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Self Concept Is a Thing: Exploring Title I Middle School Teachers' Alignment to Self-Concept Enhancement Pedagogy for African American Students

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SELF CONCEPT IS A THING: EXPLORING TITLE I MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' ALIGNMENT TO SELF-CONCEPT ENHANCEMENT PEDAGOGY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership (P-12)

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the instructional practices of Title I middle school teachers and their alignment to the development of student self-concept. Additionally, this study identifies the degree to which teachers are prepared to skillfully meet the needs of African American students in poverty. While public schools across our country have adopted numerous curriculums, learning initiatives, and best practices in efforts to increase the academic achievement of students, there is a lack of collaborative dialogue on how democratic educators can contribute to students seeing themselves in a positive manner. Seven highly-qualified classroom teachers at two Title I middle schools in South Carolina were used in this case study by means of observations, interviews, and thematic analysis of teacher feedback. The findings revealed nine themes related to the two research questions. These emerging themes were affirmations and celebrations, high expectations, relationship building, culturally relevant pedagogy, student empowerment, limited knowledge, diminished confidence, school-wide effort, and cultural diversity. The findings suggest teachers make use of best practices but are unaware of their role in self-concept development due to the fact they have limited knowledge of the construct. Participants were also challenged in their ability to make lessons culturally relevant. The findings were interpreted and situated in the context of existing literature on theoretical framework of self-concept enhancement. The implications of the study are discussed and recommendations for future study and educational practice were also provided.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my grandmother Regina Mosley who spoke my PhD into existence with confidence and the millions of whom this work will impact.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my dissertation committee, thank you for your commitment to my success and preparation. You all have been cheerleaders and midwives throughout this process, outlining the direction for the next few decades of my life and the value of this work.

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Thanks to all the study participants and principals who have shared their experiences and allowed me to learned about their schools. I’m grateful for all you have shared with me. I am excited about how the findings of this study will enrich the education of our youth.

I cannot forget the push of both my parents, Walter Jr. and Albertha Lee, and my brother, Antwon (Shannon & Little David) Lee, who reminded me the completion of this degree was necessary to my destiny. I also acknowledge my brother in the personality of Pastor Stacey D. Mills in whom I see as a mentor. We have all completed this dissertation!
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Researcher as Instrument – Personal Connection to the Research

Humble Beginnings

In December 2011, my teaching career began in a Title I middle school with predominately African American students and Latinos in lowcountry South Carolina. Robert E. Howard Middle School faced significant challenges being labeled “Below Average” as determined by the state and located on the borders of an impoverished community. More than 90% of students participated in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF and were homeless, foster, or migrant students. Shortly thereafter, I relocated to the upstate and accepted an ELA position at Tanglewood Middle School. While the two schools were very similar in nature and culture, Tanglewood served a larger Latino population with a poverty index of 90%.

When I first started teaching at Robert E. Howard Middle School, I was flabbergasted by the depth of students’ lack of respect for each other and, most importantly, for themselves. I observed their behavior in the classroom, which was characterized by the inability to focus, constant disruption, and lack of perseverance. All the while, teachers were still searching for ways to increase benchmark test scores. However, I noticed that little was changing in the manner in which students behaved outside the testing test environment.

One experience with a student got my attention. This particular African American male was sitting at his with no pencil. I walked to his seat and kindly gave him
a pencil in a manner so as not to embarrass him. As soon as I turned around, he shoved the pencil to the floor. I said to myself, “How disrespectful!” Immediately, my response could have been exaggerated and encompass a referral for his behavior. On the contrary, I decided to take a different approach. I picked up the pencil and placed it once again on the desk. In so many words, I said, “I know this is a challenge, but I believe you’re smart!” With a tap on the shoulder, I walked away. After turning back, I saw him lean over the test and begin working. Initially, I was amazed and felt relieved, knowing that I had done something right. That evening I speculated about ways I could positively affirm and provide inspiration that would empower my students simultaneously. By midnight, this was my finished product:

\[A \text{ Class’s Declaration}\]

\[I \text{ Will Today}\]

\[Today \text{ will be a great productive day. I know this because I am the only one that determines my attitude. I will learn and review skills that will enable me to succeed. My background does not limit nor stop me. My peers cannot block me. I will resume the building of my destiny. Regardless of the day’s challenges, I will do it today!}\]

\[You \text{ are kind!}\]

\[You \text{ are smart!}\]

\[You \text{ are important!}\]

\[And you are worthy of a beautiful life!\]

Arriving earlier than usual, I posted the declaration on sheets of paper around the classroom. Before each class started, the pledge was read for all the students to hear.
This declaration became so infectious that students had to read this to themselves when a disciplinary issue arose. It was our way of setting the tone for the day and positively anticipating the positivity affirming us. Soon, I recognized that students were captivated! 

In the city of Orangeburg, I felt that I had done something right.

Nonetheless, my journey continued to Tanglewood Middle School. The school’s climate was similar, except there were more Latino students, more White teachers, and better technology. I thought it would be arduous to relate to an ethnicity in which I had little previous interaction or exposure to their culture. Conversely, I noticed that the challenges were similar but graver. While students faced academic challenges, there was a cultural gap as well. I wondered how teachers were equipped to develop create an environment that would cultivate the whole child while engaging them in the learning process. I fully embraced the challenges head-on and built relationships, challenged limitations, and incorporated arts in my instructional repertoire. Of course, *A Class’s Declaration* was utilized as a tool as well. Only this time, the students had to memorize and recite it at the beginning of each class started. When another student needed emotional support to accomplish a task, other students would spontaneously exclaim “You are kind. You are smart. You are important. You are worthy of a beautiful life!” I developed a brand for my classroom: TRU-U, which is short for “The Re-Imagine Urself University.” The intent was to challenge the way students saw themselves and re-imagine the possibilities regarding their skills, abilities, and life’s journey. Serendipitously, I was on to something.
The school district decided to adopt Capturing Kids’ Hearts (CKH), a process that would aid in changing the school’s climate. Thanks to my affiliation with Call Me MiSTER, this concept was not unfamiliar as we recognize that we are challenged to “reach the student before we teach them.” All in all, it is safe to say that CKH enhanced my knowledge and daily practice. The process suggests protocols such as making eye contact, greeting students with a positive handshake, providing daily affirmations for students, and enhancing healthy bonds with teachers. The following are the program’s goals:

- Consistent rules of conduct with reduced disciplinary escalations and referrals.
- Dramatic reduction in truancy and dropouts.
- Reduction of negative behaviors such as isolation, violence, early sexuality, and substance use.
- Significant improvement in student academic performance.
- District-wide improvements in test scores.
- Higher rate of job satisfaction among teachers.
- Increased teacher retention and improvement in teacher recruiting.

My prior experience and personal philosophy of education were well aligned with this process.

One day, I decided to explore the entire booklet of information and stumbled across a term that I had never seen or heard: self-concept. I soon realized that the apparent substratum or premise of CKH was self-concept. This word summarized what my personal educational goals for students was all about! Students’ academic
achievement and behavior can be tied back to the manner in which they view themselves (Jensen, 2009). As a result, the term became a part of my daily conversation and studies - so much so that I fought for it. While I was better informed of the understanding of self-concept, I was not yet passionate.

**Self-Concept and Poverty in Education**

According to Jensen (2009), the human brain downloads and interprets environment indiscriminately in an attempt to understand their world, whether that world is positive or negative. The world-view is important, because social experiences shape self-concept – although it’s one of a few ways self-concept is developed. Consider the world, surrounded by flashlights and wandering eyes peering through windows at night, potholes in the roads, domestic violence around the clock, molestation as a weekly norm, and lack of basic needs, according to Maslow (1943). These factors are some of the elements of an impoverished environment. Once children gain a sense of mastery of the environment, they are more likely to develop feelings of self-worth, independence, and confidence (Sroufe, 2005). Overall, their happiness with self and life are both impacted.

Academically, socioeconomic status is strongly associated with a number of factors such as cognitive ability, IQ tests, grade retention, and literacy (Brookover, Thomas, & Paterson, 1964; Jensen, 2009). Poverty affects student behavior, patience, politeness, emotional responses, and empathy for others (Jensen, 2009). Teachers with little experience will likely be frustrated, puzzled or irritated with students in poverty with low self-concept. Thusly, teachers must have support and adequate preparation
through professional development to be equipped with the tools needed to address the needs of such students.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

To better understand the intersectionality and why it is important for schools to strategically address them, Maslow (1943) developed the hierarchy of needs, which stresses that students cannot perform at high academic levels until their basic needs – food, shelter, love – are met. For students in poverty, some of these basic survival needs, such as food, water, and shelter, may not be met. In the event that basic needs are inaccessible, all other needs become secondary to meeting those basic needs. To that end, the second and third stages, safety and social needs, are also environmental and rely on a secure environment. This environment, however, is not limited to home life. A classroom or general school climate must be safe or students in poverty will take measures to ensure their own safety. Perhaps, behaviors that could be characterized as deviant could be the students’ way of ensuring their safety. Furthermore, social needs encompass the need for belonging, love, and affection between friends and family. These needs may be met through positive, pleasing relationships with others.

While the fifth and final stage is self-actualization, the fourth stage is esteem, which speaks to the respect acquired from others. This study relies and expounds on the necessity of self-esteem. Self-esteem includes confidence, respect of others, and achievement. Based on a realistic interpretation of their capacity and achievement from others, the previously mentioned combination helps the evaluation of the self, contributing the development of a healthy, favorable self-concept. Once an individual
has meet the needs of the prior stages, the feelings of self-worth and positive sense of self will develop. Having fulfilled these needs, self-actualization becomes more accessible.

**Practices for African American Learners**

Kunjufu, an educational consultant of African American Images, wrote about the self-concept of African American students. He argued that the first step toward achieving self-actualization is the development of self-esteem (Kunjufu, 2000). Although Kunjufu uses the term “self-esteem,” the evaluative form of self-concept, it can be disputed that self-concept should have been used in that portion of the text, as his work focuses on images of African Americans. Nonetheless, enhancing the self-concept relies upon intentional pedagogy to address this deficit.

Boutte (2015) argued this shift in teaching has important implications for schools and, more importantly, classroom teachers. She maintained that in order to effectively teach African Americans and aid in changing their performance trends, educators should consider making changes to the following: (a) existing knowledge basis, (b) dispositions, (c) instructional strategies, and (d) curriculum. Similar to Boutte’s work, Ladson-Billings conducted studies to define and describe culturally relevant teaching. Though Ladson-Billings can be recognized for studies that contribute to student achievement and pedagogical practices, hints of her work’s findings reflect best practices of teachers who engage in enhancing students’ self-concept of students of color. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) writes:

“The teachers demonstrated their commitment to these conceptions of self and others in a consistent and deliberate manner. Students were not
permitted to choose failure in their classrooms. They cajoled, nagged, pestered, and bribed the students to work at high intellectual levels. Absent from their discourse about students was the "language of lacking." Students were never referred to as being from a single-parent household, being on AFDC (welfare), or needing psychological evaluation. Instead, teachers talked about their own shortcomings and limitations and ways they needed to change to ensure student success” (p. 479).

From this, Ladson-Billings (1995) determined teachers should adopt pedagogical practices that are teacher-student relationship equitable. These types of interactions in the classroom aid in the improvement of self-concept. According to Leary and Tangney (2012), self-concept is malleable over time and serves as a prediction of behaviors as well as outcomes. Such comprehension points to the influence teachers can have on helping students to develop a positive self-concept with the capability of yielding exceptional additional educational outcomes. Boutte (2015) posited a question this study seeks to answer for educators regarding the self-concepts of African American students: “Given what I know about this child’s, home, culture, and community context, how can I best educate this child within my educational space?” (p. 11). However, I impress upon educators an altered version of Boutte’s question in order to satisfy the inquiry of this study: Given what researchers have implied regarding African American students in poverty and their self-concept, how can Title I middle school teachers best educate these children within their educational spaces?
Statement of the Problem

The way children see themselves is crucial to the growth and development of the child (King, 1997). Since children spend a great deal of their time growing in classrooms, it is incumbent of educators to understand how imperative it is to be knowledgeable of and make use of the practices that contribute to the development of the whole child. While public schools across our country have adopted numerous curriculums and learning initiatives and best practices in efforts to increase the academic achievement of students, there is a lack of collaborative dialogue on how democratic educators can contribute to students seeing themselves in a positive manner.

The investment in the individual student is one that is a vibrant component of democracy of education. Democratic education speaks to the construct of self-awareness in that education should support students in recognizing their personal capacity, thus leading to the revelation of their personal strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. In chapter fifteen of Democracy and Education, Dewey (1916) wrote the following:

“It is quite true that children tend to exaggerate their powers of execution and to select projects that are beyond them. But limitation of capacity is one of the things which has to be learned; like other things, it is learned through the experience of consequences. The danger that children undertaking too complex projects will simply muddle and mess, and produce not merely crude results (which is a minor matter) but acquire crude standards (which is an important matter) is great” (p. 205).
In congruence with Dewey’s thoughts, the knowledge of personal capacity surpasses the context of students’ abilities to perform tasks. This posits students are developing a working knowledge of themselves, their beliefs, and their values. In other words, a democratic education should help students develop moral character and perceive themselves as leaders: agents of change. However, there is a deficit which summons the necessity and acknowledgement for culturally relevant pedagogy to produce more in-depth knowledge of self for students of color.

Ladson-Billings, the leading theorist in culturally relevant pedagogy, defined CRP as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Paley (1979) suggested teachers must not ignore color in the classroom and points to the fact that recognizing and acknowledging these differences to demonstrate a pedagogy that is relevant and beneficial to students. Quite often, teachers are reluctant to grapple with racial differences that exist in the classroom, which may be indicative of discomfort in discussing the topic of races (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers who aim to treat all students alike are prone to mask a “dysconscious racism” and a habit of mind, justifying inequity, thereby “accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 35). However, it is impossible to believe that teachers are negligent of race and ethnicity as they are teaching. These behaviors are inadequate for addressing the specific and unique characteristics relevant to enhancing the self-concept of African American students. Moreover, seeing students the same is unethical to the diversity of learners as it suggests that students operate in homogenous environments of equality and equity (Milner 2013,
Milner (2013) identified disparities that exist among different groups of students in education: (a) Race/ethnicity: Black/African-American and Brown/Latino/Hispanic students tend to score lower than White/European-American students on standardized exams and (b) Socioeconomic status: Students from lower socio-economic statuses tend to score lower than those from higher socio-economic statuses on standardized exams regardless of race. This is partly because children who are raised in poverty enter school with greater deficits and steps behind their more well-off peers. Pointing out the correlation between poverty and lower cognitive achievement, Jensen (2009) argued students in poverty often have poor writing skills and earn below-average scores in reading, math, and science, which are connected to the manifestation of a diminished self-concept.

Connecting low self-perception to race, Steele (1990) reasoned the existence in America as an African American suggests that one is more likely to endure wounds to their self-esteem than others. He argued that black skin has more dehumanizing stereotypes than any other skin color in America. As a result, a Black student is more than likely to believe their skin color induces stereotypes and impacts expectations regarding their performance before they are able to reveal their own individual personality. Along the same lines, the behavior of educators can contribute to students’ self-concepts. Self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP) serves as an outcome of labeling for students, acting as a determinant of behavior and academic performance (Gage & Lierheimer, 2012). SFP begins with an inaccurate definition of a situation or context and
evokes behaviors that make the false behaviors true (p. 3). Accordingly, students that were labeled by teachers to make academic gain performed significantly higher than other students, demonstrating significantly higher performance than the controlled group. According to Workman (2012), teachers are one of the most important factors that affect student performance. Teacher expectations, which can be referred to as self-fulfilling prophecy, can be based on race, ethnicity, past performance, and family income levels.

Outcomes such as this illustrate the substantial impact that teachers have on enhancing student self-concept and increasing performance outcomes. Perhaps, the beginning of meeting the needs of students is the recognition of racial/cultural differences and needs along with strategies to yield optimum educational outcomes for African American students, who represent the second largest ethnic group in U. S. schools, comprising 17 percent of the student enrollment population (US Department of Education, 2014). In contrast to the increasing numbers of African American students in public schools, the majority of teachers are White. Therefore, the informed involvement of White teachers on behalf of African American students is pivotal ( Boutte, 2015 ). This reality does not suggest that most White teachers are not interest in meeting the needs of black students, nor that teachers of color are. However, it is important to understand how the awareness or lack of awareness of the teacher’s pedagogical practice impact on self-concept enhancement. In this case, pedagogical practices are so irrelevant to learners’ lives that it could only be described as miseducation or deschooling, doing more harm than good ( Abdi, 2007 , p. 326).
Purpose of the Study

The principle purpose of this study is to explore the instructional practices of middle school teachers and their alignment to the development of student self-concept. Another purpose for this study is to examine the ways in which Title I teachers respond to students of color who display the characteristics of a diminished self-concept. Additionally, this study proposes to identify the degree to which teachers are prepared to skillfully meet the needs of African American students in poverty.

Research Questions

Using the following two research questions as a basis of examination, I explore the pedagogy of Title I and their practices to help students develop a positive self-concept, which is needed support to meet the academic needs of the students they teach.

1. How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept development for African American students?

2. What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?

In efforts to illustrate the practices of teachers, seven classroom teachers at a Title I middle school in South Carolina was studied, using the collective case study methodology. The following types of data collection techniques will be used to analyze the findings: (a) observations, (b) interviews, and (c) thematic analysis of teacher feedback.
The outcome of the study will provide strategies that educators can use to prepare teachers to be intentional in their instructional practices and responsive to the needs and challenges of students with the end goal of developing a positive self-concept and increasing academic achievement for African American students. As a consequence of this study, the findings bring clarity to the type of professional development and access to information teachers will need in order to implement the tenants of the theoretical framework. An analysis of the background, subjectivities, and explicit analysis of teachers was conducted regarding their use of best practices to help students develop a positive sense of self, promote health social interaction, and build meaningful relationships.

**Significance of the Study**

There are three substantial ways this study can inform the current body of research. First, the study’s chief significance will be to explore the practices of teachers who are tasked with the challenge of meeting not only the core academic needs of students but also the emotional needs in diverse population settings. Secondly, this study can serve as a guide to teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators through professional development, book studies, tailored guidance, and support in order to meet the needs of African American students. Thirdly, this prism will foster an increased level of consciousness as it relates to self-concept development, providing educators additional components to consider in decision-making, instructional planning, and addressing academic achievement. Finally, educators will be able to use the findings to show a need for the implementation of practices pertaining to such theoretical frameworks that
promote optimum growth and development of students of color that will also manifest in academic performance and other applicable educational outcomes.

This approach can be used for further considerations to potentially increase positive interaction in the school setting and academic achievement. The background, knowledge-base, biases, and personalities of classroom teachers influence the climate of their classrooms. Both novice and veteran educators would benefit for understanding their intricate role in helping students to develop their self-concept. Woodson (1933) contended that there are those that are helping to African American; however, there are few that prepared to help. “They must be awakened and shown the error of their ways” (p. 93). Essentially, it is imperative that educators use the material from this study to assist African American students make functional, goal-oriented decisions and ultimately contribute to the identity of these students. Significantly, this study will sound the alarm to awaken educators; we’ve got more work to do!

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is supported by empirical studies on self-concept enhancement. Drawing from leading educational theorists’ scholarly works that address self-concept development of African American adolescents who are the products of poverty and the strategies for teachers to aid these students in developing a positive self-image, the following terms have been used in empirical to refer to this phenomenon: “self-concept” (James, 1890; Hawk, 1967); “self-esteem” (Bandura, 1965); “self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1977; Bong & Shaalvik, 2003); “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000), and “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2008). While all of
these works have been used to inform the body of literature, I draw mainly on Hawk’s (1967) notion of changing the self-concept.

Travis Hawk, a self-concept development theorist, discussed the self-image socially disadvantaged students have of themselves. Made popular by James (1890), Hawk relies on the prior explanations of self-concept. Having reviewed these assumptions of self-concept, Hawk determined that the self is an aspect of all experiences and contributes to the overall quality and form of their experiences. Furthermore, he posited self-concept is developed through a perpetual process of interaction with one’s environments. These environments include interactions with other individuals as well. Hawk maintained that self-concept is developed by participation and engagement with significant others as well as the nature of these interactions. Often referred to as reflected appraisals, the words of significant others contribute to self-image. Even after a self-concept has been developed, it can be changed gradually and over time.

Other researchers have contributed to the understanding and development of self-concept literature and the intersectionality of poverty and African American students. In recent years, Jensen (2009) established connections between poverty and self-concept, discussing how poverty poses emotional and social challenges. Perceiving poverty to influence the image of self, behavior, and academic performance can be a daunting task. However, this idea is apparent in literature and has been supported by other researchers. Okiakor (1992) referred to the results of extensive dehumanizing antics that have affected African American children. Thus, it is critical to recognize how this emotional aspect manifests in low achievement as well as behavior. Obiakor, moreover, explored methods
in which educators to enhance self-concepts of African American students in order to effectively challenge and uplift these students with multicultural perspectives. The aforementioned researchers, thus, informed the existing body of literature of practices educators can use in the classroom to help students develop positive images of themselves.

Another perspective is extended to this research in order to capture the scope of teacher pedagogy. Ladson-Billings and Boutte contributed to this literature, referring to the deficits of students of color caused by educational opportunities. Coining culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2009) recommended that teachers explore and implement educational practices that yield educational achievement among African American students while paying attention to the divergent needs of these students. Simply acknowledging and affirming the culture of students, however, serves as place to start – not a place to stay (Boutte, 2015). This consciousness of culture is a mechanism through which teachers can challenge the limitations of students and empower students not only adopt strategies for success but also transcend negative labels that may have been adopted from inequalities in their communities, appraisals of significant others, previous successes, interactions with peers, and society at large (Milner, 2011; Ladson Billings, 2008).

While CRP typically focuses on the outcomes of student achievement, this study merged the ideas of self-concept and instructional strategies, which are relevant to the growth essential to the growth of African American students. Through this lens, self-concept development interacts with the conception of cultural awareness and systemic
disadvantages associated with African American students in poverty. Ideally, educators desire for African American students to perform well academically and subscribe to positive interaction amongst peers and adults. However, self-concept is commonly overlooked as a pathway to understanding the culture and educational experience of these students. Positive self-concept manifests in the form of confidence, the desire to learn, acceptable interaction with peers, and overall happiness with self. While researchers have used the self-constructs of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept interchangeably, self-concept serves as the center-point upon which the other two self-constructs are informed. Nonetheless, self-concept can be enhanced! Therefore, student achievement and behavior are subject to self-concept, which relies on the intentional best practices of teachers. In this vain, awareness and intent is not enough to induce the essential changes that are needed in educational programs. It requires teachers to be culturally responsive and informed of student self-concepts in order to assist students in making functional goal-directed decisions. In other words, these educational outcomes rely on a positive image of students, which is solely connected to informed instructional practices of teachers.

The theoretical framework of the research study provided in Figure 1 represents the theory of self-concept enhancement. The outer teal square includes the initial contributors to the self-concept, even before students are introduced to their facilitators of knowledge in a school setting. Self-concept influencers are not isolated from the classroom. Teachers and other school agents participate in the development of student self-image. Therefore, the culturally relevant practices are represented in the purple
division, serving as a medium to develop positive self-perception. Additionally, this section of interventions is careful not to assume African American students arrive at school with a diminished self-concept. To that end, these students may possess a positive self-concept due to a variety of contexts such as family values and norms, clubs and organizations, and religious beliefs and spiritual practices. Particularly, these methods are centered around the academic achievement for African American students and the factors which provoke their academic achievement outcomes and personal growth. Nonetheless, this framework is not limited to the usefulness of African American Title I middle school students. Learners of various racial and age groups may benefit from this framework.
Figure 1. Self-concept development.
Limitations

Case studies occupy a central position in social behavior and is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry. However, there are also known limitations associated with the use of this particular methodology, and some investigators tend to disdain case studies. Limitations of case study research are but are not limited to the following: (a) lack of rigor in case study research, (b) little basis for scientific generalization, (c) contain large quantities of data, (d) time consuming – demands time for thorough completion, and (e) little ways exist to screen processes or test the investigator’s ability to conduct sound case studies (Yin, 2017). Additionally, case study research benefits from the development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis and relies on multiple sources of evidence in a triangulating fashion (p. 13). Ultimately, it is vital that researchers who conduct case studies are aware of the limitations of this work. Being aware of these limitations can aid in avoiding errors and reducing possible risks associated with this research methodology.

Definition of Relevant Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following relevant definitions are presented.

_African American Student_ – Any student that is non-White/non-Caucasian; primarily Black.

_Culturally Relevant Pedagogy_ – Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as a pedagogy that incorporated aspects of students’ background into instruction. It connects the experiences of African American students and empowers students by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009).
Culturally Responsive Teachers – Culturally responsive teachers are defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2013).

Poverty – According to the United States Census Bureau, poverty exists when the family total income is less than the family’s threshold. A set of money income is used, which vary by size and composition, to determine who is in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not geographically, but are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index. The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps (NCES, 2016). Payne (2005) argued poverty in the United States is substantially higher than other Western industrialized nations. Furthermore, Payne defined poverty as the extent to which one does without resources, which are not limited to financial resources. Other resources are as follows: financial resources, emotional resources, mental resources, spiritual resources, physical resources, support systems, relationships and role models, and knowledge of hidden rules (Payne, 2005).

Self-concept – Self-concept can be defined as the image we hold of ourselves or, rather, the way we see ourselves. More specifically, the definition refers to our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge of our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability (Byrne, 1984; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993).

