

**TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH: LEARNING FROM THE LIVES OF
THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS**

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This study examines the life histories of three African American social studies teachers, focusing on the evolution and changes in their identities, perspectives, and attitudes related to their profession and instructional practice. In addition, the study addresses the significance of the teachers' racialized experiences as African Americans and how these experiences influence their use of culturally relevant pedagogy and other culturally responsive instructional strategies to teach their African American students. In the context of this study of three African American social studies teachers, critical race theory is used to acknowledge the teachers' life experiences with racism and the ways in which the teachers combat and address racism and oppressive mainstream educational ideologies, by sharing their counter-stories of experience in educational scholarship and their daily classroom teaching.

A life history methodological approach was used to collect and interpret meaning from the narrative life stories of the three African American social studies teachers. The themes that emerge from the teachers' life stories focus on the teachers' beliefs and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy; the teachers' beliefs and practices of African-centered pedagogy; and the teachers' emancipatory teaching regarding racism in society and education. The results of this study have implications for the practice and research of African American teachers' philosophies and pedagogies; practice and research of culturally relevant teaching in social studies; and social studies teacher education.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY STUDY THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS

In recent years, the quality and effectiveness of educational philosophies and practices for African American students, has become an increasingly central topic of educational research. Discussion over disparities in educational opportunities given to minority students and the use of relevant instruction that address the cultural and social needs of these same students has become a pressing concern of educators, politicians, and researchers. One explanation for this disparity can be attributed to the cultural conflict that minority students experience within schools (Foster, 1993; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The curriculum and instruction that many African American students receive contradicts the cultural experiences that they bring to the classroom. In addition, mainstream Eurocentric instructional strategies typically do not address the learning styles of African American students, and are associated with the stagnation of African American academic development and achievement (Asante, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003). In an educational system that does not address their cultural learning styles, many African American students become disinterested and disengaged, resulting in low academic performance and increased drop-out rates (Asante, 1994; Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2007).

In 2006, 40% of public school students were students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). It is estimated that by 2020, they will make up over 48% of the nation's public schools. While enrollment numbers for students of color have increased, unfortunately, there has also been an increase in minority student high school dropout rates. Statistics indicate a 10.7% high school dropout rate among African American students, and 22.1% among Hispanic students. High school dropout rates among White students have declined to 5.8% from the previous years. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Statistics also indicate that 50% of all White students scored at or above basic on the national U.S. History proficiency level assessment, compared to 20% of African American and Hispanic students (NCES Fast Facts, 2008). With an increase in minority student enrolment, student high school dropout rates and delinquency, and the overall lack of student achievement and graduation rate success, educators seek positive solutions to close these divides and provide quality educational experiences for minority students. These staggering statistics support the arguments of educators and researchers alike that emphasize the need for more effective culturally instruction for minority students. Such instruction addresses the cultural competencies of minority students and requires teachers to maintain high academic expectations for their students (Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2007).

Despite the strides in achieving some levels of equity and diversity, there remains a lack of culturally relevant experiences in the classroom for the majority of African American students. Researchers such as, Asante (1991), Ladson-Billings (2001), Nieto and Bode (2007) insist that focused and culturally relevant instruction for African American students could help to motivate them and thus level the educational landscape. Ultimately, this has the potential to close the achievement gaps for African American students. Studies indicate that the academic

achievement of students increase when teachers modify their instruction to support the cultures and communication styles of their students (Asante, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Furthermore, research conducted on teachers practicing culturally relevant pedagogy suggest that culturally relevant teachers of African American students possess a cultural competence and understanding of their students (Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billing, 2001). This cultural competence is reflected in the teachers' perceptions of their students, motivations for teaching, and instructional practices that affirm the cultures of their African American students (Banks & Banks, 2007; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Understanding the role of teachers' life histories in the development of culturally relevant pedagogy is an area that has not been widely addressed. Emphasis on instructional strategies and pedagogy has been the main focus of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. Irvine (2003) concludes that "there is a compelling need for research that investigates how teachers' cultural experiences and prior socialization affect the manner in which they view their profession and practice their craft" (Irvine, 2003, p. 1). The goal of this research is to determine how the life histories of African American teachers shape their teaching philosophies and understandings of the notion and practice of culturally relevant pedagogy for their minority students. By examining how the life histories of African American teachers have shaped their teaching philosophies and influenced their practice of culturally relevant teaching for their African American students this research can contribute to the educational disparities that African American students experience in schools by providing effective culturally relevant instruction.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the life histories of three African American social studies teachers, focusing on the evolution and changes in their identities, perspectives, and attitudes related to their profession and instructional practice. In addition, the study addressed the significance of the teachers' racialized experiences as African Americans and how these experiences influence their use of culturally relevant pedagogy and other culturally responsive instructional strategies to teach their African American students. A life history methodological approach was used to collect and interpret meaning from the narrative life stories of the teachers. Life history research can be described as the most plausible method for capturing the experiences of one's life (Atkinson, 2002; Cole & Knowles, 2001). It is a "deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it." (Good & Scates, 1954, p.738) From this study, readers are able to uncover the lives and experiences of these African American teachers, and understand how teachers' personal experiences shape the philosophies and perspectives that influence their pedagogy.

Life histories are essential to educational research because they address the changes in teacher development, knowledge, and practice attributed to lived experiences. Furthermore, life histories acknowledge that many factors contribute to the teaching process and require study within a greater social cultural, and historical context. Life histories emphasize understanding of the relationship and the complex interaction between an individual's life and context, and how this relationship affects daily activities and experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

In educational research, life history studies help researchers understand teachers' perspectives about various ideas and theories in the context of their lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Wegwood, 2005). Life history studies conducted on teachers typically show that complex,

lived experiences also affect how and what teachers teach (Lynn, 2006; Muchmore, 2001). Life history studies also reveal that prior careers and life experiences of teachers shape their views and practice of teaching. Ball and Goodson (1985) note that “teachers’ lives outside schools, their latent identities and cultures, have an important impact on their work as teachers.” (Ball & Goodson, 1985, p.13) In this regard, the use of the life history narrative is key to understanding teachers’ beliefs and practices. Linblald & Prieto (1992) note the significance of life history research for understanding teaching and conclude, “it is of considerable interest to know the actors-who they are and how they conceive their task” (Linbald & Prieto, 1992, pp. 465-466) Mastery of content knowledge, instructional practices and skills are significant elements of teaching, but the role of life experience is also an important part of understanding the complexities of teaching. Thus, studying African American teachers’ lives can help further our understanding of the experiences that shape this process of quality teaching and learning for their African American students.

In order to meet the goals and purpose for the study, three central questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data for this study. These questions focus on the teachers’ life histories and how these histories shape their teaching:

1. What are the personal and educational life histories of three African American social studies teachers?
2. How do the teachers’ life experiences described in their life histories influence their teaching philosophies and practices for African American students?
3. What types of culturally relevant teaching practices do they employ in their classrooms for their African American students?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has potential significance in three areas: (1) practice and research that examine African American teachers' philosophies and pedagogies; (2) practice and research that examines culturally relevant teaching in social studies; and (3) teacher education. First, this study will contribute to research on the practice and lives of African American teachers. Currently, a limited number of studies exist that specifically address the philosophies, pedagogy, and experiences of African American teachers (Foster, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mitchell, 1998). The majority of educational research focuses on the pedagogy and experiences of White teachers, often providing a mainstream, dominant perspective and ideology of effective pedagogy for minority students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2007). By examining the life experiences of three African American teachers, this research will offer an alternative perspective to the current mainstream educational dialogues.

Secondly, the majority of research conducted on social studies teachers focus on the use of mainstream and dominant instructional practices to address essential social studies knowledge, content, values, attitudes, and ideas that teachers believe students should master. Limited literature addresses culturally relevant instructional strategies employed by social studies teachers, particularly African American social studies teachers (Jones, Pang & Rodriguez, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Pang & Gibson, 2001). The relationship between social studies teachers' life histories and their teaching can serve as an interesting area of study and further understanding of the importance of experience in the development of instructional philosophies and approaches. In particular, examining the life experiences of African American social studies teachers' who employ culturally relevant pedagogy to teach their students can provide detailed insight and explanation into the process of teaching minority students, and offer uniquely

individual perspectives on culturally relevant practices specific to the discipline of social studies instruction.