Title I Schools – According to the United States Department of Education, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides additional financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high
percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.

**Organization of the Study and Summary**

This qualitative research study is prepared in five chapters. Chapter one provided an overview of an introduction with the researcher as instrument outlining a personal connection to the research, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and the two research questions used to guide the study. This chapter introduced culturally relevant pedagogy as a basis to further our understanding of how its use can help us conceptualize ways we can indeed increase the academic achievement of students of color. The chapter progressed with the significance of the study, outlined the theoretical framework as well as the limitations associated with case study analysis, a list of definitions of relevant terms, and overview of the organization of the study.

Chapter Two is an extensive review of literature that is relevant to this study. More specifically, an expansive list of emerging themes apparent in the research and explanations is provided. The literature review covers an array of topics, which include school accountability, critical race theory and its connection to the field of education, and culturally relevant pedagogy, all inclusively needed to understand the fundamentals of this particular study.

Chapter Three includes a methodological review of the multiple characteristics of qualitative research, an extensive discussion of the case study design, particularly the multi-case study approach, a rich description of the research setting and context of the study, the triangulation process used to select participants for the study and profiles of the
participants, a detailed process of collecting and analyzing data findings, a description of the researcher’s positionality and subjectivity, and a discussion of ways in which trustworthiness and validity were implored in this study. Chapter Four presents descriptive data with analysis and results, the theoretical framework, the iterative process, themes, and discussion of the findings. Chapter Five includes a fit and discussion of findings through the lens of the theoretical framework, the research questions answered, the researcher conclusions, recommendations for future research and educational practices, implications, and a reflection summary as researcher as instrument.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

**Literature Review**

Researchers in education and psychology have long been studying the role of self-concept and its intricate role on behavior and, most importantly, student achievement (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Gecas, 1982; James, 1890; Mead 1934). Thinking about the *self* is a common but mental challenge, requiring a person or character to think about their own actions, thoughts, and interaction (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Although highly discussed by William James in the early twentieth century, the study of *self* went into disrepute for many years especially in the 20th century as researchers studied how race and environment affected the identity of students. Jensen (2009) argued that environments of poverty impact the human brain as it attempts to understand the surrounding world, whether the environment is positive or negative. These experiences expand through elementary and middle school, such as passing or failing a difficult test, getting recognition for a job well done, or growing up culturally, socially, or academically disadvantaged. The risk factors of poverty in that 50 to 70 percent of behaviors are explained by environment (Jensen, 2009). In sum, students who are the products of low socioeconomic status (SES) face a wealth of overwhelming challenges such as cognitive lags, health issues, and emotional and social challenges.

For socially disadvantaged students of poverty, both academic performance and social interaction are equally affected. Despite legal and legislative efforts to provide an adequate education for African Americans, there are still problem as it relates to today’s
school programs Obiakor (1994). Students of color, who have been faced with social injustice and labeled, face incredible challenges that can explain their self-efficacy and self-image (Steele, 1990). Empirical research supports this notion. Scheirer and Kraut (1979) explored the findings of investigators, which revealed that the self-esteem of black children was diminished in comparison to that of white children. Thus, the combination of blackness and poverty yields stimulating grounds for research and implications for instructional practices to aid in the enhancement of students’ self-concept.

Britner and Parajes (2006) maintained that self-efficacy, a self-construct that is influenced by self-concept, could affect student academic performance by influencing behaviors and mental processes. In their study, Coelho, Marchante, and Jimerson (2016) conducted a study to measure social self-concept and self-esteem with a series of sessions to help middle school experience learners’ transition. However, the researchers found a negative impact on students’ self-concept, which was contrary to the projected outcome. As a result, sessions and workshops alone are not the answer to intentionally addressing self-concept development.

Theoretical models have been suggested and differ strongly with emphasis being given to the development of self-concepts within the classroom. Two models that exist specifically are (1) behavioral learning approach and (2) the incorporation of principles of open education (Scheirer and Kraut, 1979). Behavioral learning approach contends that learning results from the identification and structure teaching of skills that are need for academic success, followed by immediate positive reinforcement (p. 135). On the contrary, open education stresses that positive self-concept is the prerequisite for
learning, which is developed by environments that breed trust, stimulating the child’s innate desire to learn.

Obiakor (1994) suggested school programs should observe and measure the self-concept of their African American students and “use the information to assist students to make functional goal-directed decisions” (p. 160). These goal-directed decisions lie in the best practices and pedagogy that have been prescribed by credible researchers. From an instructional perspective, Ladson-Billings (1995) recommended that educators should look for exemplary practices in both the classroom as well as communities that many may dismiss as inept to producing achievement and consider methodologies that provide additional portraits of teaching. Therefore, there is a crucial ultimatum for schools to address self-concept in part due its correlation to student performance and behavior (Fay & Funk, 1995). Failure to recognize the varying needs of African American students in the classroom results in perpetuating systems of inequity and inequality for students of color. Dewey (1938) argued that democracy and education were inevitably interconnected, and a sound education is one that serves a societal good as well as a purpose for the individual student. Ultimately, the priority should be extended toward the development of students’ self-concept, implementing best practices that will yield the projected educational outcomes that benefits the student and society.

**Origin and Meaning of Self-Concept**

William James, one of many early American psychologists, considered self-concept important in behavior in the early twentieth century (Hawk, 1967). Although highly discussed at the time, the study of *self* went into disrepute for many years and
emerged once again as Gestalt psychology became highly regarded. Gecas (1982) later presented the understanding of the self as a process of reflexivity, stemming from dialectic between the “I” and “Me,” explaining that self-concept is the product of the reflexive activity. Self-concept has also defined as the image we hold of ourselves or, rather, the way we see ourselves (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Epstein (1973) offered self-concept as a theory that one holds of his or herself and their interaction with the world. Quite similarly, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) provided a broad definition of self-concept, one that has informed the assumptions of contemporary research studies:

“Self-concept, broadly defined, is a person’s perception of his or herself.

These perceptions are formed through one’s experience with and interpretation of one’s environment… and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations of significant others…” (p.411).

The researchers claim that one’s perception influences their decisions in turn reveals the ways in which the individual perceives his or herself. While these explanations are all analogous, these major outlines have largely remained unchanged since the foundational understanding of James (1890) and Mead (1934), who both positioned self-concept as a reflexive phenomenon that is influenced by and evolves as the result of social interaction.

Fay and Funk (1995) disputed that self-concept is a “misnomer” as there can be little “self” in it. Ultimately, the thoughts one may have about themselves are determined by the appraisals or gestures of others (p. 120). In this vein, the even one’s behavior is influenced by one’s assumptions of another person’s perception of them (p. 124). On the contrary, self-concept is not solely defined by the little thought one takes in his or herself
alongside the reflections of others. Sousa (2006) suggested self-concept is shaped by past experiences in general. These experiences expand through elementary and middle school, such as passing or failing a difficult test, getting recognition for a job well done, or growing up culturally, socially, or academically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the experiences of youth produce the emotional reactions or triggers emotional reactions that are stored in the brain with the cognitive event and impedes upon academic performance, especially in the lives of the impoverished child.

According to Jensen (2009), the human brain downloads and interprets environment indiscriminately in an attempt to understand their world, whether that world is positive or negative. The world-view is important, because social experiences shape self-concept – although it’s one of three ways self-concept is developed. Consider the world, surrounded by flashlights and wandering eyes peering through windows at night, potholes in the roads, domestic violence around the clock, molestation as a weekly norm, and lack of basic needs, according to Maslow (1943). These factors are some of the elements of an impoverished environment. Once children gain a sense of mastery of the environment, they are more likely to develop feelings of self-worth, independence, and confidence (Sroufe, 2005). Overall, their happiness with self and life are both impacted. It should not be contended that environment alone impacts the self-concept of students and their achievement.

Using Shaalvik’s (1976) antecedents to self-concept, Britner and Pajares (2006) offered critical assumptions regarding the contributors to self-concept development. First, frames of reference heavily influence self-concept by providing a standard that one
may use to measure or judge their own traits. Social comparisons serve as the most organic source of information for the perception of self. This can be applied academically as a student measures their intelligence to that of another student’s.

Secondly, casual attributes are used to attribute one’s success and failures. Consequently, the subsequent self-concept formed influences future attributions.

Another key, initial contributor to self-concept is reflected appraisals of others is the component researchers believe individuals based their own perception of self. Mead (1934) discussed how even the gestures causes an individual to adjust themselves to the attitudes of others regarding them. In order to satisfy self-esteem needs, learners should feel loved and cared about (Berlson & Thoron, 2014). It is imperative that educators ensure students that they are valued as individuals, taking advantage of “every opportunity to reinforce positive learner behavior and self-esteem” (p. 2). This type of interaction serves as a contribution to the development of self-concept.

Lastly, self-schemas are created by the culmination of experiences in a particular domain. Shaalvik (1976) contended mastery from past experiences may contribute to not only the development of self-concept but also that of self-efficacy. Additionally, psychological centrality is the composite of the self-assessment of qualities that are deemed important or psychologically central to the individual. This evaluative aspect of self-concept is self-esteem, which helps one express the attitude of approval or disapproval of the self (Viktor & Schwalbe, 1986). Self-esteem, in the visual sense, can be complex and misleading. Bandura (1965) specified students who displayed high self-esteem may wear a façade to cover the feeling of worthlessness; the same students with a
façade to cover low self-esteem may have heightened anxiety and feelings of isolation. While researchers adamantly seek other contributors to the development of self-concept, the newly-emerging literature relies on a number of these antecedents of self-concept, which informs their research studies.

The relevance to those who serve in educational facilities may find value in understanding the manifestations of self-concept in students. To increase student achievement in schools, the efforts should shift to focus on altering students’ self-beliefs. According to Pajares and Schunk (2001), self-concept coupled with self-efficacy are powerful motivational constructs that predicts academic achievement at varying levels. Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith (2011) postulated on identity-based motivation model, which proposes that people feel led to interpret situations and act in ways congruent to their own identities (p. 89). When this particular practice was implemented with African American and Latino students of low-income households, class participation increased, more time was spent on homework, grades improved, and so did attendance. In this context, when particular actions are congruent with identity, students are more likely to engage in behaviors and deem them important. Schools that focus on self-concept development using appropriate interventions are likely to experience the following educational outcomes for students: increased confidence, increased class participation, confidence to engage in instruction, positive interaction with adults and peers, improved behavior, risk taking, and self-confidence (Gage & Lierheimer, 2012; Gay, 2000; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Jensen, 2009). Conclusively, it is important for educators to understand
the various self-constructs in order to fittingly address students’ needs to implement appropriate interventions.

**The Ambiguity of Self-Constructs**

Exhausted research has led to various concepts that are similar to self-constructs such as self-efficacy and self-esteem. It is important to discuss focus on the dissimilarities of these terms that appear to be highly analogous constructs. As these terms have been used interchangeably, it is important to recognize self-concept and self-efficacy are similar but have very distinct differences. Oysterman and Markus (1998) situated the construct of self-concept to be cognitive structures, which include content, attitude, and evaluative statements make sense of the world and protect one’s basic sense of worth. This definition encompasses the meaning of both self-concept and self-esteem, which contributes to the ambiguity of these constructs. To that end, explanations such as these do no diligence in illuminating the unique methodological and conceptual differences between the concepts.

Byrne (1984) further defined self-concept as “our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge of our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability” (p. 429). Byrne’s definition speaks to feelings that one may have towards themselves, which, most specifically, speaks to the notion of self-esteem. Kunjufu (2000) articulated self-esteem to be viewed more as an end result that stems from the self-concept or the image students hold of themselves, which illustrates a clear connection. Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Keizou Noguchi, and Watanabe (2012), on the contrary, argued self-esteem is also developed by environment and relationships with parents, which is quite relative to the descriptive
development of self-concept. Explanations as such demonstrate the obscurity of the use of such terms. Furthermore, it has been argued the “field struggles to decipher the characteristics and comparative usefulness of the two belief systems” (Bong & Shaalvik, 2003, p. 2). For these reasons, King (1997) recommended that researchers vigilantly position the self-constructs of self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem while maintaining clear, consistent definitions.

Self-efficacy notions that individuals with the confidence from past experiences may be empowered to take on task with an attitude of confidence, especially when students have previously been successful. Bandura (1977) developed the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one’s self to successfully execute a particular behavior. Britner and Pajares (2006) contended that self-efficacy could affect student academic performance by influencing behaviors and mental processes (p. 486). Progressively, Bandura (1977) differentiated between efficacy and outcome expectancy, which is a person’s estimation that particular behaviors and decisions will lead to a particular outcome. The discussion continued, arguing that outcome and efficacy expectation are differentiated by virtue of the fact that one may have knowledge of the actions that will produce anticipated outcomes; however, if serious doubts are entertained, the information provide will no longer serve as a dominate pathway to achieving the expected outcome (p. 193).

In recent years, Bong and Shaalvik (2006) explored the irrefutable distinctions between self-concept and self-efficacy. The study’s findings confirmed the assumptions in that both self-concept and self-efficacy are likely to contribute to the prediction of
subsequent behaviors (Marsh, 1991). Educational researchers Bong and Shaalvik also maintained that (2006) both self-concept and self-efficacy “share many of the same presumed antecedents such as past experience, social comparisons, and reinforcements from significant others” (p. 5). On the contrary, the self-efficacy does not rely on students’ comparison to others but rather goal referenced evaluation (p. 9).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, self-concept can be broadly defined as the image we hold of ourselves or, rather, the way we see ourselves (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). This construct focuses on the individual’s knowledge and perceptions about themselves in achievement situations, while self-efficacy refers to the convictions about the ability to perform activities and tasks (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Students with a strong belief about their ability to complete certain tasks will more than likely work hard to complete them successfully (p. 486). Although self-concept explains behavior and academic success, self-efficacy possesses a strong relationship to academic success. The working knowledge of how self-concept and self-efficacy, being similar and different, is important to how these can critically explain academic attainment psychological well-being in school (Bong & Shaalvik, 2003, p. 28).

Prior achievement has the potential to positively or negatively influence the development of self-concept as well as self-efficacy. However, the strongest relationship to self-achievement or ability existed between the self-measure of self-efficacy (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). Hattie (2009) asserted that self-concept and self-estimates were more related as self-concept is often confounded. In Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis study, a sense of confidence of self, which is birthed through self-concept and the measure of
self-efficacy, is particularly one of the most powerful attributes that will forge students through various challenges and roadblocks (p. 47). Bandura (1993) expounded on the outcomes of those with high efficacy versus those with low efficacy. Persons with high efficacy will “approach difficult tasks to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (p. 144). Setting challenging goals, people with high efficacy will heighten as well as sustain their efforts - even when faced with the threat of failure. However, due to a myriad of reasons, not all have developed high efficacy. In contrast, Bandura explains how people with low efficacy will shy away from difficult tasks, perceiving them as personal threats. Undoubtedly, these individuals “diagnose insufficient performance as deficient aptitude” and lose faith in their abilities (p. 144). Eventually, self-efficacy contributes to the image we hold of ourselves but asserts judgment on our ability, which affects performance outcomes.

Finally, self-esteem is a term that is also used interchangeably to describe self-perceptive constructs. Most commonly defined this way, self-esteem is the way one feels about them in an evaluative form (Brow, Dutton, & Cook, 2001). Self-esteem refers to the extent to which we accept or approval of ourselves. In 1980, James argued that self-esteem should be defined as satisfaction or dissatisfaction of oneself, which is similar to the definition provided by other researchers (Brow, Dutton, & Cook, 2001; Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Noguchi, & Watanabe, 2012). Evaluating the feelings of oneself is common but should be done deliberately. One who has high self-esteem is typically “characterized by a general fondness or love for oneself” (Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Noguchi, & Watanabe, 2012, p. 616). Individuals with high self-esteem may subscribe to
confidence in their own abilities, self-acceptance, unmoved by the criticism of others, and optimism. On the contrary, low self-esteem can be depicted by mildly positive feelings toward oneself, which may manifest as having lack of confidence, the desire to be like another, pessimism, and extreme concern for the thoughts of others. Eventually, these self-evaluative emotional reactions are referred to as self-worth (James, 1890; Brown & Marshall, 2006).

Sharing many similarities and differences, these self-constructs are inter-related but must be properly distinguished to ensure validity and clarity from their distinct dissimilarities. In summary, self-concept refers to the image we hold of ourselves and how we see ourselves holistically. Interestingly, Rochat (2010) explains self-concept as the “trademark of humans”, explaining that each person is not the same as another (p. 321). Next, self-efficacy refers to the convictions about the ability to perform activities and tasks. These prefacing thoughts indicate the capacity to select and successfully perform tasks. Ultimately, those with a low sense of self-efficacy will shy away from tasks that are perceived as difficulty, internalizing the task as a personal threat. Others with high efficacy will challenge themselves to overcome obstacles to achieve both assigned and selected tasks (Bandura, 1993). Lastly, self-esteem takes those images or information and evaluates it, adding feelings of approval and disapproval to those images. This evaluation varies based on context, time, and feedback received from the environment and its participants. Whether esteem is assessed as high or low, the self-concept or image informs these conclusions and determines one’s course of actions,
levels of accomplishments, and interactions with others. Essentially, the constructs of self-esteem and self-efficacy are dependent upon self-concept.

**Impact of Socioeconomic Status (SES) on Self-Concept**

According to Trowbrdige (1972), findings in the relationship between SES and self-concept remains to be undetermined as findings are in conflict. Some postulate that students of low socio-economic status reflect the negative image that society holds of them (Ausubel & Ausubel, 1963; Witty 1967; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Others suggest no differences between in the self-concept of students with low-socio-economic status (Coleman, 1966; Scott, 1969). Zirkel & Moses (1971) have even indicated that students of low socio-economic status may have a more positive self-concept than that of middle class children. Research maintains that it is imperative to understand how demographic variables can enter a person’s life and reflects the relationship to his environment (Rosenburg & Pearlin, 1978). The study describes how both adults and children learn their worth by comparing themselves to others, and, for social structural reasons, adults are more like to comparing themselves to others according to socio-economic status (1978). Although the Clark Doll Experiment mentioned previously explored the impact of racism and segregation on children, a child’s self-concept – and an adult’s - is to a large degree influenced by the attitudes of others toward them.

Caliguri (1966) explores the self-concept of the disadvantaged child as it relates to aggression behavior and feelings of self-worth. Caliguri used 425 intermediate minority students to collect data of their self-concept through open-ended questions. He submits that the disadvantaged child lives in an environment whereby there are limited values on
social skills of relating to one another. The students in his study internalized their aggressive behavior due to the hostile environments. Simultaneously, the study found 54 percent of the students indicated high sensitivity toward their physical features with criticism and disdain.

However, low self-concept is not only manifested in criticism toward their physical appearances but also in their ability to perform academically in school. Coster (1956) found that students of higher-income families were twice as likely to get grades of A or B, proving that a child’s economic status influenced his or her academic success just as much as their intelligent quotient did. In this vein, self-concept of the disadvantaged child depreciates and has led to less self-esteem as they matriculate through the educational process, which proves that there is a significant and positive correlation between self-concept and academic performance (Brookover, Thomas & Paterson, 1964). Similarly, Hawk (1967) argued that a child’s socioeconomic status serves as a predictor of academic success just as much as intelligence quotient. Hoge & Rnezulli (1993) studied the link between giftedness and self-concept with results that were similar to Brookover, et. al., (1964). The results indicated that, on average, the gifted children exhibited more positive academic self-concepts than the comparison groups. They also exhibited higher scores on the behavioral dimension, though the reasons for this are not clear (1993). Uncommonly, the self-concept of the disadvantaged child depreciates and self-esteem is lessened as a result of the educational process (Hawk, 1967, p. 199).
Inequity in African American Education

Historically, the education of African Americans was under-resourced in comparison to White schools. Walker (1988) disclosed the tremendous burden lack of resources and facilities created for principals, teachers, and parents, who preferred equal educational opportunities for their children. Despite the neglect of White school boards, school leaders and community members prevailed creating safe environments to meet the diverse needs of African American students, providing opportunities for maximum success. Caswell County Training School, an African American school in the segregated South, was led by educators who demonstrated the centrality of students’ needs throughout school operations. The school’s philosophy was the heartbeat of all who served. The school sought to promote and influence growth in the broader community with a focus on student development. In response to the rural community, absent of museums, forums, and plays, the setting yielded implications for the school’s curriculum (Walker, 1988, p. 95). Students were involved in drama, debate, sports, music, and other activities that interested them, ultimately providing students opportunities they were not previously afforded. With an end result of preparing students to return to their communities to become effective citizens, the immersion of activities offered cultivated leadership skills and self-esteem (Walker, 1988). All in all, developing the self-concept of African American students is no new standard. Rather, it was overshadowed by imposed discourses and formulas with annual evaluative tools (Poetter, Wegwert, & Haerr, 2006).
Even with political climate change such as desegregation, neglect was still present in such schools. As noted by Obiakor (1994), despite legal and legislative efforts to provide and an adequate education for African Americans, there are still problems as it relates to today’s school programs. Many of these efforts were the result of racial tension in the United States and the drive for racial equality. This movement involved measuring the impact of race on the self-perception of children. The study of “self” became crucial in the mid-thirties to understanding behavior and was revisited again in the forties with the Clark Doll Test as Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark sought to explore how racial attitudes or preferences impacted the Negro child’s self-awareness. The researchers, in their classic study, showed dolls to black children (ages 3-7), who chose white dolls and rejected black dolls. Clark and Clark (1939) recorded subjects breaking down and crying when they were required to make self-identifications. Results of the study were discussed in three categories: racial differences, self-identification, and racial preferences. Researchers concluded that students demonstrated negative attitudes toward the brown doll. Interestingly, according to findings, 60 percent of children selected the white doll for having a “nice color” (Clark & Clark, 1939). While this study focused on racial identity, it closely aligns with physical self-concept and the approval of self, which reflects a trend of self-perception for African American students based on social norms and events.

*Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought to combat social, political, and economic problems facing African Americans in mainstream America. African Americans remained among the lowest in terms of
socioeconomic status, reading scores, and math scores than any other racial groups (Obiakor, 1996). While legal litigations were in place for students of color, legislation did not lead to maximization of learning potential for African American students. During this period of time, Black schools were closed, Black principals became teachers, teachers were fired or transferred, and teacher competency and expectations declined (Kunjufu, 2000). Minton and Schneider (1980) confirmed this conception and discussed how situational variables can serve as a prediction of academic achievement for students of color. One of the variables which impacted the learning outcomes for African American learners is self-concept.

Without a doubt, African American students have a long-standing history of being educationally, financially, and emotionally underserved. Black students suffer due to school staff and service providers who classify, label, and define students when their best interest is not at heart (Kunjufu, 2000, p. 10). More specifically, the high population of African American students in special education reveals the subjective characterization, which affects the students’ self-concepts. Blanchett (2006) discussed the disproportionality of African American students’ representation in special education programs. While African American students account for only 14.8% of the general school system, they represent 20% of the students with disabilities (p. 24). Blanchett (2006) attributed the high-incidence diagnoses to the subjectivity of referral from school personnel and the variations of eligibility enrollment processes within districts. The centrality in the role of personnel referring students can create a potential source of bias (Harry & Anderson, 1995). Fenning and Rose (2007) offered a counter explanation of
this phenomenon. Disproportionality of identified students correlates with the perception of school personnel in that African American students do not fit the norms of the school environment. These staff members may be faced with the anxiety of controlling student behavior. Lacking knowledge of best practices to engage students, African American students become targets of exclusionary practices. Not only is this disposition true for African American students but also that of general students in poverty (Payne, 1996).

Unfortunately, special education placement may serve as a mechanism of removing “unruly” students from the general population.

Losen and Orfield (2002) maintained special education serves as a means of keeping African American students from receiving an equitable education in the general education environment. This is evident in that African American students in special education are often associated with high dropout rates, low academic performance, and an abbreviate dosage of curriculum (Ferr & Connor, 2005b). It has been further argued by other researchers that special education does not prepare African American male students to become productive, responsible members of society (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Causing a depreciatory effect on self-esteem, the effectiveness of special education programs remains in question.

Since self-concept is cited as a significant variable in human behavior Purkey 1970; Super 1990), African American students – especially those in special education – must be involved in a continue process of learning (Obiakor, 1996). To achieve a maximizing learning environment for learners, educators and other service providers
must understand their roles as they interact with African American learners (p. 21).

Obiakor (1992) argued:

“To meet the needs of African American-students in school programs, special educators should observe, describe, measure, and interpret the self-concepts of their students, and use this information to assist students to make functional goal-oriented decisions” (p. 164).

Regardless of how educators define their ethical roles, the disproportionate placement of African American in special education should continue to be explored as a social phenomenon (Blanchett, 2006). In this vein, Blanchett argued further research should be conducted to develop strategies that too eradicate such practices and employ adequate teacher preparation to impact this problem. Nonetheless, these practices are not foreign to the educational communities of African Americans.

The lack of educational resources in African American communities has been deliberated in the literature for decades. James Anderson explored the education of African Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anderson (1988) discussed the disproportionately of resources and negligence to the needs of Black students, arguing that Blacks were deliberately excluded. In 1933, more than 200 southern counties, Black learners only constituted 12.5 percent of the student population. Blacks were excluded from the revolution of secondary education, and as a result, information and resources were withheld from the race (1988). While Blacks in the urban south were not affected to the same degree, similar patterns existed in that state and local governments extended benefits to White schools (Anderson, 1988). Perhaps the
period of such work may call into question the relevance of adequate funding and resources provided to African American learners. However, Blanchett’s (2006) work expound on the subsystems in the American educational system – one being the system that refers to students defined as normal or having no disabilities. African American students are likely to attend schools that are deemed high in poverty with a high teacher turnover, limited access to technology, little foreign language programs, few advanced classes, and no travel-abroad programs to broaden their scope of the world (Blanchett, 2006, p. 26). A combination of high schools being unavailable to African American students and special education disproportionality contributes to the moral debt Ladson-Billings refers to in her writing.

Moral debt refers “to the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8). In the United States, groups of people have been excluded from social benefits and opportunities – education being one of many, causing an insurmountable deficit. It should, then, come to no surprise that African American students continually perform low academically. Historically and currently, the classroom has been a political and social battlefield for people of color, putting in to question one’s self-worth and self-esteem self-awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Coupled with poverty, racial attitudes seem to play an integral part in self-identity. Although this topic of research does not seek to continue disentangle the relationship between race attitudes and preferences to self-identity or self-concept – which are used interchangeably in this due to the synonymy in meaning, it is important to recognize how students of color have historically been challenged to hold positive views
of themselves. Responsively, the improvement of students’ self-concept serves as a valued education outcome with particular importance for interpreting achievement outcomes (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culture refers to a dynamic system of behavioral standards, worldviews, beliefs, cognitive codes, and social values give order as well as meaning to our lives (Gay, 2000). Payne (1996) suggested an understanding of the culture and values of students in poverty lessens the frustrations educators experience in the classroom, particular when dealing with students and parents. Whether we are consciously aware, culture ultimately influences thoughts, beliefs, and actions, which manifests in pedagogy as well as how educators learn. Unfortunately, the culture of African American students is not woven into nor imbedded in our nation’s schools – even if they are acknowledged. For novice teachers, multicultural competence can be exacerbated in working with African American students (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). The embedding of culturally relevant pedagogy can serve as a challenge to European American teachers, who are accustomed to a passive-receptive pattern of discourse (2004). For African American students, a participatory pattern is more of the norm, typically demonstrated with engaging comments and reactions that may be perceived as rude or disruptive. As a result, a deliberate effort to adopt the discourse style of students that are being taught will contribute to students feeling more secure and protected (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004, p. 28). Boykin (1994) advocates for the infusion of Afro-cultural
expression in the school, which allows for a climate that embraces the value of African American learners. Boykin wrote:

“Since teaching is properly viewed as an art-form, it is more crucial for a given teacher to get a feel for the landscape, texture, contours, and conditions of the relevant educational responsibility in order to create pedagogy, rather than acquire a new set of procedures that are to be adhered to” (p. 644).

As a result, it is imperative that critical insights are provided in regards to challenges, issues, elements, and contexts of classroom pedagogy that strategically recognizes and appreciates the culture of student, which yields their identity or, as referred to in this literature review, their self-concept. Flippo, Hetzel, Gribouski, and Armstrong (1997) declare the relationship between culture and education to be “bidirectional” in that cultural identity not only mediates the acquisition and expression of literacy, but also “literacy education will also influence and mold a culturally identity” (p. 646). Gay (2000) presented cultural identity as a continually changing element. Shaped by a variety of factors such as time, setting, age, and economics, and social contexts, ethnic groups do share cultural characteristics. Changing overtime, Leary and Tangney (2012) self-concept is malleable over time and predicts behaviors as well as outcomes as does cultural identity.

Disparities that exist in the classroom interactions tend to have very little to do with intellectual abilities of students, but rather a lack of knowledge regarding culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued three criteria must be met in order to effectively execute
the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness (p. 483). Billings-Ladson (2009) later found teachers are aware of their political nature and how that manifests in teacher-associated activities and legitimize the experiences of students as they are immersed into the curriculum. According to Gay (2000), classroom teachers and educators need to understand that achievement or lack thereof is an experience that may correlate with culture. Gay also argued that the disempowerment come to an end, setting into motion strategies to ensure student achievement. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2008) discussed the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and the implications on student achievement, especially that of African American students. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy should provide “a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (p. 476).

So, what if a teacher recognizes and endorses these cultural differences that exist in the classroom? Awareness produces no changes in educational programs to prevent academic inequities among diverse students. Additionally, the argument that African American teachers should teach African American students is meritless. Carter G. Woodson (1933) postulated:

“...the emphasis is not upon the necessity for separate systems but upon the need for common sense schools and teachers who understand and continue in sympathy with those whom they instruct” (p. 18).
While there is value in prerequisite knowledge or culture of Black teachers, such similarities do not indicate preparation to teach students of color. Ladson-Billings (2009) suggested from her studies that teachers, both Black and White, feel incapable of meeting the needs of African American students they teach. Consequently, educators should be careful, however, to pay attention to the diversity among these students and ascertain that their practices reflect equitable practices. Be that as it may, “the notion of equity as sameness only makes sense when all students are the same” (p. 36). African American students possess various physical, intellectual, emotional, and, in many respects, cultural difference. Consider, for example, the nuclear family children are not all the same; they come from the same parents, but they are different. The same goes for African American students of poverty; their needs are different and need to be dealt with equitably.

Hawk (1967) discussed the importance of self-concept to behavior and educational implications. While student achievement is currently valued in many Title I schools, Hawk disputed that there is no end product of education that is as important as one’s self-concept (p. 205). How can schools properly educate learners without focusing on their self-perceptions? Studying the outcomes on these tests and the amount of emphasis schools have placed on these assessments, reveal what students know and need to know (Milner, 2013). Education in the United States is under siege as educators may be missing a valuable component. Hawk (1967) composed the following:

“Although education is not and should not be perceived as psycho-therapy, the educational process, by its very nature, affects a reconstruction of the self-concepts of children. Therapy is successful to the
extent that the end result is a worthy, valuable, and realistic self-concept.

Education has failed, regardless of the amount of knowledge imparted, when selves of pupils are inadequate, defensive, and characterized by a general feeling of incompetence in what matters to them” (p. 197).

This call to educational transformation still has not been sufficiently answered and attended to. These questions remain: Where do we go from here? And how do educators support African American students in developing positive self-concepts? Well, immediate impact can be made in a classroom with a climate that is high in challenge and low in threat, providing opportunities that will lead to self-discovery. A prerequisite to achieve this operational educational system is an exploration of self-image and how classroom should intentionally include practices that enhance self-concept, especially for that of African American students with a long-standing history of being educational deprived and socially disadvantaged in America’s history. The next section of this literature review seeks to provide a necessary foundation to begin transforming both the practices of teachers and of African American students.

**Recommended Best Practices**

This section examines recommended practices suggested by both researchers and practitioners with the intent to enhance the self-concept development of not only African American students in poverty but also students in general. With adequate training, intervention, and opportunity, educators can change their instructional approaches and attitudes towards African American students of poverty, embracing whole-child development practices to meet their needs. The recommendations consist of interventions
such as arts engagement, curriculums, classroom management, and strategies to challenge the limitations of students in a positive, healthy manner that contributes to educational achievement outcomes and, most importantly, an enhanced self-concept.

**Arts Engagement**

Ample research evidence indicates that different ways that teachers and school leaders can commit to practices. Studies have found that infusing arts with academic subject areas can transform the learning environment, foster learning, increase attendance, improve school climate, and contribute to student person development (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Duncan, 2009). Sousa (2006) suggested that success in arts serves as a bridge to successful learning and raise their self-concept.

In a study conducted by Fiske (1999), arts organizations attributed to a range of positive features in school climate. Schools that had strong arts programs also had supportive administration that empowered teachers to learn new skills and broaden their curriculum. According to findings, the results of the study were more tied to high arts engagement than to high economic status, which substantiates the necessity of arts organizations for students of low-income homes. In this examination of over 2,000 students in public elementary and middle schools, the goal of determining the personal, social, and cognitive skills that were developed according to arts learning. Using a comparative research design, researchers from Teachers College Columbia University found significant relationships between rich in-school arts programs and competencies needed for academic success (Fiske, 1999). Data revealed that students with rich arts
environments were more confident of themselves and noted that the arts allowed them to better express their emotions that would have otherwise been interpreted as aggression or misbehavior (Sousa, 2006, p. 219).

In addition to research findings, students in arts-rich schools score higher in multiple measure of self-concept (Sousa, 2006). On the contrary, schools of high low arts programs and integration developed students who possessed a lower overall self-concept. The data presented in similar studies were significant as students who were involved in these arts organization were more than likely to be derivatives of stressful home environments (Fiske, 1999).

In both arts-integrated classrooms and arts classrooms, students can feel liberated to explore ideas and take risks while feeling safe to do so. Additionally, students’ self-efficacy can be built, which is essential to academic success and life. Furthermore, schools exist as complex systems that can be transformative for students when art has been imbedded in instruction.

**Healthy Relationships & Classroom Environment**

Despite the fact that teacher’s ability to demonstrate care to students is irrevocably critical to the success of students, the relationship between teachers and students are often tense and unobtrusive. The enhancement of students’ self-concept has been important to the educational experience as an outcome or moderator of achievement (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Jensen (2009) maintained that secure attachments and stable environments are vital to the outcome of positive self-concept development; essentially, poverty negatively affects the progress of healthy relationships (p. 86). When
students lack positive relationship with adults and peers, it manifests as misbehavior that can be compartmentalized as disrespect, helplessness, and unruly. Households of families with adults, who are overworked, overstressed, and undereducated low-SES, may appear to be less interested in their children. Without the opportunity to form solid attachments and relationships, a stream of emotional, social, and psychological consequences is created for children (Jensen, 2009, p. 86). One of these consequences is a diminished self-concept.

The Love and Logic approach maintains that self-concept is developed by individuals who model appropriate behavior, which encompasses thoughts, speech, and actions (Fay & Funk, 1995). Among the literature, a recurring theme does, in fact, exist: teachers’ relationships with students can enhance the perceptions students have of themselves. Researches have provided strategies for positive interactions with students in a manner that would change their self-concepts (Fay & Funk, 1995; Hawk, 1967; Baker, 1999). These prescribed best practices proposed supports positive teacher-student interaction, which contributes to a healthier self-concept. Baker (1999) wrote:

“Within the school climate literature, there has been research on the socio-psychological environments of classrooms (sometimes termed the classroom learning environment) and their effects on student outcomes. This research has generally shown that positive classroom environments are associated with improved academic achievement and affective outcomes, such as motivation, self-concept, and academic engagement.” (p. 58).
Positive classroom learning environments are the result of positive relationship between teachers and students. Hawk (1967) argued that warmth and acceptance are essential to the development of self. Fundamentally, the classroom environment should be high in challenge and low in threat, providing opportunities for the development *self* (Hawk, 1967, p. 203). For students from poverty, Payne (2005) suggested the most significant motivator for such students is relationships, which contributes to support systems and positive classroom environments.

Fay and Funk (1995) provided strategies to contribute to a positive classroom environment and ultimately change the self-concept of students. First, the use of eye contact, smiles, and appropriate touch serve as bonding contrivances. Secondly, students should be allowed to own and experience their own feelings such as pride. Another classroom suggestion is having clear expectations and consequences that help students change their behavior. While consequences are important, the most effective way to administer such is by avoiding anger, moralizing, and sarcasm. Having the students respond with reasonable consequences, educators should give students the opportunity to involve students in the solution/decision making address the issue (Fay & Funk, 1995, p. 168). However, a practice as such does not override general classroom guidelines. Lastly, teachers are encouraged to find something unique about each child and share it frequently. Such unique characteristics are similar to affirmations that help students to recognize how they are distinctly different from other students. This kind of behavior can be defined as affirmations and gestures of care.

**Demonstrating Care**
The substratum of the dynamic of care lies in interpersonal relationships, which may be categorized by patience, persistence, validation, and empowerment (Gay, 2000). Teachers who demonstrate care towards students produce success in a broad array of areas. Gay reflected on the common theme of care emerging from interviews with participants who were the products of segregated schools. Gay wrote:

“They remembered these schools as ‘homes away from home,’ places where they were nourished, supported, protected, encouraged, and held accountable. The students recalled their teachers having faith and conviction in the students’ abilities; being demanding, yet supportive and encouraging; and insisting that students have high aspirations to be the best they could be...They demonstrated concerns for students’ emotional, physical, economic, and interpersonal conditions as well” (p. 47).

Research in more contemporary classroom environments indicates effective teachers of African American students tend to demonstrate - in their actions and philosophy – the same beliefs and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Care for both the individual and performance are equally important. Kunjufu (2000) indicated performance is a by-product of self-esteem, which is informed by self-concept. Expectations in the classroom typically display acts of care, exemplified by expectations. The mediocre teacher makes comments such as “Why should I care when the parents don’t care?” or “Bless their little hearts.” Kunjufu (2000) argued it only takes one person to show care for student for their performance to improve (p. 26). This care shows up through positive relationships where exertive power or authority is not
necessary (Jensen, 2009). Additionally, Jensen encouraged teachers to celebrate both effort and progress and praise students to reaching instructional milestones. The aforementioned strategies create warm classroom environments, develop positive interpersonal relationships with students, and establish high-demanding academic performance (Gay, 2000). Although grades display academic progress, the greatest outcomes of a caring teacher may not manifest in the form of outstanding grades or scores on standardized tests. Rather, students may demonstrate good manners, respect, high positive self-concepts, persistence in academic efforts, and overall improvement in school attendance.

**Challenge Limitations**

Developing the self-concept of individual students is no simplistic task. Such outcomes require respect for uniqueness and personalization of instruction, ensuring that students “be given tasks appropriate to his level of competence” (Hawk, 1967, p. 203). Obiakor (1992) also recommended that educators provide situations that challenge students. In doing so, sensitivity should be considered but not overemphasized by being overly sympathetic. Challenging students in this manner addresses the notation that African American students are helpless individuals, which is a negative label that is counterproductive to learning and overall pedagogy. Although Obiakor’s work focuses on special education, the suggested strategies are transferrable and applicable to the general education population. He argued educators should be sensitive to the needs of students but resist the urge to feel sorry for these students, which may reinforce low expectation and negative labels (Obiakor, 1994).
Recently, Won, Lee, and Bong (2017) found Korean middle school students’ self-efficacy and examination outcomes were significantly influenced by teachers’ social persuasions and credibility given by students. Often teachers and counselors were met with the challenge of persuading students to adopt a more positive self-concept and further develop self-efficacy. In a similar conception, Ellis (1975) developed the Rational-Emotive Theory (RET), which applies itself to the work of guidance counselor in this theoretical article. The theory illustrates students’ emotional consequences as a result of events that occur and the belief system about those activating experiences. RET shows students that their (C) consequences do not directly stem from their (A) activating experiences but rather from their (B) belief systems (Ellis, 1975, p. 237). Ellis maintained that the counselor should understand that it's appropriate to feel misfortune for failure. One of the main techniques of the counselor is to disturb people, disputing their irrational beliefs with intensive questioning and challenging conversations until they ultimately surrender the belief that has no logical foundation. The counselors are to give "positive regard and undamning acceptance" no matter how badly the student behaves (p. 239). Ultimately, school counselors are to confront students’ self-binding feelings and self-perceptions. However, use of this type of practice is not limited to that of guidance counselors; teachers can embed RET into their instruction. Ultimately, the development of positive self-concepts is greatly enhanced with a shared, high expectation between both the parent and teacher (Kunujufu, 2000). With that said, the community at large has a shared responsibility to contribute to the positive self-perception of students.
Kunjufu’s (2000) work articulately advocated for the services available to African American students. He argued:

“The development of positive self-images and discipline in Black children is the primary responsibility of the parent. Teachers should provide supplement nurturance and high expectations. If the parent does not fulfill his or her primary responsibility, every available institution must take heed to develop positive self-images and discipline in Black children” (p 98).

Certainly, it takes a village to raise a child!

This chapter endeavored to explore the earliest discussions of self-concept and the implications during the late nineteenth century. Additionally, the theoretical persuasions were explained to adequately situate the meaning of self-concept against other similar self-constructs. Exploring the patterns in history, educational patterns in African American students were considered to indicate its relevance to this topic. Next, culturally relevant pedagogy was deliberated as a framework for instructional practices, followed by best teacher practices for self-concept enhancement according to researchers.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

With a focus on instructional practices, the purpose of this study is to explore the instructional practices of middle school teachers and their alignment to the development of student self-concept. Another purpose for this study is to examine the ways in which Title I teachers respond to students of color who display the characteristics of a diminished self-concept. Additionally, this study purposes to identify the degree to which school leaders have prepared teachers to skillfully meet the needs of students of color and poverty.

The aforementioned studies in Chapter Two (Necessary & Parish, 1994; Fiske, 1999; and Hattie, 2008) provide relevant research results that support the need advocate for and raise awareness of self-concept development in the teacher profession as it related to the well-being of African American students. While these studies are useful, they are limited to a substantive list of technique teachers can in employ and how school administrators and other school leaders can contribute to the ongoing support of self-concept enhancements. Obiakor (1994) reported strategies that aid in the development of self-concept for African American students who receive special education services. However, this particular study will explore, from the perspective of the Title I middle school teacher, ways in which the teachers can support the development of a positive self-image and by virtue of classroom management, culturally relevant pedagogy, ultimately meeting the complex emotional needs of African American students. This
study highlights how school administrators and pre-service programs can equip teachers in Title I school settings with the tools needed to meet the needs of these students. African American students of poverty are the focal point of this study as the state is comprised of a 60.19% poverty index, with one district having an index of 83% (SCDE, 2016).

**Overview of the Chapter**

This methodology chapter begins with an overview of qualitative research with Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), Glesnes (2016), and Stake’s (1995) outline of distinct characteristics of qualitative research. This description of qualitative research is followed by a brief synopsis of case study method design, an in-depth exploration of a particular setting, the participant selection process and profile for each, the qualitative data collection and analyses procedures, researcher positionality and subjectivity, a discussion of the process used to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the study’s results and findings, and a summary of the chapter.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Stake (1995) argues, “…the experience of the qualitative researcher is one of knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations” (p. 50). This statement situates the lenses of reality in which qualitative research utilizes, providing a deeper understanding of the numerical findings. Ultimately, qualitative and quantitative research methods rest on this distinction:
qualitative research use methodologies to critically explain the substratum of a phenomenon.

Researchers have approached the distinction of qualitative inquiry from that of other approaches. Miles, Humberman, and Saldana (2014) maintained that qualitative work provides access to accounting for events, rather than documenting their sequence. Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2005) maintained that two major theoretical practices have dominated the social science scene: (1) positivism and (2) theoretical perspective. The positivist is the individual who seeks out the facts and causes for a particular social phenomenon, which is removed from subjectivity. The researcher, through this lens attempts to consider the external factors whereby people are influenced. Secondly, theoretical perspective acknowledges the long-standing history of a series of events, also known as the phenomenon. In this vain, the phenomenologist is concerned with explaining the phenomenon my considering the actor’s own perspective and how the actor is experiencing the world (p.3).

**Interviews in Qualitative Research**

In qualitative inquiry, people in real settings are the objects of study, providing the research insight to understand the experience of a phenomenon. However, much of what the research cannot observe or identify can be done so by others. More importantly, those who are members of the setting being studied provide access to multiple realities. According to Stake (1995), a unique data-gathering plan should be implemented and rooted in the research questions. While there are a host of qualitative research methods, getting acquaintance to interview is possibly the easy task. Simultaneously, researchers
should use deliberation in formulating interview questions in response to the research question, as it is possible to fail to ask the right questions that will lead steer the conversation to issues of choice. This chapter identifies valuable ways by which qualitative methods of research aid in answering the research question. Choosing a research design that is appropriate is a crucial aspect to the success of the research. In doing so, the selection of an appropriate design encompasses capturing a broad understanding of the phenomenon, exploration of the various designs and the blend of the researcher’s personality, skills, and understanding of the limitations and impact on validity (Bordens & Abbott, 1999).

An important aspect of this method qualitative research is keeping record of the interview. During the interview process, Stake (1995) suggests that the interviewer take field notes as it fits the occasion. At the same time, the researcher should remain fully present and in control of the discourse. Often, this involves jotting notes and probing to gain insight on what was meant by their responses. Qualitative research may involve the participants after the study for the purpose of accuracy of, not only what was said, but also by what was meant. This technique of qualitative research is used to conduct this study.

**Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

As a framework of interactive continuum, Newman and Ridenour (1998) provide the dichotomy between qualitative and quantititative research. First, qualitative research often explores from a phenomenological perspective, suggesting that multiple realities and interpretations are available from varied individuals who experience the world. On
the other hand, quantitative research assumes objective reality across individuals. The qualitative method is used when the researcher wishes to naturally observe and interpret reality with the aim of developing a theory or explaining a phenomenon. Instead, quantitative research begins with a notion or theory and tests for confirmation or disconfirmation of the hypothesis. While both research methods are used in the educational arena, this study aims to describe the alignment of teacher practices in the classroom and the effect on student self-concept. The end result will be more descriptive and narrative, thus best situating this study in a qualitative manner.

**Case Study Design the Multi-Case Study Approach**

This qualitative study was conducted using a multi-case study approach. The study will be guided by Gloria Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Use of the Case Study Design**

Case studies intensively measure a person to a group of people and the common denominator of an event or implementation of a program (Glesne, 2016; Bordens & Abbott, 1999). This methodology tends to involve in-depth longitudinal study examination and data gathering rather than themes and search for patterns (p. 289). There are three types of case studies: (1) intrinsic – seeks to understand and further interpret a particular case, (2) instrumental – provides insight into a case and conceptualize a generalization, and (3) collective – investigates a phenomenology, population or general condition. Although case study does not consider themes alone, it functions as a way of understanding human social behavior. Often used to contrast two different points of view, case study can describe observations but not determine superior theories (Bordens
Case study would not serve as the ideal study as the purpose of this research does not explore changes over time as the result of a program or initiative. This study’s research question does not explore the implications of actual theories nor events. Thus, is a principal standard of self-concept enhancement and is the case with this research study.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory, which guides this work, is that of self-concept enhancement, which is supported by empirical studies. The term self-concept was originally used by William James, psychologist. During the twentieth century, the concept was used in discussions of race and poverty and soon became a central topic in education. Drawing from leading educational theorists’ such as Jensen (2009), scholarly works that address self-concept development of African American adolescents who are the products of poverty and the strategies for teachers to aid these students in developing a positive self-image. This study draws mainly on Hawk’s (1967) notion of changing the self-concept that socially disadvantaged students have of themselves.

Another theoretical perspective is extended to this research in order to capture the scope of teacher pedagogy. Ladson-Billings contributes to this literature, referring to the deficits of students of color caused by educational opportunities. Coining Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2009) recommended teachers explore and implement educational practices that yield educational achievement among African American students while paying attention to the divergent needs of these students. Acknowledging and affirming the culture of students, serves as place to start – not a place
to stay (Boutte, 2015). This consciousness of culture is mechanism through which teachers can challenge the limitations of students and empower students not only adopt strategies for success but also transcend negative labels that may have been adopted from inequalities in their communities, appraisals of significant others, previous successes, interactions with peers, and society at large (Milner, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2008).

Relevance of the Study

From the perspective of the teacher, the chief purpose of this study is to explore the instructional practices of Title I middle school teachers and their alignment the self-concept enhancement of African American students. Another purpose for this study is to examine the ways in which Title I teachers respond to students of color who display the characteristics of a diminished self-concept. Additionally, this study purposes to identify the degree to which school leaders have prepared teachers to skillfully meet the needs of students of color and poverty.

The aforementioned studies in Chapter Two (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Boutte, 2015; Duncan, 2009; Sousa, 2006; Holtzapple, Grisworld, Cirillo, Rosebrock, Nouza, & Berry, 2011; Fay & Funk, 1995) provide relevant research results that support enhancement of self-concept with culturally relevant pedagogy as it pertains to instructional practices. However, these studies are limited to the in-depth exploration of self-concept enhancement strategies used in today’s classrooms and do not highlight the extent to which, through professional development and support of administrators, teachers aware of the significant roles their profession contributes to such. Hawk (1967) disputed that there is no end product of education that is as important as self-concept,
which is malleable and formed over time. In her study, Ladson-Billings (2009) found, from her studies that teachers, both Black and White, feel incapable of meeting the needs of African American students they teach. Consequently, educators should be careful, however, to pay attention to the diversity among these students and ascertain that their practices reflect equitable practices. In conjunction with the argument of Hawk, equitable practices would encompass techniques that secure a positive development of self-concept. This study also highlights teachers’ role, as an educator, in developing students’ self-image as well as the extent to which they are involved in the process. Recognizing the findings that have been demonstrated in aforementioned studies in Chapter Two, this study can equip South Carolina’s middle school teachers with the tools that are need to meet the emotional and academic needs of African American students who currently comprise of 47% of the public-school population in South Carolina.

**Characteristics of the Case Study**

Glesne (2016) described the study of cases as the in-depth, longitudinal examination with the gathering of data through observations, interviews, and document collection and analysis. In fact, Yin (2014) maintained that case studies explain the real-world contexts, enlightening those situations in which an intervention may lack targeted outcomes. As a result, researchers should endeavor to not interfere with the ordinary activity, which may occur in the environment to maintain authenticity. Usually, the context is uninterrupted and should remain natural for interpretation absent of manipulation. A threat to validity using the case study methodology is that all fair report of all evidence. In order to focus on the complexity of the case and add detail for clarity,
interviews may access the life experiences of those immersed in the normalcy of the setting. Stakes (1995) further explained the easiest way to fail an interview is not asking the right questions that will warrant informative response. As suggested, getting acquainted with interview is quite simple, but getting a good interview is there the challenge exists. During the interview process, it is not important to notate every word; the priority is walking away from the interview with meaning of the words. At the end of the case study, the write-up is typically narrative, and descriptive, frequently lending to a search for patterns.