Lastly, the study of the life experiences of three African American social studies teachers will add to the research on teacher preparation. This study highlights the role of life experiences in shaping teacher philosophies and practice, and similar to the teachers in this study, pre-service teachers bring a variety of life experiences to their teacher training and practice. It is important that coursework and teaching field placements consider these experiences and how they shape the perspectives and philosophies that pre-service teachers have regarding instruction for minority students (Doyle & Carter, 2003, Gomez, Rodriguez & Agosto, 2008, Ladson-Billings, 2000). Providing culturally relevant teacher training and experiences for pre-service teachers and engaging in meaningful dialogue and reflection of the connection between past lived experiences will allow pre-service teachers to consider how their experiences shape their practice and affect their understanding of culturally relevant instruction.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study provides individual portraits of exemplary African American social studies teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogies for their African American students. Their experiences and practices are theirs alone and cannot serve as “stand alone” descriptions and generalizations about African American teachers. However, their stories add to the current limited data on the work of exemplary African American social studies teachers. Life history research does not accept knowledge claims that are conclusive and universal. Instead, knowledge claims are multidimensional and inter-subjective, allowing for multiple interpretations and reader

response (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The life history account is designed to connect in a holistic way, with the hearts and minds of the readers. Thus, allowing for a high level of authenticity that “speaks to the truthfulness and sincerity of the research relationship, process of inquiry, interpretation, and representational form.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.126). Although the results may not be generalized to include all teacher experiences, the audience that encounters these narratives may find that they too share similar experiences and pedagogies. The stories of these three African American social studies teachers allow other teachers to reflect on their own life histories and consider how lived experiences shape their own teaching philosophies and pedagogies.

1.5 SITUATING THE RESEARCHER WITHIN THE RESEARCH

This section presents a life history portrait of the researcher divided into chronological themed sections beginning with early childhood experiences and concluding with current teaching experiences. In addition, researcher motivations and personal experiences relating to the research study are discussed. Coles and Knowles (2001) suggest that the researcher write a personal history account before engaging in life history research. Personal history accounts are segments of one’s life that provide understanding of oneself in relation to a broader context. For example, personal history accounts that detail the origins of interest in an area of chosen research can offer the researcher a better understanding of the personal reasons and passions behind the research goals and objectives. This understanding of one’s self allows the researcher to identify personal beliefs and issues that may affect the researcher’s ability to listen and understand participants’ experiences. “The more we understand ourselves as researchers, the better able we are to listen

and understand others” (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p.52). In an effort to increase my ability to effectively listen to the stories of my participants, I decided to write my own personal life history. In writing my life history, I began to re-examine my initial interests in the study of African American social studies teachers.

My interest in the study African American social studies teachers has been shaped by my life experiences. As a female African American social studies teacher, I understand that I am a minority in the field of social studies education. I recall attending my first National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Annual Conference in 2006, and I noticed that there were very few African American K-12 teachers in attendance, and even fewer university faculty members. Although, I was not completely surprised, I really wanted to know how these African American professors approached their instruction; specifically those who help prepare K-12 pre-service teachers.

In the 2007 spring term, I had the opportunity to co-teach a course on assessment in the social studies classroom to pre-service teachers enrolled in the social studies teacher education program, and I wanted some helpful teaching tips from African American scholars in the field. Teaching at the university level seemed ominous and much more challenging than teaching high school. I had so many questions; could I talk about issues relating to race, achievement, assessment, and effective instruction? Will my students think these issues are important or will they be resistant to really tackling these issues?

I recall sitting in a roundtable session and hearing Dr. Cynthia Tyson discuss her pedagogical approaches. She discussed how she has her students read and discuss the work of various authors that address issues related to culture, equity, and race in education. She further added that she encourages her students to become involved in the local communities of the

schools in which they teach. The majority of her students are White, and in order to help her students better understand the educational and societal inequities and issues that exist, she has her students reflect on their personal educational experiences and challenges their understanding and ideas of privilege. I vividly remember her stating, “Because of who I am, and what I have experienced, I teach for social justice.” In essence, as an African American woman and a member of both racial and gender minority groups, Dr. Tyson understands and has experienced some of the injustices and inequities that exist, and working for change and promoting social justice is a part of every aspect of her life. She believes that it is her duty to encourage her students to work for social justice and positive change.

As I continued to listen to Dr. Tyson discuss some of her life experiences, and how she has incorporated those experiences into her teaching, I begin to think about my own teaching philosophies and pedagogy. She further discussed how she exposes her pre-service teachers to a range of topics and activities relating to social justice, equity in education, critical theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory. Many of the very topics she addressed were topics that I felt were central to my educational philosophy. As I continued to ponder these educational issues, I considered my life experiences and how they have shaped and defined my teaching perspective and practice. What follows is a short life history of my experience and how these experiences have shaped my teaching philosophy and pedagogy.

1.5.1 Growing up with a Christian Education

I was born in 1978 in Hampton, Virginia. Hampton is an average southern city, located on a peninsula. The Hampton Roads area boasts of a great colonial and southern traditions and history. Featured locations such as Yorktown, Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Richmond

represent landmarks of rich American history. This area is often called the Tidewater, and has a diverse population. This diversity is primarily due to the several government installations and military bases in the Tidewater area. Langley Air Force Base, NASA, and the Newport News and Norfolk Naval Shipyards, serve as the largest employers in the area. Unlike many that migrate to the area; my parents are natives of the Tidewater area. My father is from Suffolk, Virginia, and my mother is from Portsmouth, Virginia. Both come from large families, each having a total of seven and eight brothers and sisters, respectively. My parents met in high school, were married, and moved from their homes to Hampton.

I am the younger of two children born to my parents. I have an older brother, who I have always admired and love dearly. Although there is a six year difference in our ages, we are very close. My parents instilled in us the importance of family, and made sure that we remained close. As children growing up, I can remember spending some summers playing outside with my brother and our neighbors. I can also remember my parents giving my brother and me countless opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. From ballet to piano lessons, I was always on the go, attending a different activity each week. I recall that for many of the activities, I was the lone African American participant, and sometime felt a little awkward. At the time, I couldn't understand why my parents felt it was so important for me to participate in so many different activities. I remember when I asked my mother to stop ballet classes and participate in volleyball she said, you can always do sports, but you can't always do ballet. That's different, and requires more discipline. For my mother, ballet represented a skill or discipline that would provide access and opportunity into White mainstream culture, unlike volleyball which represented just another sport, something that wasn't unique and instead common place. Reflecting back on those experiences, I realize that my parents who lived through the 1950s

racism and segregation, wanted me to be well-rounded and exposed to a variety of activities, so that I could take advantage of the opportunities and gain entrance into the privileged spaces of society, primarily reserved for White America.

Although my parents were not wealthy, they went to great lengths to ensure that their children were provided opportunities to learn and acquire a good education. I attended a private Christian school my entire K-12 education. They felt that public schools offered too many distractions, and it was best to receive a strong Christian foundation. When asked if I could attend a public high school, my mother would adamantly say no and remind me that I was fine where I was. My parents would always stress the importance of a good Christian education. They also believed that attending a private, Christian school provided opportunities and access to the privileges that were reserved for the children of wealthy White America. They deeply wanted my brother and me to have many of the opportunities that they never enjoyed and struggled to receive. They sacrificed greatly to ensure that I received a good education. To this day, I'm still not sure how my parents were able to afford my education, considering that I did not receive any scholarships or financial assistance. Many of my classmates came from wealthy families with tremendous financial resources. Although, I did not share the same economic status as my White counterparts, my parents always made sure that I had all the things I needed.