Researchers choose the case study design as means of collecting insight rather than confirming or disconfirming a hypothesis. Case studies focus on a phenomenon, allowing the researcher to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues (Yin, 2014). Effectively carrying out the case study relies on the researcher’s ability to understand their personal style and allow fluency in case studies to develop over time. Yin also suggests reviewing notes in table form, as novice researchers may be overwhelmed with interpreting data findings. A strategy to avoid a troublesome experience is to begins with a straightforward topic with simple steps, which is an effective way to lay the foundation for a high-quality case. For this reason, this study involves interviewing teachers on the basis of their experiences in working with African American students.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants were selected according to availability and willingness to participate in the study. This section will outline that process and provide information on the length
of the study, the participants, and the prescribed data collection methods. A total of seven participants were used to complete this study from Milford County School District 84, located in rural Upstate South Carolina.

Length of Study

The time frame selected for the study was established considering the time constraints surrounding the public-school system. Data collected lasted throughout the month of March 2018. Time constraints were present due to the preparation for standardized testing in the upcoming weeks. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the total duration of a classroom period. As for the interview, I anticipated the duration to be no more than 45 minutes.

Prescribed Data Collection Methods

After the participants were chosen, I scheduled a time to interview and observe each participant in their naturalistic setting. These seven participants were interviewed with use of a recording device for the purpose of transcription. Before the interview, each participant received written consent for participating in the study. Once signed, the interviews and observations were scheduled and conducted shortly thereafter. Observations records were used to inform the semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed on the basis of their educational experiences, educational philosophy, teaching practices, classroom environment, and knowledge of students’ needs.

I conducted for the participants in the study on the day of the previously scheduled interviews. During these observations, anecdotal notes were drafted,
specifically focusing on the participants’ interactions with their students. Using the interview protocol and field notes, I endeavored to explore the alignment of the participants to the self-concept development strategies. My intent was to illustrate the rationale of teachers’ philosophies and practices in efforts to meet the varying academic, emotional, and social needs of students. Furthermore, I was interested in factors that either helped or hindered their ability to effectively serve these students. Ultimately, I sought to discovered the central point of teachers’ positionality in the classroom, which contributes to their instructional knowledge and experiences.

**Direct Observations**

Along with the data gathered from the interview process, classroom observations were also conducted for the purpose of answering the research question. Patton (2005) asserts the fact that while people are equipped with the five functioning senses – sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing – merely having these does not constitute a skilled observer. Each individual may report different findings. However, the prepared and trained observer can report with accuracy, validity, and reliability. Field notes serves as the primary recording tool of a qualitative researcher (Glesne, 2016). It consists of descriptions of people, settings, events, and interactions, which becomes the origin of ideas, reflections, and patterns that emerge during the observation. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest the research should include direct quotes of people said as a means of informing interpretation.

Field notes are not documents created with the intention of being shared, as notes may be harmful to participants. Some researchers choose to record notes onto loose-leaf
paper so that notes can be easily accessible. Others may input the data directly into a tablet or computer, which shortcuts the transcription process. Glesne (2016) maintains the chosen form is not important but rather that field notes are kept. Notes should be expanded at a later time, preferably the evening after the observation was made due to the fact that memorable details needed for field notes decline rapidly afterwards. (Glesne, 2016). During that time of reflection, the researcher may include minute details and engage in reflection of what was seen.

The primary strength related to observational data is collecting data as it is happening (Patton, 2005). Therefore, it is recommended that date, time, and setting of each observation is included. During the first step of the observation process, notes should be written descriptively and analytically with accuracy and avoidance of judgment. Field notes should be descriptive to the point that readers of notice can visualize and experience the setting in written form. However, room should be left for after thoughts. The second step is read through the day’s notes before the day ends to fill in remembered descriptions, clarify the meaning of words used, and reflect on the overall experience. The last step involves a series of processes which includes frequently reading and pondering on notes, writing analytic memos, begin to see themes and connections, and pose questions that serve as a guide for further work (Glesne, 2016).

The findings from observations will be used to inform the direction of the interview questions. Specific questions regarding the observations can be asked for clarity and may support the conceptual framework, which includes best practices as suggested by researchers and practitioners. Using the themes that arise from the
interview, participants may provide clarity regarding the intent of their practices. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), the intent of this observation would be categorized as an anchored interviewed whereas questions are anchored in what was observed. For this reason, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommend the range of the interview be determined – rather the observation will be structured or unstructured. A code sheet is prescribed for observers who which to document certain behaviors. However, many of these decisions are to be determined by the research question. As a researcher, I determined that observations would be the best way to get insight on the teacher’s alignment to self-concept development of students and follow-up with interviews to gain insight on the teacher’s intent behind their pedagogy.

**Managing the Data**

All files, included audio transcriptions were collected, secured, and analyzed with used of an electronic database: Dropbox. This database served as a secure way of storing files, recording, as well as the development of charts and tables to store codes and thematic analyses. Additionally, Google Doc and Google Form, applications of Google were used to store data. These programs not only enabled data management, but also allowed for efficient data organization. Transcriptions of interviews were uploaded to Dropbox and printed for a hard-copy for notetaking and highlighting. Using individual large posters and post it notes, the headings and comments were posted, categorized, and clustered to organize findings into themes. Dropbox and Google applications were used to ensure no loss of data. Once all interviews and observations were completed and findings were rendered, all data was destroyed.
**Researcher Bias**

A researcher can affect the outcome of any study. Lack of awareness of bias or subjectivity causes the research to insinuate rather than clarify personal benefits of the study. This section will discuss the positionality and subjectivity that may impact this study.

**Positionality and Subjectivity**

Positionality and subjectivity are present in all aspects of the human experience rather research is involved or not. Peshkin (1988) referred to these terms as garments that cannot be removed (p. 15). To some degree, researchers are already aware of some level of subjectivity that exists. Peshkin further asserted researchers should constantly engage in systematic monitoring of the self. While subjectivity and bias may affect the collection of data in qualitative research as well as how the data is interpreted, researchers should monitor themselves in effort to create “an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes” the researcher to themselves (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20). Therefore, the researcher is encouraged to manage their subjectivity so that it would not become a burden to the research process.

My personal philosophies and perceptions are biases which impact my professional experiences and recollections including preconceived knowledge of pertaining to my research topic. Glesne (2016) argues “subjective positions or aspects of your life history and personal experiences that help to form your values” (p. 150). As a result, these positions affect how individuals portray themselves and how they are
perceived by others. I found it important to engage in meaningful discourse with researchers, relatives, and mentors regarding my professional experiences and personal mission. For the purpose of my research and innocence of the knowledge presented, it was import that I remove my assumptions and allow participants of this study to be fully present as I holistically relay the meaning of their lived experiences. Moreover, it was my responsibility to consider and manage my personal position so this research study can be trusted.

Vulnerable Participant Populations

Over the years, I have become more aware of my passion in education and mission of my overall life, which has warranted the formation of prejudices, assumptions and preconceived notions. While I do not have personal relationships with the study participants, I do share similar experiences and perspectives due to my previous service to the public education in South Carolina as a middle school teacher of students of color. Having these experiences raises the awareness of the fact that this study makes them susceptible to vulnerability.

Sieber and Stanley (1988) input “socially sensitive research refers to studies in which there are potential social consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research” (p. 49). This type of research involves both sensitive topics as well as vulnerable participants. Consequently, Liamputtong (2007) provided advice regarding special considerations regarding the deliberative approaches to research with vulnerable participants. Strategies suggested include the acknowledgement as a means of self-
disclosure allows for the building of rapport and validating the stories of participants. Ultimately, the purpose is to exercise extensive precautions to protect the personal safety of all those involved. Liamputtong argued researchers should make use of the following techniques to ensure protection of participants involved in the study. The following are strategies provided: (a) considering location of interview as comfortability of setting may influence the research relationship, (b) having access to a professional for consultation in cases of unfamiliar circumstances, (c) building trust and rapport, (d) being mindful of our responses to emotional responses of the vulnerable, and (e) being attentive to the needs of participants after the interview and giving something back as a result of their participation (Liamputong, 2007).

By way of summary, Hill (1995) further argued researchers search for empirical research which have yielded valid results while anticipating and circumventing ethical dilemmas. He also recommends negotiation with gatekeepers such as agencies, boards, institutions, funders, and panels. Additionally, it is incumbent of researchers to design research that respects the rights to confidentiality of participants and all others with similar backgrounds. Furthermore, I chose to triangulate findings to effectively answer the research questions in efforts to increase trustworthiness and manage researcher subjectivity.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

In any conducted study, it is vital to ensure the information presented is credible. For this reason, this study acknowledges and utilizes the trustworthiness boundaries of validity and reliability.
**Trustworthiness**

The notion of trustworthiness in qualitative research has often been challenged and questioned by critics. Qualitative studies cannot be approached in the same manner of naturalistic work. Consequently, notable researchers have demonstrated strategies to deal with these issues. Doing so requires researchers to assess the extent to which they are able to apply general strategies to their studies in an ethical matter. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued credibility is one of the most important parts of instilling trustworthiness. In detailed discussion, Shenton (2004) outlined provisions researchers can follow to promote confidence that the phenomenon in which they are documenting is done so meticulously: (a) random sampling of participants to provide assurance that the selected individuals are certainly represented of a broader population; (b) triangulation of data collection methods, which will compensate for individual limitations while supporting the individual strengths of each method; (c) implement tactics to ensure honesty of informants by encouraging frankness from the beginning of the process and reminding participants of their privacy rights; and (d) engagement in frequent discourse with superiors to broaden the vision of the study and solicit alternative approaches within ethical boundaries. The execution of the aforementioned and several other provisions aid in creating trustworthiness in a sound qualitative study.

**Validity and Reliability.**

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argued all research is concerned with valid and reliable research. Ensuring validity and reliability involves confirming that research is
conducted in an ethical manner. Regardless of the research type or methodology, these concerns can be approached study’s conceptualization, data collection, analyzation, interpretation, and presentation of findings (p. 239). Maxwell (2013) argued the use of the term validity does not imply the possession of an objective truth not is it solely relative to methods. For clarity’s sake, Maxwell further stressed threats to validity are made implausible by evidence; making use of an appropriate methods is the only way to annul validity threats (p. 121). Maxwell (2013) offered approaches to research design, collection, analyzation, interpretation, and presentation to lessen the threats to validity: intensive, long-term involvement, rich data, respondent validation, intervention, searching for discrepant and negative cases, triangulation, appropriate use of numbers, and comparison between controlled and experiment groups. I incorporated the above strategies to ensure trustworthiness and validity in the study. I conducted the research process prudently by checking interpretations with participants and maintaining a reflective journal, which contributed to effective coding and themes developments (Saldana, 2013).

**Summary**

Stake (1995) argued, “…the experience of the qualitative researcher is one of knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations” (p. 50). In attempts to answer the research questions, the qualitative research must strategically use means to collect sources of data that will yield substantial interpretations. The case study design captures the lived experience of participants in this
The following data collection techniques of qualitative research were used as primary sources to conduct a study: (a) interviews and (b) observations.

Using the following two research questions as a basis of examination, the alignment of Title I middle school teachers to self-concept development practices, and further needed support to meet the diverse needs of the students they are now teaching were explored:

1. How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept development for African American students?
2. What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?

This chapter included a methodological review of the characteristics of qualitative research and its distinctions from quantitative research. Included in this chapter is also a discussion of case study design, a rich description of the research setting, a description of direction observations and interview, synopsis of data collection and analyzation, a description of researcher’s positionality and bias, and a discussion of ways in which trustworthiness and validity are secured. The findings of this study will depict the extent to which teachers are aware of self-concept enhancement and the intent of strategies in the classroom; it will also aid school leaders in intentionally addressing the need of self-concept enhancement pedagogy through ongoing professional development.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

In Chapter 4, the analysis of the data for this qualitative research study is presented based on the perspectives of seven participants. The multi-case study design used findings from classroom observations as well as interviews. The findings illustrate the perspectives of Title I middle school teachers and their alignment to self-concept development pedagogy. Using two research questions to drive the study, Chapter 4 explores the instructional practices of teachers to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students. Furthermore, the information presented in this chapter characterizes the data analysis and finding to address the following research questions:

1. How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept development for African American students?
2. What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?

These research questions provide the scaffolding in this investigation and serve as a cornerstone for data analysis. Strategically, the process of forming the interview questions and instrument for direct observation borrowed the central research questions as fundamental steps towards effective execution of this study. Table 4.2 serves as the foundation with subsequent interview questions.
Table 4.1

Research Questions in Relations to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept development for African American students?</td>
<td>6, 6a, 13, 13a, 13b, 13c, 13d, 14, 14a, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?</td>
<td>7, 8, 8a, 9, 10, 11, 11a, 11b, 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the results regarding interviews of the seven teachers from two school sites. Interviews and observations were used to further explore the perspectives of these teachers and their alignment to prescribed research practices. All seven teachers were middle school teachers.

Each interview began with the research assuring participants their responses would remain completely confidential and their identity would be protected. Most the interviewees were relatively comfortable and open to answering the questions. For the most part, they were enthused about sharing their teaching philosophies and how that informs their practices. All interviews were conducted in a familiar, natural setting: the individual classrooms of participants. Each of the interviewees selected the day and time
of the interview. The interviews were recorded using an iPad Pro after seeking permission from each participant as well as storing the files in an online, password-protected data filing platform. Not only were each of the interviews recorded, but also each was transcribed no more than 24 hours after the interview. Field notes were collected during the time of the interview and used to aid in coding transcripts.

During the month of March 2018, the interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks, taking place during the participants’ planning period or after school. After conducting and recording the seven interviews, NVivo, a qualitative analysis software, was used to code the transcripts. A color coding system was also used to compile codes from field notes. The responses of participants were used as a guide to code and categorize responses as they are connected to each of the two research questions. Using NVivo, I gathered similar quotes into a list of similar themes. During the coding process, there were instances where phrases where participants meanings were similar and could be grouped into various categories. For this reason, open-ended coding was used. The interview questions were designed in an open manner so interviewees could share their thoughts and perspective. Additional questions were used to probe for more information or clarification of statements. Monitoring responses from the participants, I analyzed the findings through a comparative method. After the coding process was complete, consistencies among the responses were used to form the analysis.
Descriptive Data

This multi-case study’s participants consisted of Title I middle school teachers from Milford County School District 84. After sending obtaining district permission invitation emails were sent to two schools from which teachers were selected. Participants’ subject areas were not limited to core content but expanded to co-curricular subjects such as Art and Physical Education.

Of the seven teacher participants in the study, three participants were Black/African American and four were White/European American. There was a combination of five females and two males. As noted in Table 4.2, most teachers completed a graduate degree with years of experience ranging from three to fifteen years. Most of the participants obtained substantial experience teaching in a Title I school and working with predominately African American students (Table 4.3). More specifically, the table illustrates the amount of years working in a Title I middle school. Additionally, most participants taught in core subject areas (Table 4.2). A pseudonym was assigned for each participant with the letter to represent the school’s name and a number, indicating the participants from that particular school.

The 7 teacher participants in the study were all highly qualified to teach in the state of South Carolina. At minimum, these teachers had three years of experience – one of which was named Teacher of the Year. As pictured in Table 4.2, most teachers’ subject areas were either Science or Social Studies.
Table 4.2

*Multi-case Participants Cultural Background*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Master of Arts in Teaching</td>
<td>Montessori Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master in Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Master in Administration</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Master of Arts in Teaching</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master in Middle Level Education</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bachelor of History</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3

*Title I Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Title I Experience</th>
<th>Experience with AA Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data was collected from questions 2 through 5 of the interview.
All participants have more than three years of experience teaching in a Title I school with the same amount of years working with African American students. The years of Title I school experience range from three to nine years. However, a range of the subjects taught were from 4 different areas.

Milford County School District 84 is a rural county in the upstate region of South Carolina, serving an enrolled student population of more than 5,900 students between kindergarten and twelfth grade. The district holds an overall poverty index of 70.25 percent. There are 9 schools, including high, middle, elementary, and Montessori schools offered in elementary and middle schools. For this study, Regina Middle and Milford Middle Schools were the settings. Regina Middle School is the educational home to 297 students. The following is a summary of the student population at Regina Middle: 120 Black/African American, 33 Hispanic/Latino, 12 Bi-racial, and 131 White. Milford Middle School serves a total of 454 students. The summary of the student population is as follows: 206 White, 167 Black/African American, 64 Hispanic/Latino, 15 Bi-racial, and 2 Indians.

Data Analysis and Results

Data analysis began once data collection process met the requirements data saturation according to the research design (Fush & Ness, 2015). A consistent line of questions was prepared to interview participants with additional probing questions to gain clarity from participants (Yin, 2014). Recording of the interview contribute to the aggregation of data for the use of coding and discovery of themes. The phenomena of interest were not purely historical and relied upon environmental conditions for direct
observations. An instrument was created based on the theoretical and research to ensure data saturation. Therefore, data collection was conducted using the following approaches: direct observations and observations.

Specific to the case study analysis, Yin (2003) contended analysis is the least developed aspects of the case study. The recommendation, consequently, is “playing” with data in search of patterns, insights, and concepts (Yin, 2003, p. 132). Reflecting on the research questions, I chose to use coding cycles as prescribed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2015). Table 4.4 represents the steps taken in this research study.

Specific to case study analysis, Merriam (2009) maintained there is no particular method for data collection and data analysis. However, she does suggest using step-by-step processes for data collection and analysis if the researcher prefers to use them as a guide. Due to the ease of understanding, I chose to use a Step-by-Step Guide to Data Analysis by O’Connor and Gibson (2003). Table 4.4 represents the steps that were taken in this research study.

In Step 1, I gathered the data and conducted a classical content analysis to assess the amount of times the codes were utilized. This was completed during concurrently during data collection to aid in reflection and deliberating existing data and generating strategies to efficiently collect, better data. Interweaving the data collection from interviews and observations while collecting the data led to a more in-depth consideration of possible descriptive coding values (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Transcripts from the interviews were downloaded into NVivo. I read through each interview transcripts twice to generate codes.
Table 4.4

*Step-by-Step Guide to Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Supporting Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>◊ Organize data to find and organize ideas and concepts</td>
<td>“Check the data for accuracy and to look for possible gaps and inconsistencies” (Dey, 2003, p. 77).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>◊ Data reduction</td>
<td>“Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is part of analysis. The researcher’s decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – are all analytic choices. Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Use classical content analysis to identify which codes are used most and which might be the most important concepts for the interviewee (Leech &amp; Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 569).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>◊ Use findings to answer the research questions</td>
<td>Summarize findings to answer research questions. In effect, use your findings and themes to tell the story of the research (Bloomberg &amp; Volpe, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often, I found myself perusing each interview after a new one was uploaded to reconsider adjustments to the current themes as well as ideas which may have been overlooked. Once the codes were generated, I placed the codes in a chart below the research questions they addressed.

In Step 2, I began to group the summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, and constructs. The object was to condense the data into smaller analytic unites. In doing so, I was able to focus the field work. Also referred to as data reduction, the groundwork was laid for cross-case analysis by recognizing common themes that surface.
The matrix display, as prescribed by Miles et. al., was the easiest way for me to organize and condense the material into a legible format for reflection, verification, and drawing conclusions. Again, using NVivo, I was able to manually drag codes to other codes and merge them into chunks. This second step drew me closer to understanding what was happening and why.

The third step in the analysis made meaning of the themes and categories with substantive explanations. The data was compared among participants and the relationship to the theoretical framework. With plausible explanations, conclusions were drawn based on the content of the data. One of the examined areas was Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to the strategies recommended by researchers. There was a direction correlation to the prescribed methods. In fact, every teacher mentioned relationship building as the key component to helping students; and three out of the four White teachers disclosed their openness to learning to be more culturally relevant.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is supported by empirical studies on self-concept enhancement. Drawing from leading educational theorists’ scholarly works that address self-concept development of African American adolescents who are the products of poverty and the strategies for teachers to aid these students in developing a positive self-image, the following terms have been used in empirical to refer to this phenomenon: “self-concept” (James, 1890; Hawk, 1967); “self-esteem” (Bandura, 1965); “self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1977; Bong & Shalvik, 2003); “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000), and “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2008). While all of
these works have been used to inform the body of literature, I draw mainly on Hawk’s (1967) notion of changing the self-concept. Having reviewed these assumptions of self-concept, Hawk determined that the self is an aspect of all experiences and contributes to the overall quality and form of their experiences. Furthermore, he posited self-concept is developed through a perpetual process of interaction with one’s environments. These environments include interactions with other individuals as well. Hawk maintained that self-concept is developed by participation and engagement with significant others as well as the nature of these interactions. Often referred to as reflected appraisals, the words of significant others contribute to self-image. Even after a self-concept has been developed, it can be changed gradually and over time.

The Iterative Process

Interviews and direct observations of participants were analyzed for findings. The forms of data were examined, categorized, tabulated, and tested to extract themes. Themes brought meaning and identification to repeated events experience. From the interviews and observations, nine themes emerged.

During the first step of iteration, codes were observed and from the data through a continual process of reviewing and perusing the transcription of interviews and the field notes. Comparable ideas and word repetition were used to identify themes. Using NVivo, the use of repeated words and phrases were located and read multiple times for meaning. Once repeated words and phrases were located, they were coded according to meaning and analysis.

All participants share their teaching philosophy, educational background, and
overall teaching experience at the beginning of the interview. This conversation transitioned into the meaning of self-concept and the practices used to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of African American teachers. Using the two research questions as the basis of exploration, there were 34 categories identified during the first iteration. I associated 17 of the categories with the first research question and the participants’ alignment to practices of self-concept development for African American teachers. The second question consisted of 17 categories in the first iteration, focusing on participants’ perception of the meaning of self-concept and their strategies to meet the needs of these students. As I reviewed the data, I created names for each of the categories. During the second iteration, 13 categories emerged from the data. Several of the themes were repositioned as sub-themes as the ideas were consistent with other themes and could support the variable. For example, Life Application was merged with Student Empowerment, as teachers are equipping students with the skills needed for life. That is one of several examples of thematic merging. In the final stages of the iterative process, nine themes remained. The illustration of this process – including the first iteration of codes – is displayed in Table 4.5 First Iteration of Analysis: Coding Map.

Table 4.5 present data represents the data with a broadened list of clustered codes. The coding directed in this table was prefaced and accompanied with careful reading and rereading of the data with connections of insight (Saldaña, 2013). The specific codes were influenced by the central research questions with the direct voices of the seven teacher participants. Table 4.5 emphasizes the alignment of the participants to the best practices of Title I researchers and practitioners, their perception about the
meaning of self-concept, and their overall pedagogy to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of the African American middle school students they are teaching. During the first cycle of iteration, the coding was based on the types of answers needed to answer the central questions and the forms of questions that were used. A query through NVivo was used to detect word frequencies. While the frequency did not always suggest significance, some of these words highlighted emergent, undetected patterns. With two initial clusters, Table 4.5 represents the 34 initial codes gathering from the two data sources. Subsequent to the first iteration, the 34 themes were revisited and re-examined to consolidate themes into fewer categories. Table 4.5

*First Iteration of Analysis: Coding Map*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1: 17 Initial Codes</td>
<td>Affirmations &amp; Celebrations; Arts integration; Care; Challenge limitations – Holding high expectations; Discipline; Go beyond classroom; Group work; Honesty; Journaling; Life application; Meeting their needs; Mistake friendly; Positive support initiatives; Relationship building; Culturally relevant pedagogy; Self-help; Relevant teaching philosophy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2: 17 Initial Codes</td>
<td>Unaware of term; Blames racism; Lacks confidence; Forced growth; Aggression/Defense; Environment contributes to self-concept; Time constraints; Influence of peers; Parental involvement; Incoherent teams; Irrelevant battles; Lack of cultural awareness; Leadership support; Standards; Openness to personal growth; Team support; Transparency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 illustrates the second iteration, which consisted of two components: (1)
the alignment of the participants to the best practices of Title I researchers and practitioners; (2) their perception about the meaning of self-concept and their overall pedagogy to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of the African American middle school students they are teaching. Once these components were established in this iterative process, 13 themes remained and were associated with the data from the seven teacher participants. The first cluster consisted of eight codes related to their alignment to best practices and the second cluster presented five themes regarding their perception of meeting the needs of African American students.

Table 4.6

Second Iteration of Analysis: From Codes to Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1: 8 Codes</td>
<td>Affirmations and Celebrations; Self-expression; Care;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment to Best Practices</td>
<td>High Expectations; Life Application; Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy; Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2: 5 Codes</td>
<td>Limited Knowledge; Diminished Confidence; Aggression/Defense; School-wide effort; Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Self-Concept of African American Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated in the abovementioned sections, the third iteration of analysis was completed. Once re-examined, a total of nine themes emerged as the most vivid representation of the study with fewer categories: five involving alignment to best practices and four regarding perceptions about the meaning of self-concept development for African American students and their commitment to the process.
Table 4.7

Third Iteration of Analysis: Final Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1: 5 Codes Alignment to Best Practices</td>
<td>Affirmations and Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2: 4 Codes Perception of Self-Concept of African American Students</td>
<td>Limited Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-Wide Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion of Findings

The seven multi-case studies were conducted seamlessly, concluding with a detailed analysis of interviews and observations to share the findings. A total of seven interviews were conducted with teachers from Milford County School District 84, using the Interview Protocol Appendix 1 and 2. The interview questions were clustered into two groups and were developed from the central research questions as a base reference for the study (Table 4.1). There were a total of 15 questions and nine sub-questions in the semi-structured interviews. The discussion of findings was organized and grouped according to the research questions. The nine emerging themes from the data aligned with the research questions are included in the discussion of findings.