While attending Mary Atkins Elementary and Hampton Christian High Schools, I learned the foundations and principles of Christianity, and dedicated myself to living a Christian life. These schools used a Beka-Book curriculum, a Christian-based curriculum that infused Christian ideals and principles in all subject areas. Reflecting on my educational experiences, the Beka-Book curriculum focused on many Christian values and ideals that have sustained me throughout my life, and I continue to practice today. I do not regret my early educational experiences,

although at times, it was very difficult being in the minority. The students at both Mary Atkins and Hampton Christian were predominantly White. Regardless of our racial differences my White classmates and I were the best of friends. There were a few African American students that attended the school, and by the time I reached high school, I was the only African American female, along with five African American males, in my graduating class. These five African American males were like my “brothers”, and we formed a bond that helped us navigate the two very different worlds that we ventured in and out of daily. At school we were the minority, our African American culture was not celebrated and often misunderstood by many of the teachers, and we were encouraged to learn and conform to the dominant, Eurocentric, Christian ideologies. So we stuck together, and held each other up. In our homes, and neighborhoods, we were comfortable, able to practice our cultural traditions, attend our own Black churches, and engage in activities with our African American friends.

1.5.2 Conflict of Education

I can recall a time in my high school years, when I began to distance myself from some of my White classmates and began to struggle internally with issues around race. During my junior year, my brother and cousin introduced me to literature on Malcolm X, ancient Kemet history, and the Black Power Movement. At this time, I was also completing my 11th grade United States History course requirement. The literature that I read on these various topics really motivated me to seek out more information on the history of “my people”, and contradicted much of the school content I was learning. This led me to question my own learning. Why did my teacher not address the experiences of African Americans? Why did he always focus on the negative aspects of the Black experience in the United States, particularly slavery and Black oppression? Why did

he always state that Africans should be thankful that slavery came to their continent, and before the Europeans, Africa was a “dark continent” void of history and civilization? I can recall one day standing up in the middle of class and stating that “I’d had enough. Slaves should have rebelled and not obeyed their masters, and if it wasn’t for Europeans always thinking that they have a moral right to conquer, enslave, evangelize all in the name of Jesus Christ and the Bible, then many nations and people would be better off.” I was asked to leave the room and report to the office. By stating that European conquest was not based on Biblical ideas of evangelism and salvation, but instead greed and White supremacy I was denouncing their ideas of Christianity and overall belief in their concept of religion and salvation. I can remember boiling over with anger and I vowed that if I ever became a teacher, I would teach the truth, regardless of how difficult it was and how unpopular it may be to some. The truth should always prevail in history, and the story of all peoples should be heard. At that time, I did not realize that I would one day become a history teacher and be required to teach the truth.

Although my high school history teacher refused to teach it, there was more to the historical record than what I was learning, and it was clear that this “mis-education” I was experiencing was an intentional attempt to detach me from my own African American culture and history. Through his instruction, my teacher was asking me to support a Eurocentric ideology that esteemed European values, culture, and ideologies over my own. Woodson describes this “mis-education of the Negro” as an educational dilemma in which African Americans are exposed to an educational system that seeks to erase their histories and cultural values. This educational system demands that they assimilate into an American culture that is based upon an oppressive Eurocentric idea (Woodson, 1933). This experience served as my first

recollection of the tensions and contradictions that existed between my schooling and my core understanding and beliefs as an African American.

1.5.3 The Desire to Teach

Upon completing high school, I entered the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Fortunately, I received an academic and athletic scholarship to attend Pitt, and began my pre-med studies. Inspired by the work of Dr. Charles Drew, I initially thought that working as a medical doctor was my career goal. I spent countless summers volunteering in the hospital, and I felt comfortable around doctors, nurses, patients, and other medical staff. I enjoyed my biology and chemistry coursework, but after visit to the specimen laboratory, and a close encounter with human cadavers, I quickly changed my field of study. While fulfilling my pre-medicine requirements, I also decided to take several African and Africana studies courses. I did not know much about my history, other than the few things my brother gave me to read. I desperately wanted to learn more about my history and my people, and these courses provided me with a new knowledge and understanding of the history, culture, and issues that African Americans and people of African descent shared. The literature, writings, and knowledge that I was exposed to, really fascinated and gave me a new perspective and understanding of whom I was and my purpose. I had finally progressed from a state of “mis-education” to intellectual empowerment. I was so excited about my “new education” I eventually changed my major to history with an emphasis in African American and Afro-Caribbean history.

It was also during this time that I begin to consider becoming a history teacher as a career path. I began volunteering at one of the local middle schools in Pittsburgh as fulfillment of my athletic community service requirement. I would assist students with their homework. The

majority of the students was African American, and was always excited to work with the cool college student. I served as a role model for many of the students. I represented an example of what they could aspire to become, and I encouraged them to pursue higher education. I always told the students, that “college shouldn’t be an option, but a requirement. We need more African American teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, and you can be all those things.” I shared with the students stories about the accomplishments of great African Americans who came from humble beginnings, worked hard, and took advantage of every opportunity. I enjoyed working with the students, and I really loved learning about history in my university courses, particularly African American and African history. Reflecting on my work with the students and in my university courses, I realized that there was so much that I could share with African American students about history, and becoming a teacher would allow me to do so.

I would not be the first in my family to enter the education profession; there are several educators in my family. My aunt, a high school mathematics teacher, my cousin a high school science teacher, and my uncle a professor of education all provided personal examples of outstanding African American educators. Although, I never really embraced teaching as a career choice until much later in my collegiate studies, teaching was in my blood, and was definitely a part of my family history and make up. As I approached my senior year of college, I decided to apply for the Master’s of Arts in Teaching (MAT) social studies education program.

My mother always says that deep down I really wanted to be a teacher and not a doctor. She describes how I would line up my stuffed animals and dolls around the bed, and teach to them. I would create worksheets that consisted of a variety of activities that my “students” were required to complete. She recalls purchasing a chalkboard and other teacher supplies for Christmas one year. When I received my first chalkboard, I had finally acquired the tools

necessary to be an effective teacher. She said I often told her that one day I would be a teacher. In high school, I remember participating in a program in which high school students read to elementary school students. I really enjoyed doing this, and would spend hours at the library finding the perfect story to share with the students. When I informed my parents that I was accepted into the MAT program for social studies education, they were not surprised. My mother said she was glad that I had finally decided on an appropriate career, and I would make a wonderful teacher. This validation and support from my parents, helped confirm my decision to become a teacher.

1.5.4 Cultural Encounters in Education

As a student in the MAT program, I was assigned to Clifton High School on the Northside of Pittsburgh. I was given two courses, U.S. History and the Law and Public Service magnet class. I was unfamiliar with the dynamics of the Northside community and public school education. My educational experiences were vastly different from my students, and I needed to find a way to not only relate to them, but also provide lessons that addressed their cultural learning styles. I never attended a school in which African Americans represented the majority. However, I knew that these students, like me, wanted to know more about their culture and history. Unfortunately my university teacher education coursework did not address instructional strategies related to teaching African American students in an urban school setting. The majority of my coursework provided detailed lesson activities and strategies for those teaching in suburban schools with a student population very different than mine. I found this lack of training for teachers working in ethnically and racially diverse urban schools very frustrating. Were not the students in schools that were not predominantly White just as important? Did instruction for them matter? In my

opinion, this void in the teacher education curriculum indicated that there was minimal concern for minority students, and teaching that emphasized Eurocentric approaches was standard and appropriate for all students. Again, I was experiencing a contradiction in my schooling, and my “mis-education” would in turn, affect how and what my students were able to learn and achieve. Realizing that I was perpetrating the cycle of “mis-education” for myself as well as my students, I knew that my teaching must change.

Lacking the resources necessary to address my specific teaching needs required me to seek other resources to support my teaching. I supplemented the text with many of the readings and materials that I received from several African American and African history undergraduate courses. I collected more than enough content to supplement the text, but how to effectively teach it still seemed to be an issue. Finding the necessary instructional assistance was a challenge, but with the help of my mentor teacher and several African American teachers in the building, I was able to develop a teaching style that addressed the cultural needs and competencies of my students. During my internship, I met Mr. Ron Wright, one of the teachers in the social studies department at Clifton High School. At the time, he was teaching Civics and African American History. We often spoke about ways to supplement the text and add interesting materials and activities that would engage my students in the lesson. For example, in my Law class, I incorporated several discussions and activities that constantly related to legislation and court cases around issues such as poverty, racism, access to quality education and community resources, community violence, and other topics that directly affected my students. In my U.S. History class, I would have my students examine historical events described in the text, and then compare the text to the supplemental readings that I presented. The supplemental readings that I provided were usually written by African American scholars, and offered a

different historical narrative. This allowed my students to study history from a different perspective, one that often contained a minority, African American perspective not stated in the text. Reflecting back on my first teaching experience, the materials and methods that I incorporated in my teaching at Clifton aligned with an African-centered pedagogical approach.

Upon completion of my internship, I moved to Stanford, California to pursue a professional running career. While in California, I served as the Economics, U.S. History, and Law elective teacher at New Valley High School for four years. New Valley High School, located in Santa Clara, California is a unique school. The majority of the students that attend New Valley are of Latino, Pacific Islander, and Asian descent. Students come from varying social and economic backgrounds, and the majority of students is eligible for free or reduced lunch program. About ninety percent of the students are classified as at-risk populations, due to not only their socioeconomic status, but also their emotional, behavioral, and truancy problems. When I first started teaching at New Valley, I realized that I needed to change my teaching style to meet the needs of my new students. These students came from very different cultures and experiences than those I taught at Clifton High School. The same strategies that were effective with one group were unsuccessful with the other, and I readjusted my instruction in order to effectively address the cultural competencies and values of my Latino and Asian students. In this regard, my instructional focus became more aligned with the ideals and principles of multicultural education.

Understanding the cultural background and implementing school structures, instruction, and programming that support the students and foster student growth and development is a central concept of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2007). This multicultural view of education was very evident in the policies and programs offered at New Valley. For example,

realizing that many of our students worked jobs to support their families or were required to take care of younger siblings while their parents worked, a special homework policy was implemented. Students were not required to complete daily homework assignments; instead teachers could only assign homework on Tuesdays. Also, all teachers were required to complete an ESL training and certification. This enabled teachers to provide appropriate support for students who were not English-proficient. In my classroom, changing my planning and overall instruction, visiting students and their parents at home, serving as a counselor and teacher were some of the many duties that I performed as a teacher committed to my students and their overall success.

My experiences at New Valley and Clifton High Schools helped shaped my current teaching perspective and practice. There is a great need to ensure that minority students receive equal educational opportunities. I noticed that the curriculum and instructional strategies I received in my teacher education courses did not completely address the necessary strategies to effectively instruct my minority students. Instead the training I received reflected a traditional Eurocentric ideology of teaching and learning. For me to be an effective teacher, it required that I seek out new ways of teaching and learning to engage my students. It required that I supplement the curriculum and take on the perspective of the students, and address their issues, concerns, and learning styles. I had to address issues of race, the distortion of the histories of underrepresented peoples, social justice, and ideas related to community and family. These were the issues and experiences that pertained to my students.

In essence, the teaching strategies that I employed were often the result of personal research and listening to the experiences and ideas of expert teachers. African American and Latino teachers shared with me their experiences and provided strategies that worked for their

students. I can recall discussing issues around teaching immigration with a Latina colleague. She discussed how her family illegally immigrated to the United States. She told me about the negative experiences and racial attacks she suffered being the child of illegal immigrants. As she told her story of hardship, determination, and triumph, I realized that many of my students might one day share a similar story, and it was important that I provided them with the accurate knowledge and tools that they would need to address such issues. She concluded by stating that it was important that I use a variety of instructional strategies and constantly creates cultural connections between my students and the content.

After spending four years in California, I returned to the University of Pittsburgh to pursue a doctorate in education. My teaching experiences and the desire to create meaningful culturally relevant learning experiences for minority students influenced my decision. When I began my studies, I noticed that there were few courses offered on the topics that aligned with my research interests. I began to seek out scholars and colleagues to help increase my understanding of educational issues related to minority students. As I studied the scholarship on culturally relevant pedagogy, African-centered pedagogy, critical race theory, and the teaching and experiences of minority teachers, I realized that the literature in social studies education included minimal research on these topics. Also, from my experiences as both a student and instructor within the teacher education program, I have concluded that pre-service teachers who are enrolled social studies methods and curriculum courses must be exposed to a variety of educational issues relating to minority students. Thus, my goal for this research and in the future, is to address topics in social studies education related to minority teachers, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory, in both my scholarship and teaching. I want to end the cycle

of “mis-education” and address the issues that are needed to foster effective instruction and learning for minority students.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation presents research on the study of the life experiences and pedagogies of three African American social studies teachers. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study. The research purpose and goals are also discussed. The research questions presented focus the study and are used as guiding questions for data collection and analysis. A summary of the significance and limitations to the research are also presented. Chapter 1 concludes with the researcher’s life history and explains the researcher’s personal connections to the research topic. Through her life history, the researcher connects her life experiences to her motivations for teaching and her use of culturally relevant instruction. A short conclusion describing the researcher’s commitment to the study of educational issues that address teaching and learning for minority teachers and students is also presented.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to research relevant to teachers’ life histories, African American teachers’ life histories and the relationship between life histories and beliefs about teaching. A discussion on the research on African American teachers’ use of culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies for effective instruction for African American students is also presented in the review of literature. Lastly, a discussion of critical race theory as a lens for exploring counter-stories and racism in education is presented.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to collect and analyze the teachers’ life histories. Life history methodology is presented and justified as the most logical approach for

this study. A description of the participants and setting of the study is provided. Special emphasis on the research-participant relationship is discussed. Method of data collection and analysis is detailed.

Chapter 4 presents the life story portraits of three African American social studies teachers. The portraits are presented in chronologically themed sections. Each portrait reveals the personal, educational, and professional experiences of the teachers. The stories shared provide insight into the ways in which the teachers' life experiences shape their teaching philosophies and practices.

Chapter 5 offers an in depth analysis of the life stories of the teachers', highlighting the connection between the teachers' life experiences, philosophies, and pedagogies. The major themes identified in the teachers' portraits are described. Each theme addressed is linked to the literature related to teachers' life experiences and teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, African-centered pedagogy and critical race theory. Also provided is a discussion of implications for current and future research related to African American teachers' life experiences and pedagogies, the use of culturally relevant pedagogies in the social studies, and teacher preparation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature significant to the study of the life histories of three African American social studies teachers. The first section of the literature review focuses on three main areas of research relevant to: (1) teachers' life history research, (2) African American teachers' life histories, and (3) the relationship between life histories and beliefs about teaching. The second section of the literature review presents research on African American teachers' use of culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies for effective instruction for African American students. The final section of the literature review focuses on the use of critical race theory in educational research. In the context of the study of three African American social studies teachers, critical race theory is used to acknowledge the teachers' life experiences with racism and the ways in which the teachers combat and address racism and oppressive mainstream educational ideologies, by sharing their counter-stories of experience in educational scholarship and their daily classroom teaching.

2.1 TEACHERS' LIFE HISTORIES AND BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING

2.1.1 Teachers' Life History Research

In educational research, life history studies are used to understand teachers' beliefs about various instructional ideas and theories in context of their lived experiences (Cole & Knowles, Foster, 1993; Lynn, 2002; Mitchell, 1998; Muchmore, 2001; Smith, 2005; Wegwood, 2005). Several life history studies have examined the educational experiences of teachers and how these experiences have influenced their teaching philosophies and instruction in the classroom (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Muchmore, 2001; Smith, 2005; Wegwood, 2005). The majority of these studies argue that the teachers' early educational experiences, encounters with various individuals and teachers who supported or their educational goals and life aspirations motivated and shaped their overall teaching and interactions with students (Foster, 1992; Lynn, 2006; Muchmore, 2001; Smith, 2005). In one such study of an English teacher, Anna, revealed that her educational experiences and exposure to various literary genres influenced her beliefs about literacy and effective literacy instruction for her students. Anna's life history indicated that her beliefs fell into two categories, temporary beliefs and long-standing beliefs. Temporary beliefs were described as beliefs that were a part of her childhood educational experiences and university experiences as a pre-service teacher. Long-standing beliefs originated in her personal life experiences outside of school (Muchmore, 2001). Anna's teaching philosophy and understanding of effective literacy instruction were influenced by both her long-standing and temporary beliefs. The role of outside of school experience in the development of her teaching was equally as important as her educational experiences, and she encouraged her students to participate in a variety of out of school activities that fostered literacy development.