To further probe the participants for a more in-depth discussion and clarity of ideas, sub-questions were asked. The overall goal was to capture their perception of the meaning of self-concept and their alignment to the best practices. Additional
instructional practices were captured as result of the sub-questions. The majority of the teachers erred on the concepts of care, relationship building, challenging limitations, and affirmative speech as daily practices. A consensus surfaced among all teachers in that African American students seemed to lack confidence in their academic abilities. Furthermore, all themes unfolded from the interviews and classroom observations regarding Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to self-concept development pedagogy for African American students.

### Alignment to Best Practices

African American students of poverty face challenges that manifest both academically and socially. According to Steele (1990) such students face challenges such as labeling, which affects their self-image. Ladson-Billings (2009) recommended teachers explore practices that warrant educational achievement for African American students and their divergent needs. Through the perspectives of the participants in this study, Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to self-concept pedagogy were explored, collected, and analyzed in alignment to the research questions and theoretical framework. The following themes emerged from the alignment to best practices: (1) Affirmations & Celebrations, (2) High Expectations, (3) Relationship Building, (4) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and (5) Student Empowerment.

**Affirmations and Celebrations.** Teachers are encouraged to cultivate positive classroom environments that will insight positive student interaction. One of the gaps in scholarly literature exists in how teachers use celebrations of students’ progress and affirmations regarding the individual qualities contribute to a healthier self-concept. The
participants in this study used affirmations quite frequently in their interaction with African American students. Of the participants, four embedded celebrations and affirmations in their interactions with African American students during the classroom observations. However, all seven teachers made reference to their regular use of affirmations.

Participants R-1, R-2, M-2, and M-3 all demonstrated affirmations in the classroom when students performed well or challenged themselves to complete a task assigned by the teacher. Participant R-1 exclaimed, “You got it baby!” once a student was able to prove their mastery of the contents taught in the day’s lesson. Instantly, the student began smiling and working even harder as a result of the affirmation. During instruction, Participant R-2 echoed this sentiment as lesson progressed and students were engaged. “I knew you guys would catch on to this quickly”, said Participant R-2.

Affirmations as such are not limited to verbal expressions. Participant M-2 frequently nodded and made eye contact with students while they were working on a creative historic timeline. In some cases, the nods were complimented with comments such as “Nice! I like how you did that. Clever! Very clever!” While teachers used words and non-verbal acts of approval, Participants M-3 accentuated her classroom with affirmative posters. One in particular caught my attention: “champ”. However, she still affirmed students and celebrated their attentiveness and self-motivation moments after entering the classroom. Almost immediately, she acknowledged students’ self-discipline and ability to begin working on bell work without her command.
During the interviews, participants spoke about how they use affirmations with students and celebrate their accomplishments. Participant M-2, a Social Studies teacher, was supporting students in completing an arts-integrated timeline to be used as a major grade and made frequent comments about their work. Similarly, in Participant R-1’s class, students were also grouped so support each other in completing the task. In the interview with Participant R-1, he said,

I give high fives and just try to build their confidence. Because most of them come up and say, I can't draw. That's what I should've said is a part of my philosophy, I teach creative thinking, if I can get you to think creatively, then what you put down is good for me. So, just giving them praise when they need it.

When asked about how he responds to students, who progress in small phases, Participant M-2 spoke about how he acknowledges small steps:

At least it's progress, you can't go from A to Z, you gotta get B, C and all those too. Students, I'll put on there, say a student constantly fails or what is perceived to be failing. So, the grade's 59 and down is fail, so say they make less than that. Say they make a 65 on the next test. I'll put a smiley face on there just saying hey good job. We're not to the 100 yet, but we're working our way. It's just like setting goals, you can't just set a goal up here without getting to this one first. So, I do that daily. Caring, I think you'll find all my students tell you that I care for them daily.
Similarly, Participant R-3, encouraged students with verbal affirmations as she celebrates achievement. With nearly 15 years of teaching, she came from a family of teachers and was always told she possessed the qualities of a teacher. After experience in the corporate world, she began helping students with math skills and noticed she was making a difference. That recognition made her aware of the possibility to make a difference in the classroom like her family members. During the afterschool interview, she explained how she makes use of positive reinforcements:

I'm just praising them, especially if they do well. ‘Hey, you made a 90 on that test. I need you to keep up that momentum. We got to keep it going.’ Sometimes even ask them just about other classes. I go, ‘Hey, I talked to Miss so and so, I know you're not doing too well.’ I let them know that I'm not just about the math, I'm about the person. When they see that you care then they'll start coming and telling you, ‘Well, Miss so and so, we did this and I had this problem.’ Then they're coming to you full circle, so now I can bring them up hopefully not just in math class but across the board.

Participant M-1 expressed how she made a concerted effort to resort to positively affirming students – even after a long-stressful day. In discussing her personal background, she disclosed how most of her K-12 experience was spent in private school. Growing up in a middle-class home, she was not limited to her rural hometown. In her lifetime, she has been able to travel and visit 32 states, which she knows is not the story of her African American students. She is considered to be a career-changer. Before
entering the classroom, she worked in forensics, testifying against youth. After leading
tours with middle students and explaining how her role was connected to sending
juveniles to jail, she suddenly wanted to make a change and found her way into the
classroom. During the interview, she expressed how she was learning daily. Participant
M-1 explained how, despite the frustration, she submits to positive affirmations:

I try to instruct them if I know that they're having a rough time with
something. Something that I try to do is just always positive. Always.
Even if it's a student that...you're always going to have a student that gets
under your skin. That's always going to happen. Something's going to
happen. I always try to point out the good things they do. If there's
something that you know, today, you really did well today. I might have
got onto you for not being on task one, or two times, but you really did
well today.

High Expectations. Obiakor (1992) suggested teachers provide students
with challenges that will expand their skill sets and abilities. While being
sensitive to their limitations, it is important not to be overly sympathetic. Using
Ellis’s (1975) Rational Emotive Theory, teachers should make students aware that
their outcomes stem from their belief systems. With that being the case, students’
beliefs about themselves and their abilities should be challenged for change. In
other words, expectations should not be lowered for students because of their self-
concepts. Rather, high expectations are to be maintained while equipping
students with tools, skills, and a safe environment to reach them.
During the observations of the seven teacher participants, students were challenged in their performance and ability to stay on task. In some classes where students were on task, high expectations were not verbally expressed. Participants R-1, R-3, M-2, and M-3 displayed high expectations regarding task management and performance. In the Montessori Arts class, Participant R-1 noticed a student was conversing with students and drifted away from the completion of the assignment. When he noticed the student straying from work, he exclaimed, ‘[Student’s Name], focus!’ Not many moments later, the student was back on task. Participant R-3, in a more positive sense, called students back to task by saying ‘Come on. Y’all can do this!’

Participant M-2 established perimeters for students to complete their timeline activities of the Reconstruction Era by allowing them to return during free time, after school, and the next day to complete the assignment. As the class period was coming to an end, he mentioned, “This has to be turned in by the end of the class or you can let your 4th period teacher knows and you can come back to complete it then.” Participant M-3 also called students back to focus as they began talking. She announced to the class how their talking was excessive and they would work in silence to ensure that their work was complete. While the class transitioned from a starter activity, the teacher paused and allowed them extra time to finish an assignment that many did not complete. She declared the work must be finished before leaving. Simultaneously, the students were affirmed as the teacher shared, “I would not give you work you could not do!”

By challenging students’ limitations, students are encouraged to fully participate in the construction of knowledge. While maintained high expectations for students and
their behavior, the academic component should not be overlooked. It is unsafe to assume students who are quietly seated and not disruptive are learning. Therefore, the challenge should be intentionally reflected in the academic prism of teacher.

During the interviews, Participant R-3 discussed how students are not challenged with high expectations in all classrooms to demonstrate their best work and go beyond their highest accomplishments. Steele (1990) argued African American students are often labeled and face incredible challenge, which explains the self-efficacy and performance outcomes. Participant R-3 said,

Academically - sometimes they're not challenged. I think sometimes assumptions are made about our minority students and I don't think they're challenged the way they should be academically. Then, the gap just widens.

As it was, Participant R-2 expressed similar sentiments regarding students not being challenged by teachers.

I think that they don't have a strong foundation as far as teachers. As far as having someone they can go to and trust and not having people write them off, and sweep them under the rug because they failed a test, or they had a bad day that day, and they just didn't feel like doing anything, they had a headache, and they didn't pay attention, they didn't take notes, and that teacher just kind of sweeps them under the rug, and gives them choices, so to speak - if that makes sense.
Along with her argument, she submitted not all teachers are willing to do the work of challenge students, which does more damage in the long run. Participant R-2 believed patterns as such contribute to an educational debt for students, limited their ability to achieve. She said students “are 100% capable of doing the doing the work.” In this vein, her challenge was for students to eventually own the learning process and take charge of their educational experience, conveying to students this idea: “the only that’s stopping you is you.”

Participant M-3, who was in her third year of teaching, used the previous success of students to challenge the glass ceilings in which African American student thwart academic achievement. Her strategies served as a visual trail of what students have accomplished in the previous units. She maintained a working list of concepts learned throughout the year as a point of reference and provocation for student determination. In our discussion, she provided further insight on how she uses it support her high expectations.

So, academically, they have grown so much. I make sure they know that because one of the big things... I love having my word wall with all of my words on it because I get to say it all the time. I'm like, look at all the things you've learned. You came in here not knowing any of these words and not knowing how to say them, not knowing what they mean. Look at all these amazing things you can do! I give them midterms, I give them tests and all that, 'cause they need to see where they're growing and I point it out every time, look how much you've learned. Look how you're able to
make these connections, not only with what you're learning to your life now, but you're able to start connecting things in ancient history and a lot of people can't do that. So, we're getting to see that and they're getting to see the growth and I love it. It's so much fun.

Participant M-3 was not oblivious to student circumstances as she held high expectations and challenged students. She was sure to provide reasonable scaffolding to help students meet the expectations, combatting the lack of support students may have in the home. Ladson-Billings (2009) argued students develop a greater commitment to learning due to their commitment to the teacher. Ladson-Billings (2009) maintained “effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both students and the subject matter” (p. 136).

Participant M-3 discussed her knowledge of African American students’ home contexts and how she accommodates their needs in her pedagogy. She said,

So, one thing that I do see often with some of my African American students is they're not having the support when they get home. It's that their parents are working two, sometimes three jobs, a single parent who has to work those. So, they're going home to an empty house. They're going home to where it might be an empty house and they're the oldest child there and they're having to take care of younger siblings. So, like I said earlier, they're having to grow up way too fast.

So, what I try to do here is to give them all the tools that they need. It's to make sure that they know that I will work with them if they can't stay after school for extra help to do a retest, to do makeup, whatever it is, we'll
figure it out in school. That is my job to figure it out. It's your job to learn things. And that goes back to, again, the relationship thing, it's that I have to know what's going on in my students' lives, because I'm not going to assign them work or assign them something that they can't do at home or that's just gonna put extra stress on them that they don't need.

Practices similar to the abovementioned displays teachers’ vision for students and commitment to their development. In addition to high expectations, Participant M-3 shared her efforts to create a safe environment for students to make mistakes. She does so through honesty and transparency regarding her connection to the human element of mistake making. Exposing this flaw to students elucidates the susceptibility for students to feel secure in their growth process. Participant M-3 shared:

I make sure that even if they get a question wrong, they still answer it and they still tried and it's amazing. We talk about failure. We talk about it's okay to make mistakes, it's okay to not know the answer, but you gotta figure it out. And we worked on how to figure that kind of stuff out together. One thing I do with my kids too is they know I'm not perfect. If I make a mistake, I don't hide from it. I tell them "I did this. Let me fix it." Or "Yeah, I tried doing it this way, it didn't work. All right, well, how can we try it?" Because my kids need to know that I also make mistakes and I make them a lot. And I think that helps with the relationship piece too though is that I don't think I'm this amazing, perfect person. Because
if I was, I couldn't grow either and if I can't grow, then why should they

grow?

She referred to this idea as “The Growth Mindset” and explained how it is
completely safe to make mistakes as it is part of learning and human growth. She
understood mistakes are to be used as a learning tool and not a deterrent to student
success. It was this strategy, I believe, contains a key element of Maslow’s
Hierarchy of Needs: safety.

Finally, Participant R-2 spoke about her relentless expectations for African
American students and all others. Her career background stood out among the other
participants as she encompassed years of military experience before transitioning into the
classroom. Observing her class, she expectations for students were unyielding and
emerged in students’ engagement and determination. She held high expectations for
students academically, emotionally, and socially in her classroom and others. As I asked
her about ways she held high expectations, here was her response:

It's just, the thing is, they're allowed to get away with certain things. And
if I could, instill in them, it doesn't matter where you go in this building,
you still have to be respectful, you still have to respect each other, you still
have to respect adults. It doesn't happen outside of this room, it does not
happen outside of this room. And I feel like, I take it personal, because in
here, I'm like, oh my god, my kids are so perfect, I love them to death, I
love being around them. They're so respectful, they do what they're told,
they don't talk back. But then, outside of this room, they're so different,
and I wish I could instill in them without having to stare at them across the room, because they're doing something wrong and they know they shouldn't be doing it, to get them to stop. You can't put your head down, I can't put my head down on that desk and teach, I'm tired too, nope, come on suck it up. And I tell them that in a minute. Tell them in a minute. And they know it, they know it. It's so weird, I'm very tough on them, but I'm also very soft in a lot of aspects, when it comes to them.

Due to the nature of the subject matter and activities for the day, high expectations were not as visible in some classes as they were others. **Relationship Building.** Relationships between teachers and students contribute immensely to the self-concept of African American students. Hawk (1967) argued that warmth and acceptance are essential to the development of self. Further, Payne (2005) suggested the most significant motivator for such students is relationships, which contributes to support systems and positive classroom environments. All participants voiced their alignment to self-concept development was based on relationship building. Teachers saw relationship building as the core to their daily interaction with students.

Observing Participant R-1, I noticed him walking across the room during the lesson, stimulating conversations with each student about his or her progress on the assignment. One student entered the class with high levels of energy. When he noticed the student being talkative, the teacher assigned the student the task of passing out
worksheets to the class. Another student was allowed to step out of the room for a moment. Once the student returned, the teacher patted him on the shoulder and spoke with him. During the interview, Participant R-1 said,

Anything can trigger a master comeback or attitude, so me just having that relationship and knowing my students, that's the rule: knowing your students. So, I just know my students and how to deal with them.

Similar to Participant R-1, Participant R-2 showed emotional care for her students. The relationship-building component was evident as she interacted with students. One student began crying. Participant R-2 then pulled the student aside in a discreet manner while the class was still working. Eventually, she had the student step out of class and began to console her while the other students were working. Students often become overwhelmed with emotions when being challenged. Negative interaction or taunting by peers and teachers may be overwhelming to students during this process. She said,

But it starts with building relationships and really getting to know your kids. I hate to say this, but I hear other teachers yell all the time. Yell at their kids all day. For me, kids, they're not going to take what you say to heart, if they know you don't care about them. And for him, for that particular topic, he knew I cared about him, and he knew I wasn't going to leave him alone. He was able to open up and share that part, and it's not that it wasn't there and he didn't know, but I don't think he's ever had anybody kind of force that out of him, and say 'Hey, listen! I am truly
interested, I'm genuinely interested in what you're interested in, let's talk.'

And he opened himself up to that part, and I don't know if he did that on purpose but it happened, and once I got it, I said, 'I got you now, let's go!'

Before every student left her classroom, she hugged students and said, “I love you.” She brought attention to this conduct during our conversation as the said, “These kids - it's just the kids. It's just the relationships that I have with them. When I tell you I love, I truly love every last one of them.” Participant R-3 addressed her practice of relationship building to inform how she will present the content to students. During the observation of instruction, she was facilitating a review activity. I observed the distance between the teacher and student as though she was simply monitoring the students as they worked, providing assistance as needed. She mentioned how she adjusted her teaching styles based on relationships with students and her knowledge of their learning styles. She disclosed,

    This year is new - every year it's like starting from scratch because you don't know essentially what you're working with. You don't know the children's learning styles. You don't know their backgrounds, and so you can't use the same thing every year. You have to adjust to what you have. Some years you get, hey, this group is great at math and you move a little faster. You do things a little different. Then, the next year you go, hey, these are tactical learners. Then, you change. Then, content is the same, but the way you teach it may be different from year to year.
Participant M-1, also worked on a review activity, which made it difficult to observe acts of relationships. Therefore, I relied on the interview to gain insight on her usage of relationship building as she works with African American students. Her teaching philosophy was based on her desire to make a difference in the lives of students. She used relationship building to gain respect. Here is what she said:

I think relationship is key. I think that you have to have a good relationship with them, because if you don't have a good relationship with them, they're not going to respect you, even though they should. They should respect you, because your authority, but a lot of them will say you have to give respect to earn respect, which they don't follow that. Because they don't just give it until they earn it.

This participant shared the account of a time an African American student was off task and refused to work. Coupled with high expectations, she addressed the student based on her relationship. She said,

There was a student that didn't do any work at all, and I was like, ‘Okay. We're going to go outside.’ He just knew I was going to wring him out. I said, ‘Listen, here's the deal. This is unacceptable, and it's not unacceptable because of your behavior. It's unacceptable, because I know you can do better than this.’

Participant M-2 spoke about the academic success of his students and their ability to perform on standardized tests. He accredited high scores to relationship building. While his proficiency in presenting the content supplied students with the information to be
academically successful, the teacher spoke about how relationship building manifests yielded academic success. He said,

I can only speak for myself but I know that my test scores have been, my students have done really well on their test scores. I don't believe it's because they enjoyed the content more so or anything else, I believe it's because I built a strong relationship with them where they know what they're going to get out of me. They know when you come into my class, we're going to be working, we're going to be doing this and it's not going to be just playtime. I think that students understand that, and they may not come out and say that they want it, but they do. They do, they want that structured environment.

The next participant, M-3, began the interview sharing her teaching philosophy. She said, “It’s all about relationship!” Although she was Caucasian, she disclosed that her spouse was African American, and she has been afforded the opportunity to make connections with Black students. Above content, she explained how the beginning of the school year is all about building relationships and owning their success as her own. This ownership confirms her commitment to their growth. Her thought-provoking responses were about the manner in which she removed preconceptions about their abilities. She said,

So, my philosophy of education is I have to build relationships with my students. I know that if I don't do that, they're not gonna care at all what I say. I don't blame them. Because especially teaching history in middle
school, it's a bunch of dead people. I've told them that and that's usually how I start my class. And I usually even upfront say that when we get to the end of my content area, it's a bunch of dead, white, men. And that we have to figure out why history is told from that point of view and we have to figure out why it matters it was told from that point of view. So, we talk about that. I spend my whole year building relationships, but especially before we dig into content, I have to get my kids to see that I'm here because I want to be here and that I would not choose to be anywhere else. I make sure that my students know that my first priority is them, their safety, and that I love them. And I do tell them that all the time. Even though I do have 120 something of them, but I still tell them they're all mine. I make sure at the beginning of the year, like when we do our personal timelines, they know about me and my background, they know how long I've been here. They don't necessarily know that I've only been teaching for three years. They don't need to know that. But they do need to know that this isn't my first year…and that I don't plan on leaving this district. So, that's the big thing with teaching is that I know I have to have those relationships.

Participant M-3 also connected relationships to behavior correction. The team of teachers worked together to discuss students’ progress. Effective diagnosis of students’ needs were centered around their knowledge of the students’ strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and abilities. She shared,
So, when we start noticing either a behavior slipping or maybe a behavior going back to the negative one that was at the beginning of the year, we'll make sure that one of the teachers that have a positive relationship with the kid talks to them. Like what's going on? We have to know what's going on in order to help them.

With 4 years of teaching social studies and coaching an assortment of sports, Participant M-4 understood relationship building as a means of cultivating and producing trust with African American students. He accomplished his relationships through conversation regarding students’ personal and career goals and adjusts to ways in which he can support students in making steps towards reaching their goals. He stated,

> The first thing I do, I try and build a relationship with them, that is the fundamentals of it. Because, without it, they're not going to trust you, and they're not going to learn from you. I look at them, I'm just like, ‘Hey, what's your name? What's something that you like?’ And then I'll try and like, ‘All right man, what's your favorite color?’ Just to build that relationship. And then after that it's like, ‘All right man! Where do you see yourself in five years? Do you have any goals?’ And I'm always pushing them to do something better.

All the participants either displayed or shared their alignment to relationship building to earn respect, receive trust, or inform the course of their instruction. Ideally, teachers sought to know each other their students. Unfortunately, there
was not a consensus considering culturally relevant pedagogy as a means of developing the self-image of African American pupils.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** Participants shared a wide-range of perspectives regarding their capacity to effectively implement culturally relevant pedagogy while teaching African American students. Some participants shared their insight on CRP, I gathered their understanding was not well aligned to the theory of CRP. Participants who taught social studies courses sought to incorporate names of notable African American persons in their lessons. However, mentioning names of Blacks is not the premise of cultural relevance. For clarity’s sake, cultural relevance uses the students’ culture in efforts to maintain it and transcend the marks of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). In the same vein, Ladson-Billings (2009) found that teachers, both Black and White, feel incapable of meeting the needs of African American students they teach. Further, she argued little reliable literature exists on teacher preparation to meet the needs of African American students. The end result should be this: to access the culture of Black students, use it as a means to empower students, and inspire them to academic excellence. Interestingly, one teacher shared that most teachers are underprepared to truly use CRP in their instructional practices.

Teacher participants were asked about their use of cultural relevance in their classroom. Additionally, teachers were observed to report the accuracy and reliability of findings. Furthermore, the field notes from the observations served as a means of enhancing the discussion in the interview.
During the observation, Participant R-3 was commemorating “Pie Day.” The lesson began with a video of rap artists who were rapping about the topic of discussion. Immediately, silence swept across the room, as students were captivated. After the video, one student exclaimed, “That’s what’s up!” The remainder of the class period encompassed students using M&M’s to exhibit their understanding of what they previously learned. The teacher continued playing videos with content for students to refer to and called their attention to specific portions of the video. As we spoke during the interview, she shared that she often uses storytelling to share her cultural with students and how she listens to stories from students to access their culture. Participant R-3 also expressed her outlook of other teachers in that they were limited in their relativity to African American students and how cultural deficits manifest in their classroom management, rousing unnecessary frustration with the student who may feel misunderstood. She said,

I think a good number of our teachers are not aware of diversity. I'm not saying that we don't have good teachers because we do have really great teachers here but I think that some of them, they're not aware of customs, and traditions and backgrounds. Things are different. That does hinder, not hinder, but changes a way a child learns in the classroom or the way they act. Some things, I guess I'll give an example, young black males not wanting to have eye contact. Some don't realize that and they think it's being disrespectful. Then, you're pushing the point to the point where the child is upset. Now, you have a whole new problem, but if you understand just that culture then you know that child's not being
disrespectful and your pushing that issue it's going to cause another problem.

Moreover, she explained her perception was not limited to race. She submitted how she and other African American teachers also found it challenging to relate to students. It's not necessarily even from one African American teacher to a student because even my culture may be different. I may not have been brought up the same way but it's understanding the diversity, and the culture and the reason that things happen. Once you understand, it doesn't necessarily make them right or wrong but it helps you better understand that child and work with that child. I think that the biggest thing that hinders it here at this school is a lack of diversity training.

Another participant explained how she steers away from cultural relevance out of fear that non-Black students would be offended. Although Participant R-2 sought to build strong relationships with students, she was afraid that White and Latino students would feel overlooked. Due to the political climate in education, she was “afraid” of being discriminative of other races of students as she met the needs of African American students. She exclaimed,

…but I'm so afraid of isolating them, because I know they're not old enough to really get it or understand. But every once in a while, like during Black History Month, I touched on that heavily, but I hate that I kind of just did it for that month. I try...it's very hard, if you can understand the position that I would be in, because I don't... And I don't
feel like my White babies would feel some kind of way, like, ‘Oh, Miss. R-2, just loves the Black kids’, because I don't come off that way. I love them all equally and they know that. But it's just, I don't want to isolate. Does that make sense?

While her intention was to not be subjective in her approach to reaching students, she circuitously fell short of that objective. She communicated how she challenged African American students to become their own rescue in a world with low expectations of them. Participant R-2 also addressed confrontational behavior between peers, deeming it unacceptable within in the classroom. Oddly enough, Milner (2011) maintained teachers should instruct students towards transcending negative labels through cultural relevance and high expectations. As the Participant R-2 shared her passion to related instructional practices to meet the needs of students, she became overwhelmed and began crying.

They're basically removing themselves to bring themselves back, kind of calm themselves down and re-center themselves. And that's what I taught them. I taught them that and they do it in here. When they try to do it in other classrooms, they don't get the same response that I give them, they don't get the empathy and the ‘Yes, I understand’, and I understand you need to move yourself, because if you don't move yourself the situation is going to get worse. Because in life, when you get into a situation out there on the streets, you need to recognize, okay, I'm getting upset I'm getting mad, I need to remove myself from this situation. Miss R-2 is not going to be there by your side all the time. I can't go into these other classrooms,
and I wish I could, but I can't, to kind of monitor when you're getting upset, come on, let's go, you need to go outside.

Ladson-Billings’ (2009) work regarding culturally relevant pedagogy affirms the pedagogy of Participant R-2 in that culturally relevant practitioners demonstrate connectedness with all students and encourage collaborative learning communities.