Life history studies have also focused on the experiences and beliefs of pre-service teachers and how these experiences contribute to their understanding of appropriate instruction for students (Doyle & Carter, 2003; Gomez et al, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Trotman & Kerr, 2001). These studies also assert that pre-service teachers rely heavily on their past educational experiences when determining appropriate instruction for their students. They are more inclined to draw upon their positive experiences with various teachers and classroom activities and infuse those experiences with methods learned in their teacher education coursework. In Trotman and Kerr's (2001) study of pre-service teachers it was concluded that the pre-service teachers used their personal experiences as "critical filters in accepting and integrating course content that is intended to develop professional decision-making frameworks." (Trotman & Kerr, 2001, p. 157) To this end, the pre-service teachers' abilities to address pedagogical issues associated with diversity and individuality were limited, and as a result promoted the acceptance of mainstream, status quo educational ideologies and practices. In Gomez et al (2008), Latino pre-service teachers' life histories were examined to determine the relationship between their experience and their teaching. From their experiences, it was concluded that teacher candidates of color have a strong desire to make personal connections with the students and families they teach. This cultural connection to the students and their families is largely due to the pre-service teachers' personal experiences and understanding of minority cultures, family, and community among peoples of color. Teachers' life histories provide a contextual understanding of the role of experience in teacher practice. The authentic study of teachers' beliefs and practice, require a direct connection to their personal experience, and without such connection, the true nature of the many dynamics of teaching is revealed.

2.1.2 African American Teachers' Life History Research

Research on the lives of African American teachers is very limited. However, two notable studies indicate that African American teachers' life experiences do affect teachers' beliefs and practice. In Mitchell's (1998) study of eight exemplary African American retired secondary teachers who taught in urban schools, she found that the teachers' life experiences influenced their beliefs regarding their students' abilities to excel academically despite the harsh realities and issues within their communities. Mitchell (1998) notes:

The teachers' encouragement of student resilience is, in part, a product of their biographies. With the exception of one who grew up on a farm, the teachers were raised in urban environments. Because of segregation, they were all raised in predominantly African American communities that included families of differing economic backgrounds. The teachers described themselves as having been strongly influenced by community norms and values, which were instilled in them through interactions with individuals in their families, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. (Mitchell, 1998, p.117)

The cultural connections that the teachers experienced living in their predominantly African American communities influenced their understanding of values, norms, and issues tied to the African American community. The experiences and interactions that the teachers encountered in their communities enabled the teachers to understand the experiences of their students and also approach their instruction in ways that resonated with their students.

Foster's (1993) research on African American teachers, offers further insight into how African American teachers' beliefs about teaching are shaped by their life experiences. Eighteen African American teachers varying in age and years of teaching experience, who began and

continued their teaching careers in predominantly African American schools, were extensively interviewed using life history and career interview approaches. From the study of their lives, Foster concludes:

The conclusion to be drawn from these interviews is that the African American teachers whom these interviewees remembered from their childhood were vital members of the communities, and often acted as surrogate parents to the children they taught. For these teachers, such stories represent key events in the information of their ideas about the teacher's role. Predictably, perhaps, these teachers have willingly embraced the characteristics they admired in their own teachers" (Foster 1993, p.378).

The early educational experiences and interactions with caring teachers directly influenced the teachers' beliefs about the role of the teachers and their relationship with their students. Several of the teachers believed that many of the characteristics and philosophies that they incorporated into their teaching mirrored the qualities exhibited by their former teachers. Qualities that encouraged surrogate parenting and nurturing was displayed by their teachers. Also, the teachers noted that former teachers were respected and active in their communities.

In a similar study, Lynn (2006) uses life history to present a portrait of a young African American male teacher, Kashari, teaching in an urban school in South Central Los Angeles. Kashari's life history narrative reveals that educational experiences encountered in middle school, high school, and college shaped his teaching. In particular, the encouragement and support he received from various African American male teachers, motivated him to become a teacher and "give back" to his community through his teaching.

2.1.3 Relationship between Life Histories and Beliefs about Teaching

The literature also indicates that from their personal encounters and desire to prepare African American students for the realities that exist in the “real world”, African American teachers firmly believe that their teaching must address issues of race and racism (Banks & Banks, 2007; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn, Johnson & Hassen, 1999; Pang & Gibson 2001; Perlstein, 2002). These teachers address the struggles of African Americans and other minority groups to overcome racial inequalities and oppression. In Lynn’s (2006) study of African American teachers, one of the teachers noted that his personal experience with racism compelled him to address issues of race and racism in his teaching. This teacher, like several mentioned in Lynn’s study, also believe that their students should understand how racism exists in the current society and the dominant structures that support and maintain racial oppression. They encourage their students to broaden their understanding of race from a single group to a collective human race, working for social justice and equality for all oppressed individuals.

African American teachers, believe that education is a spiritual and moral pursuit. They use their teaching as a means of social justice, battling oppressive ideologies, policies, and actions transmitted and used in education (Dixon, 2003; Nieto, 2003). For African American teachers, their work to ensure that students receive equitable education opportunities and instruction is an act of social justice. African American teachers believe that they have a moral obligation to provide quality education for their students. The act of promoting social justice in their teaching is not merely a surface pursuit, but encompasses a deep and personal desire that is connected to their overall life goals and personal fulfillment. African American teachers also encourage their students to combat racism with knowledge and academic success, which can

provide opportunity for a better future, one not dictated by others (Foster, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn et al., 1999; Pang & Gibson, 2001).

African Americans teachers also believe that they have a greater responsibility to act as role models for their African American students. In Lynn's (2006) study, several of the teachers highlighted the importance of positive role models within their communities as contributors to their overall success. The positive role modeling and characterization demonstrated by teachers are important for ensuring the commitment of minority students in schooling (Banks & Banks, 2007; Lynn 2006; Nieto, 2003). African American teachers understand that for many of their students, they represent examples of success, and hope of a better future. Thus, many African American teachers feel that through their example and teaching, they can motivate a younger generation of African Americans to achieve personal success. Furthermore, African American male teachers believe that they need to model certain behaviors and attitudes for their students and teach powerful life lessons that would help their students navigate the negative societal pressures and develop into productive individuals. "Their [African American teachers] roles and their thinking about schools and schooling processes are integrally connected to their sense as care-givers with the responsibility of modeling certain behaviors and attitudes for their students" (Lynn, 2002, p.126). In Lynn's (2002) study an African American male teacher describes his role in schools:

As a Black man, I want to make sure that these Black boys become Black men. So they're able to be positive members of their community, members of their family. To do that, they have to avoid a lot of the...what I call potholes, particularly in neighborhoods like this. So, I try to make them aware of it. I try to give them as much knowledge as I

can about that and so that they can make the proper decision when it comes forth. (Lynn, 2002, p.126)

In essence, this teacher believes that he has an obligation to not only model appropriate behaviors, but to also protect the humanity of his African American students who live in an oppressive society designed to for their demise (Lynn, 2002).

African American female teachers view teaching as a spiritual calling, caring, and “other mothering” (Dixon, 2003; Irvin, 2003). These teachers believe that they serve as surrogate parents to their students (Dixon, 2003). The teachers employ a caring and compassionate, yet no-nonsense approach to academic excellence and student behavior expectations. African American female teachers demand the best from all their students while maintaining caring relations. In her study of one such teacher, Lee (2001) notes that the “teacher saw these youngsters [students] as she saw her own biological children for whom failure is simply not an option” (Lee, 2001, p.133) In the same regard, when students behaved inappropriately in class, the teacher would ask if they would act in the same manner with their mama or grandma watching. This emphasis on the family, and the teacher being an extension of the family, admonishing negative student behaviors and promoting the student home and family values, connects the school to the family (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lee, 2001).

2.2 APPROACHES TO TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

In the previous section, I discussed the research on teachers' life experiences, specifically the connection between teachers' life experiences and their practice. The literature indicates that based on their life experiences, many African American teachers believe that they must incorporate specific pedagogies in their instruction for African American students. Culturally relevant and African-centered are two prominent pedagogies that African American teachers use to instruct their African American students (Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of these pedagogies addresses the use of instruction that connects African American students' home culture to the subject matter and emphasizes the cultural competencies that African American students bring to the classroom.