Similar to Participant R-2, Participants R-1, M-2, R-3, M-1, and M-4 encouraged positive learning communities through humanely equitable instruction and communal success. Students worked collaboratively to complete tasks in the classroom, often becoming owning the teacher role while working with their peers. Participant M-2 allowed students to work in groups to complete their timeline. Together students worked diligently. During the interview with the participant, his understanding of cultural relevance was communicated with an altered interpretation, which revealed the confines of his perception of CRP. For example, when asked about how he demonstrates CRP in his pedagogy for African American, he answered,

I've got Martin Luther King out there, I've got Frederick Douglass, I've got Abraham Lincoln. Not just African Americans but all races, I want them to understand that this is an open classroom that we don't judge just by somebody's color.

Participant M-2 further presented how he endeavored not to see color in the classroom. He believed his success as a teacher and constructive interaction with students.

Sure, I don't know of much for me. I feel like for me, me and the kids we get along great. I have great relationships with my students and I believe
it's because they see that I teach them every day, it's don't see color. Like yeah! We're not blind but at the same time it's kind of like what Martin Luther King said, ‘You see somebody for the content of their character, not by the color of their skin.’ So, for me, I don't have many problems with any student for that reason, because I believe that they feel that way about me.

Deficits interpretations may perpetuate a system of inequality by not meeting the specific needs of each student, especially that of African American students. According to Boutte (2015), refusing to see color or culture can be perceived as counter-productive; seeing color and individual needs is key to an equitable education. Ladson-Billings (2009) argued, “this invalidation of African American culture is compounded by a notion of assimilationist teaching, a teaching style that operates with regard to the students’ particular cultural characteristics” (p. 24). In sum, not seeing color is a depiction of dysconsciousness regarding the justified inequity by accepting societal structures as is Boutte (2015).

To resume, Participant R-1 taught Montessori Arts and was facilitating a cube building activity with paper, scissors, and other materials. There was a formula regarding the measurements that students continued asking about. Observing this, the teacher created an immediate solution and challenged students to own their learning. The solution was simple: “5-4-4-5, make a song out of it”. Immediately, heads started nodding to a soundless beat. Students began their song creation but still preserved the momentum in completing the assignment. He combined music with art in order to make

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learning accessible to the students. In a like manner, Participant M-1 found a relevant way engage students. She found a free website that allowed students to apply their understanding of dominant and co-dominant genes, which was an extension of direct instruction. CRP was certainly embedded in her classroom as she found ways to use students’ knowledge of technology. Both Participants R-1 and M-1 allowed students to collaborate and talk during instruction, exemplifying a community of learners. This could not be achieved without involving an in-depth knowledge of both content as well as students.

Borrowing from social media’s momentum about the movie Black Panther, Participant M-3 used elements from the movie as a teaching tool. One of the most talked-about movies for weeks became the teaching reference for her class. She said,

What's been nice - now with Black Panther out - is that we just finished medieval Africa. We did and we talked about that and we talked about culture and we got to bring in the colony and bring in the strongest of relationships and families. And we talked about the culture in the movie. There's a reason why they were dressed in a certain way. And we talked about that, we talked about the dress, we talked about the minister with the plate in his lip, we talked about why that was and what that represented and all that.

When asked about the importance, she began explaining how relationship building and culturally relevant pedagogy are intertwined. Relationship building was at the core of her
teaching philosophy and informed almost every aspect of her teaching. Participant M-3 responded,

So, if I don't build the relationships and my students don't know I care for them and they can't figure out a reason to take all of ancient history and make it culturally relevant, then why would they care about my class?

Several participants modeled cultural relevance in their instruction. Others spoke of it in their interview like Participant M-3 who coaches football, basketball, and baseball. He acknowledged the impact of cultivating relationship beyond the boundaries of the classroom. He said, “…them seeing me as someone outside the classroom helps a lot.”

Ladson-Billings (2009) contended culturally relevant teachers find ways to facilitate out-of-school interaction with their students. While these teachers may be frustrated and overwhelmed at times, many found ways to become more familiar with their students.

**Student Empowerment.** Teacher participants spoke about their commitment to help students make decisions that will produce desired results their lives. Obiakor (1992) suggested teachers should “inspire students to control their lives by allowing them to make goal-oriented decisions” (p. 163). With this in mind, failure should be used as a source of inspiration to work harder. Teachers in this study referred to this as “The Growth Mindset.”

Participant R-2 saw her role as a more than a teacher who provides students with needed information for standardized tests. Amidst societal structures and expectations, she was aware of the labels that will African American students. She said,
I think for them, just thinking about my kids, and knowing who they are, and how they are, and how they learn. For them, if I could just give them what they need. And I don't mean make them memorize what co-dominance and incomplete dominant. I don't need for them to memorize that. But, for me, if I can give them the skills that they need to find answers to situations in problems, just learning how to learn. And how to teach themselves, so to speak, because here they kind of have to be a part of their own rescue in a lot of situations. And not even just in the classroom, but in life, in general, you have to be a part of your own rescue. For me, I think, it's just giving them the tools that they need to figure things out, because I don't like to give straight up answers.

At end of the day, she empowered students to become independent thinkers, allowing them to make their own decision, intervening when necessary. Simply said, she believed in teaching life skills. Participant M-4 also portrayed a similar pedagogy, providing experience to affect students beyond the classroom. In our interview, he mentioned, But if you can be real with them, ‘All right, you do this here, you get a consequence there, any kind of real world situation.’ If I'm late for work, if that happens over, and over, and over, I lose my job. If they're late to class or if they don't turn in something on time, ultimately you get your warnings and stuff like that, but it becomes a zero...
Participant R-1 conveyed his love for arts and often founds ways to make his artwork relevant to other subject areas and life. In discussing his teaching philosophy, he expressed,

Mine is much different than a lot of other art teachers. My philosophy behind art and an art education is to teach something that they can apply to life like the other core subject classes. Doing the exhibitions and everything cool, even though I'm a professional artist, I love art, I don't see how teaching that to students will help them become better mathematicians, or engineers, or accountants. So, I try to relate every subject and my philosophy behind it is to give them something they can relate to, something they can use in life.

Participant M-2 changed his career from a business background and pursued his desire to impact the lives of middle school learners, getting them on the right path. It was his intent to shape their minds before they when to high school, which is a setting where independence is value. His vision for the students was not limited to finishing the school year nor going to high school. He shared,

In eighth grade, it's high school, but I'm trying to teach them beyond that. I'm trying to teach them college or work. Not everybody's going to go to college, so I try to prepare them to work too. I'm trying to teach them that it's not just school you're going to, it's the skills that you're trying to learn is what's going to teach you to becoming a successful adult.
It is huge as an educator. Our job I feel is to empower these students, with the skills to do it, with the self-esteem, we are supposed to build these kids up and get them inspired and let them feel that they can excel in life. Because especially as a young person, they need to feel inspired, they need to feel confident in doing certain things because if they don't they're going to shut down before their adult could begin. Structure and all that, one day they'll be adults, and the adult world can be cut and dry sometimes. Not that I'm going to be cut and dry to them, but I want them to understand that it gets a little bit more challenging the more responsibilities you're going to have to deal with. So, I want them to start being prepared for that now.

Another teacher referred to programs the school sponsored as they collaborated with local businesses to push the agenda of student empowerment. Students were able to develop relationships and obtain mentors for professional beyond the classroom. African American students could see themselves in different career areas. African American students, she believed, greatly benefited from activities as such. She mentioned, This school particularly has some really great programs that I was really impressed with when I got here. We don't have as many and I don't know why, but every week we would have a speaker come in, a motivational speaker who would give their story. Many of these people have some powerful testimonies, talk about where they came from and how they got where they were. I thought that was just great. Then, we have Walmart,
the distribution center, the managers come over once a month and they mentor the students. Every week they have a motivational speaker who's talking about how they came up and what they're doing now. As far as that's concerned, I just think that the school is bringing a lot of people to mentor and talk to our kids and help them raise the bar.

While Participants R-1, R-2, M-1, and M-4, shared how students are empowered within their classrooms and school, they did not speak to how this was done on a political scale with awareness of global issues as well as national and local leadership. Either way, there was a common agenda to ensure that students controlled their learning, behavior, and, ultimately, their success.

**Perception of Self-Concept of African American Students**

**Limited Knowledge.** The participants of this study possessed very little knowledge about the meaning of self-concept. While understanding the “total” students should be an integral part of education, all – except for one – had no knowledge of self-concept nor heard of the term before. Another participant began sharing their understanding of its meaning, but began describe self-esteem, rather than self-concept. The others simply expressed their unfamiliarity of the term. I also probed, asking about exposure to the term self-concept in faculty meetings or teacher preparation programs. The questioning did not yield any recollection. They embedded practices in their daily instruction that are aligned with self-concept development for students. Obiakor (1992) argued the importance of teachers and practitioners to understand the operational
perspective of self-concept if it is their intent to reduce the endemic challenges of African American students in schools.

Carter G. Woodson advocated for more suitable educational programs for African American s learners. More specifically, he appealed for the exploration of the total child:

“To educate the Negro we must find out exactly what his background is, what he is today, what his possibilities are, and how to begin with him as he is and make him a better individual of the kind that he is. Instead of cramming the Negro’s mind with that others have shown that they can do, we should develop his latent powers that he may perform in society a part of which other are not capable” (Woodson, 1933, p. 97).

Without mentioning the term self-concept, the factors as mentioned by Woodson are components of the self-concept. Ultimately, Hawk (1967) deemed self-concept as the most important end product of education. In the case of this study, teachers were not fully aware of the depth of the possibility to justly educate and empower the students they teach.

In effort to organize the responses of participants and display the consistency of their responses, Table 4.8 illustrates their prior knowledge of their meaning of self-concept. Interestingly, regardless of their years of teaching experience or highest degree, the majority of participants were limited in their knowledge of self-concept. This revealed professional development did not include conversations regarding students’ self-perception, which affects their behavior, performance, and levels of confidence.
**Table 4.8**

*Summary Table: Teacher Meaning of Self-Concept*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R-1</td>
<td>I don't know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-2</td>
<td>Never heard of self-concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-3</td>
<td>Self-concept is the way you feel about yourself, your self-esteem. It could be anything. It could be how smart you are, how pretty you are, how rich you feel you are. Just however you feel about yourself intrinsically and extrinsically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-1</td>
<td>I don't think so. Not like that. I would assume that it is understanding where you came from, and how that influences who you are today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-2</td>
<td>Self-concept, I believe it means how you see yourself and maybe where you see yourself headed or going in a sense. I've heard it before, yeah, but not one I throw around too often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-3</td>
<td>I don't know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-4</td>
<td>Well, for me, I'm not really sure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Diminished Confidence.** Participants had similar perceptions of African American students when they enter their classroom. The emerging theme, extracted from interviews with the seven teacher participants, was lack of confidence. This was
expected from my review of the literature. Steele (1990) presented how African American students generally have low expectations for themselves. Conversely, Steele argued that schools also held low expectations for students, which may hint towards self-fulfilling prophecy. Ladson-Billings (2009) further asserted, “when students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence” (p. 134). During the interviews, I ask a series of questions to understand how teachers perceived African American students’ self-concept and how they instruct their students with that perception in mind.

Participant M-4 perceived his African American to generally have a diminished self-image. He credited their low self-esteem to the lack of role models in the home. Participant M-4 said,

Or anything, they have a negative self-esteem. It's because they see at home, some of them don't have a father figure at home. Some of them don't see their parents because they're working two or three jobs to try and support them. To them, it's more of, "All right, what can I get, what can I do?" And stuff like that. Very physical, or materialistic.

He also mentioned that students are often perceived as being defensive and aggressive at times. However, he was able to sever those issues through relationship building and earning their respect as well as trust.

Emotionally they're kind of like - all right - they're always on the defensive…socially they can tend to be more aggressive to me. They're the ones loud, or disturbing the others. But that's just with the relationship too. If you build that relationship they know, 'Hey, in this class I can be
myself, but they know I'm not ... I don't have to prove that I'm big and bad,’ type thing.

Moreover, the solution Participants M-4 used for aggressive students was positivity in all aspects of his interaction with them - even when they have done something incorrectly. In his opinion, it is imperative to save the relationship. He said,

It's always in a positive manner. Even if a student's not doing what they're supposed to do. ‘All right, man, let's get on this.’ I'll listen to whatever is going on, and then ultimately go from there. I told you before, the relationship's the key. No matter what, I've got to worry about the relationship with the student first.

Many of the other participants shared similar opinions regarding how African American students perceive themselves, according to their prior interactions. Participant R-1 said, “They’re not as confident in a school setting.” From a co-curricular standpoint, he alluded to the fact that students seem to have no problems interacting with each other. However, that changes in the classroom during learning. He articulated one of his strategies to develop their confidence:

It just allows them to be confident about themselves. I just give them that, because we have a good relationship, me and the students. So, if I give them that opportunity to stand up and talk, or stand up and lead, or stand up just to grade my daily work. That makes them confident; they go ‘I can do this.’
During the classroom observation, he did have one African American female student stand and confidently explain her strategy to complete the art activity. He felt this was a way to make students earn their learning while building confidence.

Along the same lines, Participant R-3 specifically spoke to their academic self-efficacy and their ability to perform in comparison to their non-minority peers. She said, quite honestly most of them, the ones that I've come across, perceive themselves as low learners, that they're not very smart. Every now and then I run across a few, and I don't know why, that feel like they don't meet that mold. That they're smart, and they know they're smart, and they're just going to do what they have to do. Honestly, in the 15 years that I've been teaching most of them perceive themselves to be inferior to some of their non-minority counterparts.

Referring to their immediate peers, regardless of race, she spoke about how students do not fully challenge themselves, succumbing to low expectations. She suggested, socially is them not feeling that they have to, I guess, dumb themselves down because sometimes it's not cool to be smart. If your buddies are not doing well and then you may like math and if you seem to be doing well then, they do, they pick at them. So, that they can fit in, who doesn't want to fit in, they dumb themselves down or don't do what they're supposed to do so they can blend in with their peers.

Academically? Academically sometimes they're not challenged. I think sometimes assumptions are made about our minority students and I don't
think they're challenged the way they should be academically. Then, the gap just widens.

Similar to Participant M-4, she tried to reaffirm students in a positive manner by speaking to their possibilities and small hints of potential, which may consist of her giving them positive role models and examples of those who once faced challenges like her students. She spoke about bringing role models to their attention:

One, like I said, to set the example. To give them examples of other positive role models that look like them. Let them know things that they can do. Expose them to a variety of things that will raise the bar for them. Give them examples of others who may have come from backgrounds like them who have persevered and made it.

Participant M-1 had an alternative interpretation of the African American students in her classroom. Her opinion of their self-image referred to worth. Immediately, I asked her to explain her positionality. She commented,

I think it depends on the student. Sometimes we have open house before we have school start so we get to meet their parents first with them, and I feel like you can tell a lot from that. I do think that a lot of our African American students think that they're not worthy sometimes. They don't necessarily deserve an education, and sometimes they don't like education seriously...I guess worthy of love, or worthy of respect, or those kinds of things. I've noticed that. Sometimes that's their attitude. It's not all of them. Of course, never going to be all, but I don't know. From where
they come from or if they don't have the right clothes. I know they get picked on for their clothes a lot. It's something that goes on, and we nip it in the bud if we hear it, but obviously there's plenty that goes on in social media. A big thing of shoes is a big thing this year. If you don't have the right shoes. That makes them feel like their self-esteem is lowered, and I know that that has to be I would think to do with the poverty level as well.

She perceived students individually, during the first points of contact. Many of the African American students demonstrated they were not worthy of education – or the education they were given, perhaps. Concluding her statements, her opinion about their abilities was the same as other participants: some of them don’t believe in themselves. Her solution to this problem was to inspire students to believe in themselves.

Participant R-2 shared a comparable viewpoint for students in the beginning of her class. She also believed students lacked self-belief and was afraid students would settle for lifestyles that were familiar to their environments. Participant R-2 revealed,

In the beginning, it’s an uphill battle. In the beginning, they didn't believe in themselves. I could tell that someone has told them, and it may be an everyday thing for them, that they're not smart, that they can do anything that they want to do or be anything you [students] want to be. You [students] just need to get through this right here, and maybe you can work at Wal-Mart, or maybe you [students] can work at McDonald's, or maybe you can play basketball, because that's good, that's what you're good at, that's what you [students] need to do. Or sports is what you [students]
need to do. Not, you [students] can be a scientist, or think about this right here, there's a whole huge world that they have no idea about.

Yeah, they have no idea at all. So, what I've started doing...it's so weird, thinking about where they are now, honey, they weren't there at the beginning of the year. And I'm a firm believer that kids believe what you tell them. If you tell them they're dumb and they're stupid, they believe it...But, they've had teachers call them names, call them stupid, and they believe it, they believe it. So, I have to reverse that and I had to tell them, ‘you guys are super smart, y'all are geniuses, y'all are awesome.’ And at some point, along the lines they started to believe it... they started to believe it. One of my kids said, ‘See, Miss R-2, we're geniuses.’ I said, ‘Yes, you are.’ And never heard him use that word before. But he started to believe it.

Her challenge in working with her African American students was confronting their limiting perception of opportunities. Students limit themselves to customer service roles, which may not require the completion of their public-school career. Media certainly does not help the cause. For that reason, she intentionally introduces students to a range of additional opportunities when asked about what contributes to their self-image. She shared,

I think society - things around them, things that they see on TV, because there aren't a whole lot of people that look like us on TV. There aren't a whole lot of doctors, or scientists that look like us. Because, for them,
Black people aren't scientists, because they're just not. No… there are black people that are scientists, you get what I'm saying? Everything around them is telling them, this isn't you because you're supposed to be this. You're supposed to be right here.

Participant M-3 conveyed how all students lack confidence when they enter her classroom on the first day. For sixth grades, they are immersed in a completely different system and exposed to material they have heard nothing about. In response to that dilemma, she supported her African American – and all other – students with the tools needed to confidently access new knowledge and information. Here are her thoughts:

So, what I try to do here is to give them all the tools that they need. It's to make sure that they know that I will work with them if they can't stay after school for extra help to do a retest, to do makeup, whatever it is, we'll figure it out in school. That is my job to figure it out. It's your job to learn things. And that goes back to, again, the relationship thing, it's that I have to know what's going on in my students' lives, because I'm not going to assign them work or assign them something that they can't do at home or that's just gonna put extra stress on them that they don't need.

In contrast, Participant M-2 expressed a persuasion, completely contrary of his peers. As Teacher of the Year at his school, he felt confident that African American students possessed a positive sense of self, although this does not lend itself true in all cases. In that light, he later surrendered the idea that African American students were proud of
who they are and submitted these students are probably not as confident as he would ideally believe. He said,

I would say for the most part, I believe that they would be empowered. I believe they're proud of who they are. A lot of times, I do see them, I don't feel like they feel like they could be as successful as I believe they can be. So, I feel like their self-concept of themselves is probably a little bit lower than where I would put them at.

During the interview, he impressed upon me the manner in which he instructs his students, having some perception of their confidence. He taught his African American students by making connections and sharing his personal story as well as what provoked a change in his life. He conveyed,

I try to show them where I came from, that I wasn't one that was perfect student, that as a matter of fact whenever I was a senior, I didn't have good enough grades to get into Clemson and was rejected and whenever I share that with them I can see them go ‘wow, okay, this guy, he wasn't maybe doing the right thing. But all of a sudden he corrected and I got my degree from Clemson. So, I think that hopefully inspires them, and again my family, I'm the only one that's graduated from my family, first one. So, it's like, I can share a similar experience, maybe not the same but similar kind of experiences where hopefully that leads them to trusting me more and wanting to follow my guidance.
It is huge as an educator. Our job I feel is to empower these students, with the skills to do it, with the self-esteem, we are supposed to build these kids up and get them inspired and let them feel that they can excel in life.

Ultimately, Participant M-2 charged himself with the task of empowering students and equipping them with tools to survive the turmoil of life. However, I was not confident in his insight of the self-concept of his African American students and the challenges they specifically face socially and emotionally.

Altogether, these teachers conveyed a unanimous message in that African American students generally lacked confidence in their abilities to perform academically. In the absence of professional development surrounding African American students and their self-concept, the participants were left with a valuable component: an inclusive, appropriate teacher philosophy.

**School-Wide Effort.** The Title I middle schools where the participants taught were different in management and approaches to student learning. One had a larger student population, which led to constant collaborative planning and discussions regarding students. At the smaller school, teachers voiced their concerns about lack of insight on diversity and best practices to develop students’ self-concept. These insights began the conversations about contexts within the school that help and hinder their commitment to aid students in developing a positive, healthy self-concept.

With enthusiasm, Participant R-3 shared her opinion on contexts of the school she deemed valuable. In the past, the school hosted programs with motivational speakers. Some were from local businesses; others were leaders in the community and shared their
testimonies. In her opinion, exposing the students was a way of inspiring them and raising the bar. She expressed,

This school particularly has some really great programs that I was really impressed with when I got here. We don't have as many and I don't know why, but every week we would have a speaker come in, a motivational speaker who would give their story. Many of these people have some powerful testimonies, talk about where they came from and how they got where they were. I thought that was just great. Then, we have Wal-Mart, the distribution center, the managers come over once a month and they mentor the students. Every week they have a motivational speaker who's talking about how they came up and what they're doing now. As far as that's concerned, I just think that the school is bringing a lot of people to mentor and talk to our kids and help them raise the bar.

Another participant talked about the school providing small awards and incentives for students. Teachers are able to recognize students for something they did or a challenge they made strides to conquer. This ticket is given to students and shared with parents. Participant M-1 shared how helpful this is to her in the process of helping her African American students to enhance their self-concepts. The part she appreciated most was the manner in which they were able to engage the parents in a positive manner versus always calling with negative news and reports. She said,

We have Tiger Tickets, which I think is really helpful. That's something that if you didn't have time to call their parents, and say hey, they did great
today. Because sometimes we forget to give those good things to the parents. We might say it to the student, but we forget to tell their parents they're good. Then, when parent gets a phone call they're like, ‘Oh gosh, they did something bad’. I try to make more of those phone calls personally if I can, but we have a lady that has little tiger tickets slips, and she'll take it, and you write down soon with what they did. I think that's great.

Mutually, Participants M-2 and M-3 felt the collaboration with other teachers throughout the school served as a valuable component in helping them develop African American students’ self-concepts. As teams, they built relationships with each student and met to discuss methods that help while working with students. Participant M-3 said, “I believe for the most part all of the teachers at this school are geared to trying to help. I'm not exactly sure about what else I guess.” In greater detail, Participant M-2 explained,

So, one thing that helps is I know that I have a great team who they also build relationships with our students. They know, they understand the value of relationships and we work well together with our kids. We all, we talk, we meet at least once a week talking about our kids. We talk about their strengths, their weaknesses, if we notice a student struggling, we'll talk about it and we'll figure out what we've seen positive and where we can do that in other places because we know that some of our kids are gonna have better relationships with some teachers than others. So, when we start noticing either a behavior slipping or maybe a behavior going
back to the negative one that was at the beginning of the year, we'll make sure that one of the teachers that have a positive relationship with the kid talks to them. ‘Like what's going on?’ We have to know what's going on in order to help them.

Participant R-1 gave credit to school leadership about the component that helps him in developing the self-image of African American learners. He said, “The principal helps me push towards providing them with a great opportunity. And I don't think nothing hinders that.” However, that is not the consensus of other teachers. There was a range of different school contexts which hindered teachers’ ability to serve the emotional, social, and academic needs of the African American students. These hindrances were dishonest teachers, lack of parent communication, time, lack of team cohesiveness, and team buy-in.

After probing with additional questions, Participant R-1 shared insight in what he believes serves as a hindrance. Participant R-1 explained how teachers were often vague in their affirmations of students, providing general compliments about students. In his approach with African American students, he had to be very specific in his positive remarks about students. He said,

I think so. Because most teachers probably messed them up, because they think they're not telling the truth, ‘Oh, you're like those other teachers, you're just saying that so I can...’. But no, I break it down, to make them think ‘He really did look at my pictures, that's probably a pretty honest answer.’
Participant M-2 addressed the lack of engagement from parents and further added that standards, being outdated, did not connect to social aspect of the students’ lives. He said,

I would definitely say a lack of communication with parents is one. Also, I think the standards may be changing, but they can be outdated - especially for social studies, history changes daily. In that aspect, I think sometimes the content itself is just not geared towards what they really…it's more just sometimes in a sense fluff than it is actually, this is going to help you later on.

His teaching philosophy erred on the side of preparation for the real world. Therefore, it was clear that his frustration was with the content and the irrelevance to current political climates. However, he fastens his instruction to what standards suggest he teach.

The context of standards and standardized testing, as anticipated, serve as barriers for teachers like Participant M-1. She voiced how other teachers overlooked the opportunity to building meaningful relationships with students, which may contribute to their overall performance. She said,

Well, I think it's standards for sure, because I think that I'm not a huge fan of standards. I understand we all need to teach the same things, but trying to push towards that standardized testing I do think influences teachers to not make a personal relationship with their kids, because they feel like their job is on the line based on how these kids do on test even though I think the kid would do better on the test if you had a good relationship with them, because they like you. Some of them
unfortunately, some of them will say things like well I'm not going to try, because I don't like her, or I don't like him.

She often found herself pulled between building relationships and standards. The time it takes to effectively do both is limited. At the same school, Participant M-4 shared a similar opinion. He makes reference to time. He shared,

Because teaching three grades now at one time, all right, I've got beginning of time until now in history going on in my brain. And then I've got to grade papers, make lesson plans, these work plans take forever to make. It's just like, ‘All right, now how do I commit to both?’