2.2.1 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

African American scholars suggest that successful teachers of African American students practice specific pedagogies that emphasize African American cultural values and competencies. (Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, Lomotey & Shujaa, 1990). Ladson-Billings' (1995) uses the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" (CRP) to describe teaching that

...is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the students' culture but also to use student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge. Thus, culturally relevant teaching requires the recognition of African-American culture as an important strength upon which to construct the schooling experience. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.314)

Ladson-Billings (1995) provides three key descriptors of culturally relevant teachers. “Culturally relevant teachers believe and practice instruction in which: (a) students experience academic success, (b) students develop and maintain a cultural competency and (c) students develop a critical consciousness in which they challenge the status quo of the social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160). A goal of culturally relevant teaching is to empower students to critically examine the society in which they live and to seek social change. Ladson Billings (1992) further asserts that “culturally relevant teaching serves to empower student to the point where they will be able to examine critically education content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.110). Paulo Freire wrote that a critical consciousness is an enlightening educative process in which there is a critical examination of society, the process and goals of educational content, and the role education in creating a democratic society. Through the development of a critical consciousness students contest the existing conditions of the current social norms, values, and institutions that uphold inequalities and work as agents of change towards social justice and democracy (Freire, 2000).

Culturally relevant teaching and learning incorporates the cultural knowledge, backgrounds, and values that students bring to the learning environment. This cultural knowledge is often referred to as cultural competence, the act of having an awareness of one’s own cultural view and using that understanding to effectively communicate and interact with people across cultures. Instead of ignoring the cultural competencies of students and solely focusing on mainstream educational practices that sometimes are inappropriate and unrelated to student learning needs, culturally relevant teachers believe that they are obligated to challenge

the ineffective instructional strategies of mainstream education, and provide instruction and teaching that is both relevant and critical for minority students.

Culturally relevant teachers realize that the mainstream curriculum and educational materials validate dominant Eurocentric histories, values and world views. They understand that the cultural knowledge and experiences of minority and oppressed groups are devalued and underrepresented in the curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2007). Nieto (2003) further comments on this issue of cultural alienation and contend that

Schools within the United States have incorporated very little curriculum or pedagogy related to African American students' culture and life experiences. Education has been used as one of the primary channels through which cultural alienation and annihilation has occurred. ... That is, the way in which education has been transmitted (teaching style) and the content of educational materials (curriculum) have discounted the social and cultural capital of Black populations (consciously or subconsciously) and have therefore minimized the culture of Black populations. (Nieto, 2003, p. 52)

In their instruction, culturally relevant teachers help students interrogate the content and curriculum for such omissions, and present supplemental resources that expose students to the histories, views, and experiences of these underrepresented groups.

Understanding the necessity to not only address the students' cultural competencies, in the curriculum and content, culturally relevant pedagogy supports African American students' use of cultural language styles. Instead of requiring students to only employ traditional mainstream language styles, culturally relevant teachers encourage students utilize their home language patterns. Indigenous language patterns, such as Ebonics, call and response, signifying, rapping, proverbs, and repetition are utilized in order to affirm the home languages of their

students. By using the cultural and linguistic resources that students bring with them to school, culturally relevant teachers validate their students' cultural competencies and engage students in learning (Gay, 2000). These culturally derived teaching practices ensure that African American students succeed academically and maintain their cultural identities (Lynn et al, 1999).

Adding to Ladson-Billings' (1995) conclusions of culturally relevant teachers, Lynn's (2002) study of African American male teachers working in the Los Angeles Unified School District focuses on the teachers' beliefs that they are "agents of change". The research addressed the work and lives of African American male teachers committed to social justice for their African American students. As agents of change, these teachers firmly believed that

It was their task as Black men who possessed an invaluable knowledge about their communities to help change the conditions of Black people in the United States. By and large, they believed that teaching was the vehicle through which such change could occur. (Lynn, 2002, p.125)

These African American teachers understood that their teaching was a vehicle for change, and sharing empowering knowledge that would not be available to their students in other contexts, was means of acting as agents of change.

Successful culturally relevant teachers of African American students denounce African American academic inferiority and deficiency labels through their quality instruction and demand academic achievement and success for their students (Banks & Banks, 2007'; Foster, 1993; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Lynn, 2006). In the current educational system, African American students, compared to their white counterparts, are more often labeled as needing special education, and are placed into low academic and remedial tracks. This deficit approach to the teaching learning of African American children has led to low academic expectations for

African American students. Unlike the majority of their white counterparts, African American teachers that use culturally relevant pedagogy do not view their students from a deficit perspective. Instead, these teachers believe that students from culturally diverse and low economic backgrounds are capable learners, and if treated as such, students will demonstrate a high degree of academic competence (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Howard, 2003).

Many African American scholars assert that the social development and academic success of African American students are critical and no less than total commitment to learning is expected from the students. In addition, scholars note that exemplary African American teachers set high expectations for their students. They believe that all students can learn, and are capable of academic success. Howard (2003) concludes,

Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it...This is a very different conception of caring than the often cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,” which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way and move at their own pace.

(Howard, 2003, p.109)

Teachers that practice culturally relevant pedagogy encourage students to pursue academic excellence, and are unwavering in their commitment to their students. In addition, their commitment to student academic excellence is the truest form of caring. Culturally relevant teachers believe that caring requires that they encourage students to perform to their full potential, allowing little room for student complacency (Asante, 1991; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee et al, 1990; Mitchell, 1998).

2.2.2 African-centered Pedagogy

African American scholars have also concluded that African American teachers incorporate an African-centered pedagogy (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994; Dei, 1994). Similar to culturally relevant pedagogy, African-centered pedagogy is an instructional approach that seeks to provide relevant instruction for specific to African American students. African-centered pedagogy can be defined as the study of principles and ideas rooted in the perspectives and epistemological constructs of peoples of African descent (Asante, 1991). It seeks to instill a strong sense of identity, history, and culture within African Americans (Dei, 1994). One of the inspired motivations for the creation of African-centered education lie in the *Mis-education of the Negro* (1933), written by Carter G. Woodson. In this book, Woodson describes the educational dilemma that African Americans encounter in the traditional American educational system. In the traditional American educational system, African Americans have been provided an education that seeks to detach them from their own culture and traditions. This “mis-education” requires them to assimilate into an American culture that is based upon an oppressive Eurocentric idea. Thus, African Americans become dislocated from themselves, and often unknowingly value European culture above their own (Woodson, 1933, p. 7). The issues and concerns of the African American people are no longer relevant and are not addressed in the historical dialogue. Hillard (2001) discusses this notion of European dominance and the suppression of the histories of defeated and oppressed groups:

Dominant populations crush or suppress the history of their victims, destroy the practice of the culture of their victims, prevent the victims from coming to understand themselves as part of a cultural family, teach systematically the ideology of white supremacy, control the socialization process, control the accumulation of wealth, and perform segregation

and apartheid...No attempt to remedy problems in education can occur apart from an understanding of these things. (Hillard, 2001, p.25)

The mainstream educational system has practiced a dominant White supremacist notion of history and education. African-centered pedagogy emphasizes that in order to effectively address the educational disparities that exist and promote positive change for African American students, understanding the ways in which mainstream educational curriculum and instruction promote dominant ideologies, limit the accumulation of wealth, and foster inequality and racial stratification, must be considered.

In order to reverse this inherently degenerative educational system and reclaim African cultural values, African-centered pedagogy promotes the histories, cultural experiences, and perspectives and investigates issues and concerns of African Americans. Many African American educators have concluded that African-centered pedagogy not only serves to build self-esteem and efficacy among African American youth, but also contributes to academic improvement and success. African-centered pedagogy empowers the student by presenting information that connects directly with the student. By centering the African American student within the curriculum through the use of familiar cultural and social references, the teacher begins to debunk notions of white privilege and supremacy (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994; Lee et al., 1990).