Participant R-2 expressed her frustrations as she became overwhelmed with emotions. Teachers in her grade level have accused her of attempting to be friends with students as she made an effort to build relationships within the classroom and outside of the school. Other teachers, in her opinion, had low expectations for students and demonstrated such expectations in their daily interaction with students. She shared,

I think that they don't have a strong foundation as far as teachers. As far as having someone they can go to and trust and not having people write them off, and sweep them under the rug because they failed a test, or they had a bad day that day, and they just didn't feel like doing anything, they had a headache, and they didn't pay attention, they didn't take notes, and that teacher just kind of sweeps them under the rug, and gives them choices, so to speak - if that makes sense.
She often saw minimal efforts as counterproductive as the perpetuated a system, yielding fewer positive outcomes for her students. Her African American students and others behaved differently in other classroom simply because other teachers expected and allowed them to. She addressed this directly and said, “They don't do that to me. They treat the other teachers more like friends than they do me. My kids don't see me as their friend.” She basically holds expectations for students because of her in-depth knowledge of their abilities. A lack of cohesiveness was tremendous wearisome to her daily practice. She was not only battling with students to create strategies to meeting their needs but also teachers who did not see the value in her philosophical practices. She said,

It's hard, because I don't have other teachers that kind of work off the same thing that I work off. My passion is where it starts for me. And it's so counterproductive when they come in here and it's very structured and they're not allowed to get up and walk around, and they're not allowed to do whatever they want. But when they leave, they can go to another classroom when there's no structure, and they have choices, well it's okay, if you don't feel like doing the work, then you're just going to sit there and be quiet. It's so counterproductive.

And I feel like I'm walking backwards. Do you get what I'm saying? They come here, they know what I expect, they know Miss R-2 ain't going to play with you, but I'm going to love you at the same time. But then they know when they leave here, they're so different. So, when I hear so many things about them, like talking back and being disrespectful, like I ... My
head spins, because I'm like, what do you mean? So and so? No, he wasn't, 'cause he know better. No, he did, he did.

It's frustrating, it's annoying, it's annoying and I don't understand. Because when I tell you, I'm by myself, I am. Other teachers don't get it, they don't understand, they think, for them, it's all about, 'Oh, Miss R-2 is friends with the kids, oh, they're just friends.' First of all, I don't have no friends, all my friends got bills and kids, and husbands, and wives, okay? These kids aren't my friends, they don't need another friend, you see how they treat each other.

In an adverse manner, she felt there was no support from her team, which often provoked students to misbehave and have emotional outbursts. In fact, her narrative depicted the team as being in constant conflict regarding viewpoints and practices. She felt her classroom was sensitive to the emotional needs of students and provided a place where they could safe as they learned. However, she knew this was not homogenous with other classrooms. She shared,

I'll be 100% honest, I feel like they sabotage a lot of the things that I do for them, things that I tell my kids…some of them are hot heads, and I know their triggers, and I know when it's time for them to remove themselves. They know when they need to remove themselves, and we've come very far with that. And I tell them, if you ever get in a situation and you're just so frustrated and you feel like you want to physically put your hands on someone, you need to remove yourself immediately.
Collectively, teachers indicated contexts within the school that would further support them in helping to meet the emotional, emotional, and social needs of their African American students. However, these hindrances speak to areas in which school leaders, district representatives, instructional coaches, and other practitioners can provide resources to address the challenges and offer supportive means to further meet the needs of their African American students.

**Cultural Diversity.** While many teachers did not see cultural diversity or competence as an issue within their school, the argument of one teacher raised a substantive rationale for ways in which the growth and development of African American students could be supported. Ladson-Billings (2009) shared how successful teachers use different methodologies to ensure the growth and development of their students. Above all, “culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson, Billings, 2009, p. 19). Professor Chris Emdin (2016) refers to cultural relevancy environments as “ratchetdemic”. He defined ratchetdemic as this: “to be ratchet and academic; to exemplify all negative characteristics in urban spaces in a manner that inspires the pursuit of academics”. To that end, teachers of African American students may not fully recognize their cultural limitations. Perhaps their intent is positive. Yet, Woodson (1933) addressed those who lack cultural diversity this way:

> “These persons are not all dishonest men and women. Many of them are sincere, and believe they are doing the race some great good in thus
holding is backward. *The must be awakened and shown the error of their ways*” (p. 93).

The aforementioned quote is not a target towards a particular race. Rather, it speaks to the necessities of all who are responsible to be awakened to a program that will empower African American students.

Participant R-3 shared her opinion of teachers who teacher within her school and how their lack of cultural diversity minimizes the impact they, as teachers, can collectively make on African American students. With 15 years of teaching experience, she was careful not to assert that other teachers were “bad” nor did they have malicious intent in the classroom. She simply referred to their lack of knowledge of norms in the African American culture. Additionally, she shared how her opinion did not suggest African American teachers were aware of the diversity within the race. Participant R-3 also acknowledged her lack of cultural awareness as a Black woman who was decades older than students she taught. She said,

I think a good number of our teachers are not aware of diversity. I'm not saying that we don't have good teachers because we do have really great teachers here but I think that some of them, they're not aware of customs, and traditions and backgrounds. Things are different. That does hinder… not hinder but changes a way a child learns in the classroom or the way they act. Some things, I guess I'll give an example, young black males not wanting to have eye contact. Some don't realize that and they think it's being disrespectful. Then, you're pushing the point to the point where the
child is upset. Now, you have a whole new problem, but if you understand just that culture then you know that child's not being disrespectful and your pushing that issue it's going to cause another problem.

It's not necessarily even from one African American teacher to a student because even my culture may be different. I may not have been brought up the same way but it's understanding the diversity, and the culture and the reason that things happen. Once you understand, it doesn't necessarily make them right or wrong but it helps you better understand that child and work with that child. I think that the biggest thing that hinders it here at this school is a lack of diversity training.

One teacher shared her personal background and conveyed how she was still learning to be culturally competent. Growing up in a predominately White private school, Participant M-1 was not immersed into a diverse population until the end of her K-12 experience. She shared how her private middle school restricted her exposure to cultural events and activity. The prom, football games, and diversity were not part of her initial schooling experience. It was until she attended high school that she experienced cultural shock and was immersed into a population that did not reflect her background. She said,

For just for elementary school, and like I said every summer my dad had traveled to a different state. I've been to 32 states. Now, I'm like I have to get the rest of them so I can see them all. I was very fortunate in that, and
middle school my parents decided they were going to change me to a different school. They weren't really happy with the middle school program at Shannon Forest so I went to my church school for middle school, and that's when I kind of started getting into science, and stuff, and I was asking for chemistry sets for Christmas, and all kinds of stuff. My mom was a nurse so that kind of helped with the science, and I was really interested in that.

Then, I decided I wanted to go to a public high school, because I said if I go to this private school I'm not going to get prom. I'm not going to get football games. I'm not going to get that high school experience. So. my first experience of the public school was high school, and it was kind of shocking. If you've never been in a public school, it's very different. I just remember the first day being like, "What is happening?" I had never seen a fight. I had never seen anything like that, and there wasn't a lot of diversity in our classrooms.

I continued to probe later in the interview and understand how her background has impacted her ability to be culturally competent. All in all, Participant M-1 recognized her personal deficit and entered the classroom where she could daily learn from students and learn about herself. The American Evaluation Association (2011) maintained, “cultural competence requires awareness of self, reflection on one’s own cultural position, awareness of others’ positions, and the ability to interact genuinely and respectfully with others” (p. 3). In this case, I
wondered if Participant M-1 recognized the dynamics in the difference in background between her life and that of her students. I questioned if she was capable of employing appropriate approaches towards cultural competence. She responded,

I didn't grow up knowing other people's culture. I tried to bring it in as much as I can. Especially if it's something that I think is a negative thing. Like the give respect, or earn respect. I try to bring that in as much as I can. You know, there's plenty of people that didn't ever get respected, but they still kept going, because it was for the good of society, and those kinds of things. I'm learning every day, because I learn new things that are in their culture. This has nothing to do with in here, but something I have tried to learn is learn what kind of music they listen to, and things like that. Try to make a reference, and it makes them laugh, because they can't believe that I knew that.

Like I've said, you need to be like Rihanna, and work, work, work. They start laughing, because they're like, how did you know that? That's one that I definitely try to do, but I'm learning it. That goes across the board, because like you said this is not just African American students. This is Hispanic students. Some are in their culture. Learn all about quinceanera's this year. Learning all about that. I love it though, because I said I think that I'm supposed to learn something from this too. This isn't just

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supposed to be me teaching them. They definitely teach me. This is helping me change my self-concept.

Unfortunately, professional development has not been offered to develop her cultural competence or foster culturally relevant pedagogy. August, Goldenberg, and Rueda (2006) conveyed findings of a study of teachers who embedded the culture of Native American children in the curriculum. When instruction was compatible with the social patterns of the students’ culture, students demonstrated higher levels of achievement-related behaviors than in orthodox patterns found in American classrooms.

Consequently, a pedagogical practice that stresses culture characteristics in adult-child interactions is the starting ground for education and learning. In this case, Participant R-3’s observation of other teachers in the school contributes to the argument of cultural relevance as means of engaging students in order to develop their self-concepts and yield positive educational outcomes.

Chapter 4 reported the results of the analysis of data as a result of the two research questions and based on the instructional practices of seven Title I middle school teachers. The finding revealed a range of themes that emerged throughout the direction observations and interviews. As a result of the data collected and analyzed in this case study, seven themes emerged from the findings. The themes illustrated a direct alignment to the literature review included in Chapter 2 with additional findings, which will contribute to the current literature. The five themes associated with teachers’ alignment to best practices were Affirmations and Celebrations, High Expectations, Relationship Building, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Student Empowerment. The
four themes associated with participants’ perception of the self-concept of African American students were Limited Knowledge, Diminished Confidence, School-Wide Effort, and Cultural Diversity. The data was chunked and organized by participant’s experiences and instructional pedagogy according to the procedures of Yin (2013).
CHAPTER FIVE
RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the research study design to explore Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to self-concept development for African American students. This chapter also provides a detailed discussion of the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework; answered research questions and findings-based conclusion; recommendations for future studies and educational practices, implications for educator preparation programs, and a reflection surrounding the research as instrument component.

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of seven Title I middle school teachers, using a multi-case study approach. While studies have been conducted on best practices for self-concept development and the effects of poverty on self-image, this study further adds insight to understanding the knowledge teachers have of these practices in effort to effectively meet the emotional, academic, and emotional needs of the African American students they teach. The following central questions guides this study:

1. How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept development for African American students?
2. What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?
Fit of Existing Literature and Discussion of Findings and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is supported by empirical studies on self-concept development. Hawk (1967), a self-concept development theorist, and other researchers explored the self-concept of social disadvantaged students. The use of this theoretical framework has been helpful in illustrating how these best practices can be embedded in the daily practices of teachers and theessentiality of this pedagogy. This theoretical framework was also helpful in distinguishing the intentionality of teachers’ pedagogy in the classroom and the depth of knowledge regarding self-concept in today’s public schools. The findings as it relates to the theoretical framework are discussed below.

More than five decades ago, Hawk (1967) determined that the self is an aspect of all experiences and contributes to the overall quality and form of their experiences. James (1890) was credited as one of the first individuals to discuss the theory of self-concept. Ultimately, Hawk determined self-concept is developed through the constant interaction with one’s environments. Self-concept, conversely, is not limited to physical environment. As mentioned in chapters one and two, self-concept is developed as one engages and participates with significant others. The words and actions of significant others towards an individual contribute to one’s self-concept. Although it develops as a result of these experiences, self-concept is malleable and can be changed over time. The theoretical framework illustrates the experiences outside of the classroom that initially develops and the practices teachers should alignment to in efforts to enhance self-concept of African American students in poverty.
The dynamics of the America’s public schools are ever changing. However, a particular element of the classrooms has been consistent: teacher and student demographics. The White teacher population during the 1987-1988 school year was 88 percent compared to 82 percent in 2011-2012 (USCB, 2016). In contrast, African American students currently make up 16 percent of the student population. As far as the poverty index is concerned, the national rate is 12.6 percent based on U. S. Census Bureau’s 2016 estimates. However, African American households are 25.4 percent below poverty level. For years, systemic poverty has continued to sweep through African American communities; and for the students, the effects are profound and should not be underestimated. Poverty affects student behavior, patience, politeness, emotional responses, and empathy for others (Jensen, 2009). Teachers with little experience will likely be frustrated, puzzled or irritated with students in poverty with low self-concept. Due to this interesting dynamic, the classroom has become a place where care for students is threatened by low expectations for student performance (Kunjufu, 2000).

Interestingly, as it pertains to the findings of this study, the participants possessed insufficient knowledge of self-concept and voiced they had never been presented with the term. Burn (1984) defined self-concept as the image we hold of ourselves or, rather, the way we see ourselves. More specifically, the definition refers to our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge of our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). While they felt supported by their school administration, self-concept had never been discussed in their professional development sessions, which indicates a direct correlation with teachers’ knowledge of self-concept and best practices.
Participants were unaware of how their practices contributed to a greater good. One teacher defined self-concept precisely but shared it was not part of his everyday educational language. Teachers in these schools aligned to the best practices as prescribed by educational theorists and researchers. However, intent of the practices was not directed towards self-concept development as much as it was behavior and classroom management.

Cultural relevance was included in the theoretical framework and encompassed cultural competence and culturally relevant pedagogy. Payne (1996) suggested an understanding of the culture and values of students in poverty lessens the frustrations educators experience in the classroom, particular when dealing with students and parents. Teachers expressed varied levels of knowledge regarding cultural relevance and expressed their lack of confidence in being culturally competent. One participant voiced her fear of isolating African American students and being accused of partiality towards other students. Although her observed instructional practices were aligned to culturally relevant pedagogy, she conveyed discomfort integrating the idea and capitalized on discussing Black culture during Black History Month. Another expressed his confidence in displaying pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Lincoln to be culturally relevant, portraying a misunderstanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. However, these teachers regularly made use of relationship building and affirmative speech to encourage students’ academic achievement, which are not indicative of culturally relevant pedagogy. It is apparent that both teachers’ preparation programs and professional development opportunities have prepared them to facilitate positive classroom
management but have failed in providing them with the tools and skills to practice culturally relevance in a manner than cultivates students’ self-concepts.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued three criteria must be met to achieve culturally relevant pedagogy: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483). Ladson-Billings (2009) further recommended teachers explore and implement educational practices that yield educational achievement among African American students while paying attention to the divergent needs of these students. Considering the gap between the percent of White teachers and Black students, a concerted effort must be made on national and local levels to ensure the needs of students are being met. I do insist, however, this is not limited to differences in cultures as it relates to race. Ladson-Billings (2009) suggested from her studies that teachers, both Black and White, feel incapable of meeting the needs of African American students they teach. Consequently, educators should be careful to be attentive to the diversity among these students and ascertain that their practices reflect equitable practices. Some are able to draw from their personal experiences to find innovative ways to reach African American students in their classrooms as a couple of the participants in this study. However, overall, teachers continue to struggle connecting with the cultural background of students, pondering on what they believe is the moral thing to do.

Challenging of limitations with high expectations was also part of the theoretical framework. Hawk (1967) maintained the classroom environment should be high in challenge and low in threat, providing opportunities for the development self (p. 203).
Teachers in this study implemented high expectations for students regarding behavior and academic performance. Participants referred to African American students as competent but not confident in themselves nor their abilities. Participants felt it was their role to empower students to believe in themselves by virtue of empowerment. Often, students were reminded of their potential and challenged to do more. Two teachers in this study referred to this as the “growth mindset”. Student empowerment, conversely, was not included in this theoretical framework and was not found in the literature. As a result, this study adds to the literature by submitting student empowerment to expand the contributions to self-concept development.

In today’s classroom, students enter school with various needs. An equitable educational experience would only be applicable when students are the same. Jensen (2009) maintained that secure attachments and stable environments are vital to the outcome of positive self-concept development. As it pertains to the African American learner, one cannot assume academic, emotional, and social needs are not all the same. Students, having experience a range of different environments, develop self-concepts that are not all the same. Just because students are in poverty, it is not safe to assume their self-concepts are low. Therefore, relationship building is important, and teachers in this study holistically built relationships in and beyond the classroom. One participants did this by employing student interest inventories at the beginning of the year, before teaching any content. Some endeavored to become familiar with students, their patterns, and their learning styles over time. Others used relationships as a means of building trust and respect with African American students, due to race. Lastly, one teacher exercised
relationship building to know how to manage and discipline students, knowing what 'triggers’ them, getting them to perform in the classroom. As mentioned before, teachers aligned to the relationship building aspect of self-concept for the purposes of instruction, building respect and trust, becoming familiar with students, and increasing students’ performance.

In conclusion, teachers embed the best practices of self-concept development in their classroom. Relationship building, challenging limitations, and celebrations/affirmations were among the most common alignments found in this study. The seven Title I middle school teachers in this study were not aware of culturally relevant pedagogy and generally focused on instruction and learning, absent of students’ culture. Arts integration was embedded in classrooms where teachers’ instructional styles were hands-on and activities were artistic in nature. To further contribute to the literature, teachers implemented other practices such as student empowerment and journaling to help students enhance their self-concepts.

**Summary of the Study**

This multi-case study provided a limited view and description of how, in one particular school district, Title I middle school teachers’ pedagogy are aligned to the best practices of self-concept development for African American students. Within this study, key themes encapsulate the findings from the interviews and observations of highly qualified Title I middle school teachers. The research questions were answered, using the nine emerging themes, which defined teachers’ perception of the meaning of self-
concept, their involved in the process, and their overall alignment to self-concept
development best practices as prescribed by researchers and practitioners.

**The Research Questions Answered (Summary of Findings and Conclusion)**

In this study, I collected data pertaining to the instructional pedagogy of the
participants. The background information and the teaching philosophy gave me access to
understanding their schooling experiences, years of experience teaching in a Title I
school, years of experience working with predominately African American students, and
influences to become teachers. The findings of this research have contributed to the
literature by extending the knowledge of teachers’ alignment to self-concept development
practices in two rural schools. The seven teachers taught middle school core subject
areas from grades six to eight.

The participants were observed during a class period. Using an observation
instrument, field notes were collected regarding their uses self-concept development
strategies. The participants interviewed for this study were asked questions about their
teaching experience, knowledge of self-concept, preconceptions of African American
students, strategies used to instruct students, school contexts that help and hinder the
process, and their perception of the effectiveness. The chapter drew conclusions, using a
summary of the findings in this study, and answered the research questions used to guide
the study.

**Research Question 1**

*How do Title I middle school teachers align to practices of self-concept
development for African American students?*
Table 5.1 represents the raw data matrix of emerging themes and concluding data sources for research question one, a synopsis of each theme’s coverage, and the identified sources of data to determine that focus. The expansion analysis of observations and interviews confirmed each theme based on participants’ instructional practices and responses. The results for the first research question appear in Table 5.1 aligned with the emerging themes in the order as listed within the chapter. With unvarying review of the theoretical framework, the five themes, affirmations and celebrations, high expectations, relationship building, culturally relevant pedagogy, and student empowerment, are used to answer research question one.

Table 5.1

*Raw Data Matrix Emerging Themes Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Affirmations &amp; Celebrations</td>
<td>Participants were observed and interviewed identified teachers’ use of affirmations and celebrations during instruction.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High Expectations</td>
<td>Participants highlighted how high expectations are held for students both academically and socially.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>Participants shared ways in which they build relationships with students within and beyond the classroom.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
<td>Participants in this study conveyed deficit knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and were not prepared to make lessons culturally relevant.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Empowerment</td>
<td>The participants in this study felt their job was to prepare students for life and equip students with tools to be successful in life.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: *I* = Interview; *O* = Observation
Research Question 1 explored Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to self-concept development to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of African American students. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were affirmations and celebrations, high expectations, relationship building, culturally relevant pedagogy, and student empowerment. The theme affirmations and celebrations identified teachers’ use during instruction. The theme high expectations describe how teachers held high expectations for students and challenged their limitations. Relationship building was described as participants shared their approaches in and beyond the classroom and how they felt establish positive relationships was important to learning. When asked about culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers expressed different perspectives, including examples that were not aligned to the actual practices, fear of isolating students, and lack of information to instruct African American students. Lastly, the participants felt it was their job to equip students with knowledge and skills to be successful in various aspects of life.

Fay and Funk (1995) argued the magnitude of students of today’s classroom with a poor self-concept. The researchers discussed how social priorities and norms have shifted over time due to the loss of extended family and community responsibility to raise the child. Nowadays, the engagement of extended family, such as grandma, has become disregarded (p. 117). The absence of family structures and dynamics has demanded more from teachers. The self-concept of students suffers at the hands of teachers who may not recognize this need. Nonetheless, the self-concept can be changed over time and requires a supportive classroom. This classroom celebrates their accomplishments and affirming
the uniqueness of each student with positive descriptive statements. The findings of this study revealed the majority of the participants demonstrated an understanding of celebrating the accomplishments of students. Additionally, with a relationship with students, the seven participants have expressed the importance of individually affirming students.

African American students may be “cared for” in the classroom by providing support with lowered expectations. Obiakor (1992) argued African American students should be provided experiences that challenge their limitations. While the tasks should be appropriate to their level of competence, teachers should hold high expectations of students, defying the negative label of helplessness (Hawk, 1967). As noted in the findings, teachers found themselves holding high expectations for students, but some of the expectations were behavioral related and based on classroom management. On countless occasions, teachers noted they had to push students beyond what African American students feel they are able to complete or accomplish. Participants found that steady encouragement, positive affirmations, and healthy relationships aided in building up students with the necessary tools to be successful in the classroom and life. Clearly, the lack of high expectations could imply low performance of African American students. It is imperative that teachers hold high expectations of students regardless of their behavior and their perceptions of behaviors that may be characterized as lazy, helpless, and disrespectful.

Secure attachments and stable environments are vital to the emotion and social development of students in low-income homes (Jensen, 2009). A lack of secure
relationships manifests in the classroom through misbehavior, anxiety, and longing for attention (Jensen, 2009, p. 87). According to Fay and Funk (1995), students will work harder for people in whom they love until the time comes for them to do it for themselves. Teachers in this study understood this to be true and made use of relationship building both in and beyond the classroom. Most of the teachers rarely mentioned misbehavior during instruction due to their knowledge of how students learn and react to particular stimuli. Participants shared how they intentionally got to know students, which informed how they interacted with students individually and collectively. One particular threat to relationship building is time, being consumed by other teacher responsibilities and covering standards.

While teachers consistently conveyed the importance of relationship building, there was a variance in the end result of relationship building. The nature of relationship building for some teachers was in effort to help students by getting to know them as teachers. Part of helping students was becoming familiar with their background and home environment. From another perspective relationship building was used in lieu of referral writing and suspension. Participants exercised relationship building as a perquisite for teaching and learning. Understanding how each student learned contributes to effective instructional strategies. Due to race being a barrier, some teachers perceived relationship building as a means of earning respect from African American students. Getting acquainted with students and being open - in return - helped students to notice similarities. Some practiced relationship building due to their lack of diversity. With different backgrounds than that of African American students in poverty, teachers had to
be willing to allow the student to become the teacher while the teacher became the student. Relying on generalized research is not enough. Beyond the color of skin and texture of hair, each child represents a distinct, exclusive individual.

Culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be discussed – holistically! It is important for teachers to acknowledge and grapple with race and other differences within the classroom. The sensitivity of these topics causes discomfort to many teachers, leading to the teachers feeling incapable of connecting to the culture of students. Ladson-Billings (2009) argued the notion of equity only makes sense when students are just alike. In this vein, teachers of African American students should connect to the culture of the students to appropriately instruct them towards academic excellence. Teachers in this study possessed differentiated understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy. Specific to the discussion of the interview, most participants made reference to the latest lyrics or trends students were discussing. Another mentioned deceased scholars and presidents posted in the classroom as a means of being culturally relevant. The findings of this study suggest teachers are not prepared to explain cultural relevance and are limited in their ability to meet educational needs based on student culture and background. In the midst of positive relationships, the threat of alleged favoritism or discomfort for non-Black students may deters educator from intentionally using CRP during instruction. Moreover, when participant’s background and experience did not include immersion in other cultures, lack of ability and awareness was often magnified.

Participants in this study shared interesting insight which I did not find in the literature. After exploring the discussions of how teachers viewed their roles, I was
intrigued by the nature of their responses. Collectively, participants believed student empowerment was pertinent to developing African American students’ self-concept. In numerous interviews, participants indicated African American students lack self-confidence in their abilities. Beyond challenging students and building relationships, teachers were led to prepare students for life and equip them with the tools to become successful in life. However, not all teachers believe this to be their role. It can be concluded Title I middle school teachers may benefit from teacher students to find answers to life’s questions and think independently. Ultimately, their end goal is to help African American students become productive adults and successful in their careers of choice, helping them to see life from a broader view.

It can be concluded from this study that Title I middle school teachers make use of the best practices of self-concept development for African American students. Affirmations and celebrations were used often but typically geared towards behavior and work management. Additionally, teachers must be sure to maintain high expectations of students and provide scaffolding those expectations. It is vital that teachers aware of their preconceptions of African American students and deal those biases to ensure the academic, emotional, and social needs of students can be met. Many of the teachers regularly built relationships in and beyond the classroom to build trust and inform future instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be a topic of primacy in professional developments for teachers, educational leaders, and support staff. Failure to explore racial and culture differences will result in the needs of students not being fully met and limited academic success as outcomes. Finally, it can be concluded that educators in
general should consider their educational philosophies and their capacity to meet the needs of diverse students they teach, recognizing that education is more than providing information. Education is the development of productive, creative, capable citizens cultivated by community members. Education is the village’s responsibility.