African-centered pedagogy legitimizes African knowledge base; positively builds on productive community and cultural practices; uses and extends indigenous language; reinforces community ties and encourages service to family, community, nation, race, and world; endorses positive social relationships; reveals a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying self-worth and right to self determination of others; supports

cultural continuity and critical consciousness; empowers the student by presenting information that connects directly with the student (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1994; Lee et al, 1990). Through this process, students began to consider themselves as the subjects rather than the objects of education (Asante 1991). The student's narrow, detached view of society is replaced with a holistic view of society. Social, political, economic and religious structures of society are connected. Political affairs cannot be separated from economics, culture, religion, cosmology, family, and kinship. This connection extends beyond social structures to the very essence of the individual. The individual is defined through the community and individual rights require social responsibility. In other words, individuals are not lone actors, but social agents responsible and accountable to their community. This emphasis on social responsibility also allows the student to connect with the goals of their local communities and aims of the African American nation (Akoto, 1994). A national identity is established that transcends physical boundaries and connects all peoples of African descent to create a worldview that is informed by the struggles of other Africans and by similar struggles of other people (Akoto, 1994). The connection of student to an African-centered pedagogy also stresses student involvement in community affairs and embodies a commitment of service to one's family, community, nation, race, and world (Lee, 1994).

Within African-centered pedagogy, the teacher is a vital part of the success and development of the student. The process of passing knowledge, wisdom and cultural legacy from one generation to the next is an important aspect of African culture. African-centered teachers understand that they are not the only source of knowledge, and serve to stimulate and nourish creative and critical consciousness of the student (Akoto, 1994). These teachers embrace the cultural histories and knowledge of their students.

African-centered teachers and their students share knowledge, and knowledge is continuously recreated and recycled in order to enhance learning for all. The relationship between the teacher and students is fluid and equitable. A sincere bond of trust and the creation of the classroom as a community of learners encourage collaborative student and teacher exchange (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Also, the African-centered teacher serves as a caring educator, believing that all children can learn. This attitude of caring is manifested in the high expectations the teacher sets for the students. The commitment to student academic, emotional, and spiritual success and achievement is the primary focus of the African-centered teacher. African-centered teachers create a culturally conscious environment and work tirelessly to dismantle common power relationships within their classrooms by erasing the lines that separate students and teachers from maintaining caring relationships. In addition, African-centered teachers strive to produce socially conscious and responsible students who care for the community and society at large (Ladson-Billings 2001). In essence, African-centered teachers employ a holistic approach to their teaching. They focus on the growth and development of all aspects of the student's, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

African-centered teachers perceive their roles as both teacher and parent. They are dedicated to the learning of their students and fully devote their time, energy and teaching to achieve success for their students. Their goal is to nurture their students and help develop qualities and characteristics that exemplify personally and social responsibility. African-centered teachers see themselves as a part of the community, and teaching is a form of giving back to the community, and they also encourage their students to adhere to the same principles. Asante (1991) concludes that "Students often do what they see their teachers doing..." (Asante, 1991, p.4) By modeling certain behaviors of community involvement and service, African-

centered teachers serve as examples and encourage students to actively work in their communities. They are not detached from the community, and often live in the vary neighborhoods of their students. Many attend the local churches and other community organizations, and use the services of local community businesses, supporting African American economic development and empowerment.

Teachers that utilize and African-centered pedagogy, incorporate the African principle of reciprocity into their practice. This notion of reciprocity requires the teacher to view his or her own future symbiotically linked to the development of the students. In Lee's (2001) study, the teacher's approach to student resistance to the academic work and classroom demands demonstrates this notion of reciprocity. Lee (2001) noted, "The teacher's vision for their [students] future was tied to her own future well-being and to the historical traditions that proceeded this generation. When students complained about reading, the teacher reminded them that Blacks in America had died for the right to read..." (Lee, 2001, p.133). The teacher was determined that the students learn critical thinking and problem solving skills, and student disengagement and negative behaviors would not disrupt learning (Lee, 2001). In this regard, teachers that practice an African-centered pedagogy realize that their success is ultimately based on the success of the students they instruct. Their students represent the future of an African American people, and developing educated students capable of reasoned thought and action is key. Thus, social development and academic success of African American students are critical (Lee et al, 1990).

2.3 CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION

In the previous section, approaches to teaching African American students using culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies are discussed. Another aspect of teaching and learning directly related to the discussion of African American education is critical race theory. Critical race theory, initially developed by legal scholars, lawyers, and activists was a response to the retarded advancements in racial equality and opportunities after the 1960s civil rights movement. In many instances, racial progress made during the 1960s had not only declined in the 1970s, but also reverted to previous conditions that maintained oppressive ideologies and racial inequalities. Early writers, including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado addressed the subtler forms of racism that govern and control the economic, social, and political institutions within the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Realizing the significance of critical race theory in not only legal scholarship, but also in education, African American scholars, such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, and William Tate IV began to apply critical race theory to educational scholarship. Critical race theory in education is scholarship that focuses on how race operates in schools and society. The effects of race on school practices, policies, structures, and teaching is the focal area of study (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). CRT suggests that the inherent problems of the racial order and racial privilege have impeded the ability of “schools to function as tools of empowerment for racially marginalized students”. Instead, schools often maintain racial boundaries and inequalities. These boundaries and inequalities cripple the abilities and performances of marginalized students, which fosters low academic achievement and maintaining an educational divide between White and minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Lynn & Parker, 2006;

Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1995). In turn, schools become microcosms of society upholding identical racial stratifications that exist in society.

Critical race theory begins with the idea that racism is a natural part of a society founded on White supremacist principles that support the privileges of Whites. In essence, schools exist to further represent White culture, ideals, and beliefs (Lynn, 2006). Lynn and Parker (2006) assert:

This in turn, has the effect of further solidifying the political, social, and economic dominance of whites at all levels of society. The educational system becomes one of the chief means through which the system of white supremacy regenerates and renews itself. Thus, schools not only serve as a sorter and stratifier; they actively subordinate the culture, language, and social, economic, and political positions of nonwhites. (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p.267)

CRT also includes the notion of the permanence of racism in society. Adopting the realist view that racism has played and continues to play a significant role in American society is central to the argument. This permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains. This allows for the privileging of Whites, and “othering of people of color in all arenas, including education” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p.27), creating an idea of whiteness of property. The concept of whiteness of property describes the policies and practices that restrict access to high-quality curricula and well equipped, safe schools. These inequalities foster this notion of whiteness of property in which rights to “possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition, have been enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p.28). In essence, the educational access and opportunities provided to students of color often do not mirror those of their white counterparts, creating

disparities in the quality of education received. To improve the disparities and exist, racism must be included in the educational discussion. CRT brings greater theoretical understanding of how to transform African American education (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Critical race theory not only analyzes the failure of the United States educational system to properly educate the majority of culturally and racially marginalized students, but it can also serve as a way to examine the emancipatory work of minority educators trying to combat educational inequality. Emancipatory teachers incorporate the perspectives and histories of underrepresented cultures and address a myriad of issues, such as social justice, democratic citizenship, and racial and gender inequalities perpetrated by mainstream, oppressive structures. This is evident in several studies conducted on African American and other minority teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn et al., 1999; Pang & Gibson 2001; Perlstein, 2002). In Pang and Gibson's (2001) study of four successful African American social studies teachers, they found that the teachers focused on democratic concepts, relating to racism and civil rights, responsibility and citizenship, social justice, and slavery. In an effort to include the histories of underrepresented people, these teachers supplemented the social studies curriculum with content and activities that addressed issues of race and engaged their students in dialogue that challenged majority notions of citizenship, responsibility, racism, and justice. Through this type of classroom dialogue teachers of color initiate the process of ending racial subordination. "In other words, CRT appears to be quite a natural place for situating the study of critical African American teachers because it is an analytic discourse that explicitly addresses issues of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality in education" (Lynn, 1999, p.611).