**Research Question 2**

*What perceptions do Title I middle school teachers have about the meaning of self-concept development and the best practices to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students?*

Table 5.2 represents the raw data matrix of emerging themes and concluding data sources for research question one, a synopsis of each theme’s coverage, and the identified sources of data to determine that focus. The expansion analysis of observations and interviews confirmed each theme based on participants’ instructional practices and responses. The results for the first research question appear in Table 5.2 aligned with the emerging themes in the order as listed within the chapter. With a review of the theoretical framework, the four themes, limited knowledge, diminished confidence, school-wide effort, and cultural diversity.

Research Question 2 addresses Title I middle school teachers’ perception about the meaning of self-concept and the effectiveness of the strategies. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were limited knowledge, diminished confidence, school-wide effort, and cultural diversity. When asked to provide the definition of self-concept, five out of seven said they were unenlightened of the term. All the participants agreed
Table 5.2

Raw Data Matrix Emerging Themes Research Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Limited Knowledge</td>
<td>Participants possessed limited knowledge of self-concept and their key role in helping students to develop a positive self-image.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Diminished Confidence</td>
<td>The participants in this study perceived African American students to lack confidence in themselves and abilities.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>School-Wide Effort</td>
<td>Participants maintained teacher teams, leadership support, and school-wide initiatives support teachers with self-concept development.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>Participants lacked clear understanding of cultural diversity.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: I = Interview; O = Observation

self-concept was not discussed during their teacher preparation programs or during professional development. Generally, participants perceived that African American students lack confidence about themselves and their abilities. For that reason, instructional decisions are made to build confidence. School-wide initiatives, according to teachers, held their efforts to help students develop a positive self-image. Lastly, teachers require training in cultural diversity to effectively meet the needs of African American students they teach.

Participants were asked to share insight about the meaning of self-concept. One teacher provided a precise definition of the term but was unable to share any additional information beyond a meaning. Another made an attempt but was not successful in doing so. The five other teachers frankly shared they were unmindful of the meaning of self-
concept. Overall, teachers had not been trained within the school about the benefits of a healthy self-concept nor strategies to help African American students develop a positive self-image. Data from this study suggest teachers’ perceptions of self-concept were ill informed, emphasizing the need for this study and others similar in nature. Teachers subscribed to the strategies associated with self-concept development for the purpose of classroom management and instruction but were unaware of the association with an actual theory that is connected to fundamental educational outcomes. The implications to address the teachers’ limited knowledge of self-concept are essential to helping teachers meet the needs of African American students.

African American students generally struggle with labels that suggest low-expectations and outcomes for their performance (Steele, 1990). According to Workman (2012), teachers are one of the most important factors which impact students’ performance. Participants shared how African American students were perceived as lacking confidence in themselves and their abilities. It was perceived students’ confidence was the result of home and schooling experiences. Teachers regularly challenged students’ limitations and provided affirmations of work ethic and daily progress. Most shared they “pushed” students beyond their limitations. Some teachers created ways to help students building their confidence levels. Of the seven participants, all believed they were obligated to build students’ self-confidence and found their strategies to work over a period of time.

The school-wide effort theme emerged throughout the interviews with participants. The participants discussed how grade-level teams, school leadership
support, school-wide programs, guest speakers, mentors, and role models helped the process of helping students to develop a positive self-concept. While a shared vision for education and high expectations for all students as a norm, teachers felt supported in meeting the needs of students. However, there were contexts within the school that hindered the process of self-concept in enhancement. Teachers with marginal agendas, disengaged administration, time, coverage of standards, and lack of parent engagement all threaten the progress of teachers who seek to help their students. These often led to teacher isolation, blame for student behavior, and lack of faith in administration, which are unhealthy for learning community. In fact, these are symptoms of a deteriorating learning community.

Cultural diversity emerged as a final theme in this study. Often teachers felt they were not culturally competent. Cultural competence requires awareness of self and reflections of how one interacts with others (AEA, 2011). Race was not a limitation in cultural competence. Even African American teachers discussed how they felt their age and background accounted for the disconnection with students. Teachers whose background consisted of a different socio-economic status, schooling, parenting presence, and diversity longed for experiences to develop their aptitude to be culturally diverse. Others did not see culture as a barrier for their students. Actually, one chose not to see color. In response, not seeing color can perpetuate systems of inequity that fail to acknowledge and meet the needs of African American students – even when good intent is involved.
It can be concluded from this study that Title I middle school teachers’ perceptions of self-concept are underdeveloped as it pertains to the academic, emotional, and social needs of African American students. Grade level teams with similar values and beliefs are more effective in being aware of the needs of their students. On the contrary, teams where division prevails are likely to ignore the needs of students, casting blame on other teachers who are either more or less involved. It can also be concluded that professional learning communities lack learning about the sub-communities of the school population. Overall, participants’ schools lacked conversations regarding skills, strategies, and appropriate dispositions for diverse populations of students they seek to serve.

**Researcher Conclusions**

At the conclusion of the analysis and findings, I believe Title I middle school teachers have the intent to produce productive citizens for the future and within their classrooms. However, there is more preparation necessary to meet the academic, emotional, and social musts of African American learners. Consistent with the findings of this study, teachers lack knowledge of self-concept enhancement in order to produce the desire educational outcomes in African American students. Specifically, the best practices are implemented in the classroom but are generally seen as good teaching practices and are not specifically connected with the development of a positive self-image. To that end, educational leaders, policy makers, and support staff for teachers should all locate themselves in the findings of this study to meet the needs of African
American students in poverty, beyond the academic scope. Lastly, more awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity is needed.

Ideally, Title I middle school teachers hold high expectations for their students. Such expectations are demonstrated in the teaching philosophies with phrases such as “all students can learn”. Conversely, it was evident teachers were not fully aware of the components that contribute to the development of self-concept. In this study, teachers consistently expressed how the home environment contributes the way students’ see themselves. But today’s classroom, previous successes and failures, cultural relevance, and celebrations were separate from the influencers of self-concept. Furthermore, teachers had never heard of the self-concept in their professional development opportunities and teacher education programs. Obviously, education has moved towards a system of giving information, assessing for learning, and finding ways to ensure this is recurrent. Teachers focus on doing their jobs efficiently. Unfortunately, teachers make the best decisions at the time with the information they have. Self-concept development is not within the scope of the information provided to these teachers. With limited knowledge of self-concept, the intentionality of embedding these practices in the classroom may be screened in evaluations as “good teaching” versus the building of whole, competent beings: the basis of education.

Findings of this study illustrates the limited knowledge-base of teachers concerning students in poverty, which may reflect the perspective of district and statewide representatives. Poverty is not limited to financial resources. It is inclusive of emotional resources, mental resources, support systems, relationships and role models,
and knowledge of hidden rules (Payne, 2005). Understanding the development of self-concept serves as a direct correlation to meeting the needs of students. A newly revised standard is not the answer to the challenges African American students in poverty face. Sadly, teachers discussed procedures, management, documentation, changes to operations, and upcoming tasks in meetings, which consume their time and energy. The findings in this study suggest students in today’s classrooms may exist in schools that are not adequately prepared to meet their needs–let alone become aware of their needs. The challenge is for school leaders, guidance counselors, and district representatives to find themselves in the discoveries of this study. Seek out the roles that are played in supporting teachers in helping African American students developing a positive sense of self as well as their contributions to reinforcing deleterious labels which stunt positive development. Beyond the academics, the emotion and social needs must be met. Ultimately, students should have support systems that collectively define “the best” for their students, strategically explore the depth of their needs, readily position themselves to receive relevant information, and collaboratively work towards adopting systems to nurture growth.

A key missing piece in schools is cultural competency among teachers. Teachers, both black and white, are prepared to teach students to be cultural competent, especially when the teachers themselves have not received those opportunities in their schooling experiences or teacher education programs. When asked to share how they use cultural relevance, teachers referred to using recently popular movies and lyrics. Culture, being a way of life, transcends lyrics and latest trends. Teachers voiced their discomfort and lack
of capacity to instruct students from a place of cultural relevance. Despondently, the classroom has become a place where the culture of the teacher and school saturate the classroom and not the culture of the student. This study supports the sense that refusal to see color and acknowledge differences creates distance in student development. Regrettably, until teachers re-examine their role in the classroom, their subjectivity, and measurement of cultural competence, students will suffer from lack of exposure to experience beyond their own, stunting the development of critical consciousness. It is my hope that students will be able to learn in an environment where their identities are not secondary to learning.

Recommendations

This study was designed as a roadmap for other educators, especially administrators, instructional coaches, guidance counselors, and district leaders. The recommendations are made based on the finding from the data analysis. The recommendations for future research provide a research platform for future students that will enhance the body of research on best practices for teachers and those who support them. The recommendations for educational purposes are intended to enhance the quality of the educational experience for African Americans and all students in school districts in this country.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommended for future research:

1. It is recommended future studies should expand the breadth of teachers beyond a central district. It would be helpful to capture the alignment to best practices in
other districts and geographical locations. The qualitative multi-case study used in this study could be expanded into other districts and states as a limited selection of participants could not.

2. It is recommended comparative research be conducted on the basis of content areas of teachers. This study consisted of seven participants of mixed content areas. Additionally, it would be interesting to study the difference in alignment according to years of experience, sex, and race.

3. It is recommended a broad range self-esteem assessment tools be used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers who employ the best practices mentioned in the theoretical framework. While researchers have suggested the strategies it the framework teachers use them, it would be interesting to know which of the strategies are most effective and how other variables such as teacher philosophy and biases contribute to changes in self-esteem.

4. It is recommended research be conducted on the nature of professional development for teachers and the breadth of topics discussed. It would be helpful to understand the extent to which teachers are prepared to meet the needs of students and how is the content of meetings determined.

5. It is recommended research be conducted on the hiring processes of school districts. Teachers are often asked to develop a teaching philosophy in their teacher education programs. It would be interesting to study how the themes could influence the construction of interview questions and the nature of discussions towards meeting the needs of students. Ultimately, I would be
interested in analyzing the alignment of faculty members’ teaching philosophies to the school’s mission statement.

6. It is recommended research be conducted on teacher education programs and their focuses regarding self-esteem development strategies for teacher African American students in poverty and other diverse populations. Their placement in culturally relevant classrooms should be included in their student teaching experience.

7. It is recommended school leaders participate in a qualitative study to examine their perspectives of African American students’ self-concepts within their schools. I am concerned about the sustenance provided teachers to further develop their teachers’ perceptions, cultural competence, and professional development.

8. It is recommended school-wide programs and initiatives be explored for effectiveness. It would be helpful to find emerging themes and strategies that can be implemented in underfunded schools that may not be able to afford such student support tools and activities.

9. It is recommended qualitative case studies be conducted, examining the guidance counselors’ configuration and interventions according to the ASCA National Model. I am interested in investigating the role of guidance counselors and their duties during that help and hinder their engagement to the development of students’ self-concept.
10. It is recommended research be conducted to investigate the building administrators’ capability to promote the success and well-being of every student, teacher, and school staff. This study did not evaluate principals’ ability to build, advocate for, and support a coherent, support a system for African American students to develop. It would have also been interesting to gain insight on the extent to which self-concept development is considered in decision-making and support systems, according to the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards.

11. It is recommended further research be conducted to discover additional self-concept development strategies. The scope of this study did not permit in-depth of all operational features that impacts student learning, teacher practices, and educational outcomes.

Recommendations for Educational Practices

The recommendations for educational practices are meant to mature Title I middle school teachers’ alignment to self-concept development strategies in school districts throughout the nation:

1. The evidence from this study supports the fact that additional training is necessary for teaching students whose self-concepts are under-enhanced. It is recommended the school districts in this study direct its efforts to cultivating teacher knowledge of self-concept through relevant teacher training so teachers have access to opportunities to increase their awareness of more in-depth needs of the students they teach. Prioritizing their efforts will produce capable teachers within the
classroom, encourage student achievement, and produce a positive learning community climate.

2. The evidence from this study suggests school leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to be immersed in the culture of the students. It is important for teachers to understand who the leaders in the communities are, who are the respected persons, and who influences students. Additionally, teachers should have professional development experiences to help them understand awareness of political selves and biases that manifest in teacher-associate aspects of the classroom. Through cultural immersion the teachers will be able to gain insight on ways to work with the community. This may even be provided by allowing teachers to observe other teachers who demonstrate culturally relevant pedagogy. Together, teachers can cross-fertilize ideas and share knowledge regarding their practices and feedback. Ultimately, a discourse among educational communities will need to be established, promoted, and sustained to adopt and create innovative practices which reflect cultural diversity.

3. The evidence from this study supports the significance of a relevant mission statement. The current mission statement of the school presents a deficit to the growth and development of teachers and students. A deficit mission reiterates the goal of a “minimally adequate education” absent of a growth mindset for school leaders, teachers, and other educators. Since the mission drives the direction of the school’s initiatives, the district should adopt one that ensure all are able to grow and develop.
4. The evidence from this study urges curriculum leaders to initiate collective dialogue to immerse students’ culture in decision making. Developers of such tools and assessments should equip teachers with the skillsets and knowledge to provide high-qualified instruction and assessment practices. This information should disseminate from the district level to building administrators to instructional coaches and to teachers.

5. The evidence from this study petitions policy makers to recognize the limitation of assessments and evaluations. Support should be provided to consider and measure growth of students and the education system overtime along with multi-level analysis of the stimuli responsible for the change.

Implications

Research shows self-concept is not only a construct but also a process which changes over time (Demo, 1995). Later in children, students may tend to decrease in their self-acceptance and attach to social external influences (Damon & Hart, 1982). Unfortunately, self-esteem decreases from middle to late childhood (Demo, 1995). Thus, it is indicative of Title I middle school teachers to understand the importance of their role in student esteem and performance – especially that of African American students.

Until teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively discern the needs of students, students will continue to be underserved while teachers perpetuate systems of inequity with kind hearts. Unfortunately, educational policies such as No Child Left Behind provide the illusion of producing achievement. Through standards-based instruction, the movement towards accountability and high stakes testing has
positioned life-changing teaching as yesterday’s priority. While teaching has been traditionally seen as an art form in developing moral citizens, teachers have been pressured to commit educational genocide by killing off best practices that help students develop positive self-concepts, which can – in fact - impact student learning and performance. Before blaming complicit teachers, we must recognize they are in districts and states that demand standards-based teacher and the covering of material. Demands to teach standards have widened the educational debt, causing – what Ladson-Billings refers to as – a moral debt. Teachers are placed in a position to deliberate whether they will teach the student or teach the standards.

This constant deliberation causes moral dissonance, triggering frustration in teachers as they wrestle with the notion of “why standards are not working?” The findings of this study suggest all teachers should be equipped with the tools, skills, and mindsets to effectively educate our students. After conversations with teachers, they prefer to develop students’ self-image; however, they often baffle with the compromise of standards-based instruction to achieve educational outcomes. Perhaps, we should consider the intention for which the middle school was established.

The middle school was originally intended to meet the unique, developmental needs of young adolescents. Referred to as junior high, the first three-year schools were established in Columbus, Ohio in 1909 (Manning, 2010). Programs were established to enrich the academic vocational programs for students preparing for the job market. Yet, another branch of educational programs was established: the consideration of personal, emotional, and academic needs of students. I am sure those needs sound familiar! Junior
high was created as the building-block for middle schools we have today. This idea of middle level education was subsequent of the James’s (1890) discussion of self-concept and how it manifests in the lives of humans. The challenges for middle school learners are still present and should not be ignored. According to Steele (1990) the esteem of African American students still cries for help. With today’s media, the implications of their needs have intensified and demand a community that recognizes and addresses those needs so all students will then be prepared to take advantage of access to educational programs. The recognition and strategic response to these needs are nothing new.

Surviving an inherently unequal educational climate, Caswell County Training School (CCTS) laid the foundation for meeting the academic, emotional, and social needs in the face of limited resources (Walker, 1996). During segregation, the school assessed the culture of the community, analyzing the significance of the rural area and providing the type of curriculum that would stimulate, promote, and influence growth (p. 95). In sum, the teachers and everyone else did what they believed. Students in this school participated in operas, debates, the art club, aviation club, handicraft and book club, and a host of intramural sports, all of which was done without equally distributed funds to schools. Walker (1996) indicated more than 66 percent of students were engaged in the clubs and activities, which did not include the 78 percent who were involved in drama or debate (p. 102). Walker (1996) suggested the clubs and activities were geared towards building the students’ self-esteem and giving them the opportunity to develop leadership skills. From an interview with a teacher, “this was an institutional way of caring and implementing the school philosophy” (Walker, 1996, p. 108). You see this model of
building the students is nothing new to the education of African students nor to the educational system at large. It was the community who saw the value in building the image of the Black learner and helping them to experience and develop confidence in a safe environment with genuine supporters who were aware of the emotional, political, economic, and social challenges students would incur. The school’s mission statement reflected their efforts. Administrators, teachers, volunteers, and all others were involved in ensuring students received a high-quality education, which led to CCTS being the only high school in Caswell County to be accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. We have got to unearth the foundations that promoted excellence for African American learners.

Educators lack in-depth understanding of the needs of students. These needs are often overlooked by policies, standards, curriculum, and assessments, which are not adequate to detect the emotional, academic, and social needs of African American students. It should not be assumed that students are not capable of learning and improving themselves, given the long-standing history of attitudes towards achievement, learning, and self-improvement (Anderson, 1988). Teachers and leaders of African American students prior to outcomes Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka possessed insight on the challenges of the community, society structures, which threatened their advancement, and cultural norms infused with high expectations. These values and norms have been “covered” by standards and over-shadowed by data. It is incumbent of the nation’s educators to consider the factor that determine student behavior, performance, and productivity: self-concept.
Reflection and Researcher as Instrument

Since 2015, my journey began to understand self-concept and its inexorable impact on student achievement. The idea was birthed from an assignment in my program evaluations course with Dr. Knoeppel. Although it was a term I was unacquainted with, I was drawn to the literature and continued to incessantly research. There were strategies I imbedded in my practice such as relationship building, one-on-one conversation, student leadership roles, and regular celebrations. Innately, disciplinary rates were lower than that of my team teachers. However, my test scores and gradebook did not always indicate that my strategies were “effective.” I was also criticized for my idea that had no visible outcomes to other teachers who were not culturally relevant. To that end, this study was affirmative to my regular practices. As I progressed through the study, I realized educators have overlooked the findings as an influencer of student achievement and development.

In my reflection of the findings and conclusions, I consider the teachers who will continue providing educational experiences in our schools. I am concerned teachers have not been fully prepared to touch and change lives. Until educational leaders, policy makers, and support staff perceive students as growing, changing beings who rely on their expertise to better the quality of their lives and their community, we will continue to rehearse the cycle of vague advancement.

The participants in this study grew up in rural towns, and some were products of the district in which they taught. However, their schooling experiences and home environments were not all similar to that of African American students in poverty.
Factually, most had positive home environments with parents who participated in multiple aspects of their growth and development. Interestingly though, of the seven participants, only one heard of self-concept. Five of the participants had received a master degree relevant to education.

Similar to their experience and knowledge-base, I saw myself in the participants. I had too obtained a master degree and still heard nothing of self-concept. I remember my frustrations of special education inclusion and the lowered expectations of students. Perhaps I was more frustrated because the students looked like me, and I expected more from them. My engagement with the Call Me MiSTER program challenged me to go beyond the curriculum and figure out how to bring out the best in every student. The best did not show up on the report nor state testing. The best sometimes meant students came to school every day and showed up fully in the learning process, challenging themselves beyond comfort with a spirit of perseverance. I could not lengthen the school day nor could I have the students move into my home. With guidance from educational mentors with similar values, I was challenged to cultivate seeds of success among students who may have never felt successful.

I conclude this dissertation with a reminder of the meaning of educate. Educate stems from the Latin words “educere,” which means to bring out and “educare,” which means to train or mold (Craft, 1984). This one word provides vociferous debates regarding today’s education. Self-concept is centralized in the vicinity of education. One denotation sees education as preparing learners for changes ahead. The other involves thinking, creativity, and challenge. Bass and Good (2004) argued a balance is required
between the two and involves re-evaluating of the aims and structure of educational organizations. The work of educators cannot organize their work until institutions first organize their aims and priorities. We are left with a system that lacks in-depth understanding and discussion regarding the needs of African American students. Essentially, a balanced education involves connecting the information to the child through relevant systems and practices with the ending goal of giving students a redefined image of themselves. With this image, students will be empowered to conquer great exploits and defy negative labels and achieve breakthroughs towards successful living. We must get back to the meaning of education! It is my hope this study will transform systems and support teachers in recreating that village, reuniting creativity, and requiring students to live out their highest, truest potential. How do we do this? Self-concept. It’s a thing!
Appendix A

Initial Email Invitation

Good Afternoon Mr./Mrs. XXXXX,

I recently talked with you about participating in a study I am conducting as a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Clemson University.

For this study, I am very interested in your experience as a Title I middle school teacher and your perception of your awareness to meet the emotional and academic needs of African American students in which you are currently teaching. I am also interested in your collegiate experience and professional development and your opinion of how it has prepared and equipped you for your current teaching assignment.

Your experiences will inform research and educational leaders in their efforts to continuously support teachers with meeting the academic and emotional needs of their students.

May I schedule a classroom observation and a 45-minute interview during after school hours or planning period? What day(s) and time are convenient for you?

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Walter A. Lee
Appendix B

Invitation Letter

Dear XXX School Faculty:

My name is Walter Lee, and I’m a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Clemson University. For my dissertation topic, I am conducting research that will examine Title I middle school the perception of your awareness to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of African American students in which you are currently teaching. The study will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Rob Knoeppel, faculty member at Clemson University.

I am very interested in your experience as a Title I middle school teacher and your perception of your awareness to meet the emotional, academic, and social needs of African American students in which you are currently teaching. I am also interested in your experience and teaching philosophy and how you meet the identity needs of African American students. Your participation will involve one informal interview that will last about 40 minutes and class observation. This research has no known risks.

Please know that I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. Your identity or personal information will not be disclosed in any publication that may result from the study. All interview data will be stored in a secure location and destroyed upon the conclusion of the study.

Please keep in mind that your participation is voluntary. To show my appreciation for your willingness to participate, I will be providing educational tools as an incentive. If you have any additional questions regarding the study, please contact me (walee@clemson.edu), or Dr. Knoeppel (rck@clemson.edu). Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your consideration in participating in my study.

Sincerely,

Walter A. Lee
### Appendix C

#### Interview Questions

1. Let’s start by having you share a bit about your own background—how you grew up, your own schooling experiences, and why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. What is your highest degree?
4. How long have you taught in a Title I school?
5. How long have you taught in a school with predominately African American students?
6. Matriculating through your teacher education program, you were likely asked to develop an educational philosophy. What is your teaching philosophy?
   a. How has it changed due to your practice?
7. In your own words, what is self-concept? What do you understand about the meaning of self-concept?
8. When you meet your African American students for the first time, what do you perceive about the way they see themselves? Their abilities?
   a. What factors have contributed to the way students see themselves?
9. When you think about those factors you mentioned, what are some of the challenges your African American students face emotionally, academically, and socially?
10. How do you, then, instruct your students, having this perception?
11. What do you feel your role is as an educator in developing students’ self-image?
   a. How are you involved in this process?
   b. How did you get involved?
12. What contexts within the school help and hinder this involvement?
13. These are some of the strategies researchers suggest for self-concept enhancement of students. Of the strategies illustrated in this diagram, which would you say you make use of regularly in your interaction with students?
   a. What do you think it is?
   b. When do you use it?
   c. What is your perception of the effectiveness?
   d. Why do you think it matters?
14. What other strategies you engage in the classroom to build students’ self-image?
   a. How do students usually respond?
15. What affect has it had on students academically? Emotionally?
Appendix D

Informed Consent

Information about Being in a Research Study
Clemson University

**Induction Teachers' Perspectives Regarding their Efficacy towards Meeting the Needs of Diverse Populations of Students**

**Description of the Study and Your Part in It**
Dr. Rob Knoeppel and Walter A. Lee are inviting you to take part in a research study. Dr. Knoeppel is a professor and the Chair of the Educational Leadership department of the Department of Educational and Organizational Leadership Development at Clemson University. Walter is the doctoral student at Clemson University running this study with the help of Dr. Knoeppel. The purpose of this research is to explore the instructional practices of middle school teachers and their alignment to the development of student self-concept and further needed support to meet the academic needs of the diverse students they are now teaching.

Your part in the study will be to (a) allow the observation of one of your classes and (b) answer a series of questions in an interview setting pertaining to your experience. With your permission, we would like to audio record the interviews. The interview will be conducted by Walter Lee and will take place in your classroom with your building principal’s knowledge of the study. Follow-up interviews may be requested.

It will take you approximately 45 minutes to complete the interview process if selected.

**Risks and Discomforts**

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

**Possible Benefits**

Findings rendered in this study will benefit the body of educational research outlining ways in which educational leaders in their efforts to continuously support teachers with meeting the academic and emotional needs of their students. Classroom teachers and educational leaders can benefit from this study.
**Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will take measures to ensure and protect your identity privacy, and confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anyone outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. All participants and locations will be protected using pseudonyms as findings are rendered and published. Data will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

**Choosing to Be in the Study**

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Rob Knoeppel at Clemson University at 864-656-1882.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Consent**

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant’s printed name: ____________________________________________

Participant’s signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________
REFERENCES