CRT offers a theoretical approach to understanding the problems in education through the lens of communities of color (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Focused research on the work of

African American educators provides a platform in which “counter-stories,” an essential tenet of CRT, are featured. These stories are not the dominant stories offered by the mainstream white majority educators, but give voice to those of the minority groups, that offer a different perspective that challenges mainstream dialogues. Stories can indicate how people make sense of themselves and their worlds. Storytelling is a natural phenomenon; people think, speak, and bring meaning to their lives through stories (Atkinson, 1998). Storytelling has a significant role in African American communities, and oppressed groups have instinctively known that stories are of vital importance in their struggle for survival and liberation (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Delpit (1995) argues that these groups have been traditionally silenced in the field of education. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) further assert that in this regard, counter-storytelling help[s] us understand what life is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic,2001, p.41).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) suggest that counter stories can serve four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions:

- (1) They can build a community among those at the margins of society,
- (2) They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems,
- (3) They can open new windows into the realities of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live, and
- (4) They can teach others by combining elements from both the story and the current reality. (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002, p.36)

In essence, counter-storytelling validates and gives voice to the experiences of those who have been historically silenced, and through the stories, fosters connections with other minorities

creating a community of voiced experiences. It destroys the mindset that allows the dominant group to hold people of color subordinate to their educational demands and ideologies. Also, counter-storytelling challenges educational discourses and perspectives that focus solely on the experiences and beliefs of White teachers as the lone representative voice and standard of exemplary teaching and learning. The counter stories of minority teachers require true reflection on current Eurocentric beliefs about effective and quality instruction for minority students and uncover the need for systematic change in the regards to teaching and learning for minority students.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research reveals that teachers' life histories influence their teaching. The professional and personal experiences that teachers encounter impact their philosophy and methods of instruction. In particular, a few research studies indicate that as a result of various life experiences, African American teachers carry certain beliefs about teaching and learning for their African American students (Foster, 1993; Mitchell, 1998; Lynn, 2006). African American teachers tend to employ pedagogies that address the cultural competencies, learning styles, and experiences of their African American students. Through the use of culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies, African American teachers provide powerful instruction that liberate their students from mainstream, oppressive Eurocentric ideologies and educational practices, and move students to engage in critical consciousness. In addition, African American teachers self identify as agents of change and advocate for social justice. Their work within their classrooms is designed to inspire their students to improve their communities and to pursue academic

excellence (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994; Dei, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lynn, 2002; Nieto, 2003).

Using critical race theory to analyze the significance of race and culture in the emancipatory and culturally relevant pedagogical practices of African American teachers can help further the understanding of effective teaching and learning for African American students. Critical race theorists argue that studying the lives of African American teachers adds to the current educational dialogue that largely addresses the experiences, perspectives, and pedagogies of White teachers and counters many of the educational claims that are the result of dominant, traditional Eurocentric educational philosophies and practices (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1995). Furthermore, providing African American teachers an opportunity to share their counter-stories of experience validates their work as dedicated educators committed to the success of African American students.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This dissertation examines how the life histories of three African American social studies teachers shape their teaching. In this chapter, I describe how life history informs my methods. Life history methodology is used to understand how life experiences shape the teachers' philosophies and pedagogies. An introduction to the setting and participants is presented. The data collection process which included extensive participant interviews is detailed. A description of the data analysis, the process of coding emergent themes and creating teacher portraits is also described.

3.1 ELEMENTS OF LIFE HISTORY METHODOLOGY

For this study, a life history methodological approach was used to interpret meaning from the life experiences of the teachers. A life history narrative or story is a written or oral account of a life as told by an individual. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) define life history story as:

How individuals recount their histories shape what individuals can claim of their lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life, they are means by which identities may be fashioned...A life story is more than a recital of events. It is an organization of experiences. In relating the elements of experience to

each other and to the present telling, the teller asserts their meaning. (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p.8)

Life history research studies the human experience in order to provide insight into the broader human condition. This type of research emphasizes understanding of the relationship and the complex interaction between an individual's life and context, and how this relationship affects daily activities and experiences. Through the study of an individual's life experiences, insights into the broader collective experience can be discovered. Lives can be understood within their respective and collective contexts. Individuals make up communities, societies, and culture. In depth-exploration of an individual's life in context allows for better understanding of the complexity of lives lived in communities. Life history research locates the individual firmly within a historical and cultural context (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Muchmore, 2001). Plummer (2001) concludes, "Life history research at its best always bring focus on historical change, moving between the changing biographical history of the personal and the social history of his or her lifespan." (Plummer, 2001, p.40) Cole and Knowles (2001) offer a clear explanation of the purpose and value of life history research. They conclude that life history research has both an intellectual and moral purpose. In addition, life history researcher advances understanding about complex interactions between individual's lives and the societal and institutional context in which they are lived. This allows for a deeper exploration of the human condition, and the quality and conditions under which lives are lived.

This life history study uses a narrative approach to present authentic data through the voices of the storyteller. Unlike other research methods that often mute the voices of teachers by separating their beliefs from their lived experiences, this study of the teachers' lived experiences recognizes that beliefs do not exist in a vacuum and life stories are essential in uncovering

individual perspectives (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Atkinson (1998) noted, “If we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in that person’s own voice” (Atkinson, 1998, p.124). The research questions of this study focus on three teachers’ experiences and perspectives and how their experiences shape their philosophies and pedagogy; thus making life history the most effective and ideal methodological approach. The research questions include:

1. What are the personal and educational life histories of three African American social studies teachers?
2. How do the teachers’ life experiences described in their life histories influence their teaching philosophies and practices for African American students?
3. What types of culturally relevant teaching practices do they employ in their classrooms for their African American students?

3.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

This life history study was conducted with teachers in the Pittsburgh Public school district. The Pittsburgh Public school district, located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania services approximately 28,000 students in preschool through grade 12. The district’s student racial composition consists of 57% African American, 36% White, 4% Multiracial, and 2% Asian, and 1% Hispanic. Within the 65 schools, various magnet programs, athletic teams, and extracurricular activities provide students with rich and quality educational experiences. The district is committed to the academic, social, and physical development of all students and has adopted the motto, “Excellence for All”.

This statement captures the essence of the district's mission which is the belief "that every child at every level of academic performance can achieve excellence".

I selected three African American social studies teachers in the district. First, as African Americans, they represent the minority in social studies education. Secondly, administrators and former colleagues recommended these teachers as exemplary social studies teachers who are passionate about their teaching, motivated to improve the educational inequalities that African American students suffer, and are committed to the academic and personal success of their students. Finally, they were very interested in the topic of my research and were willing to dedicate their time, knowledge, and experiences to this effort. Woods (1985) describes the ideal participants for life history study as those "who feel strong identification with the research, possess, considerable insight and abilities of recall, are articulate, and give of their time and energies most freely and productively" (Woods, 1985, p.16). I feel the teachers selected exemplify these qualities, and their stories provided rich data on the relationship between life experiences and teaching. From our initial discussions, I concluded that these three African American social studies teachers view social studies from a non-traditional perspective focusing on issues of social justice, race and incorporating elements of culturally relevant pedagogy in their instruction. In this regard, they go beyond the standard traditional materials provided by the curriculum and textbooks that often focus on Eurocentric dominated notions and ideas about social studies concepts. They incorporate African-American issues and histories, experiences and problems into their instruction. They are not afraid to tackle controversial issues, such as existing racial inequalities and social injustice. These teachers use their own experiences and perspectives to educate their students.

For this research, I decided to gather the life histories of only three participants. Within life history methodology, there is no standard number of participants required, and life history studies often vary in the number of participants researched. Some studies involve a single participant, while others incorporate a group of participants. Studies that focus on a single participant often encompass a complete life story and involve lengthy research, spanning over the course of several months and in some instances, several years. These studies often provide a more in-depth biographical account of the participant. On the other hand, studies involving several participants seek to focus on particular life experiences and events in hopes of capturing the significance and context of the experiences in relation to a specific phenomenon (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Due to practical limitations, researcher resources, and the sizeable amount of narrative data that I expected to emerge from the interview process, only three participants were chosen. Secondly, for my research, I was not solely focused on capturing the experiences of the participants, but I also wanted to use those experiences to make comparisons that add to the understanding of the relationship between teachers' life experiences, perspectives, and practice.

3.3 ESTABLISHING AUTHENTIC RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship that exists between the researcher and participant for the purpose of inquiry into an area of shared interest is central to my research endeavor. As the researcher, I seek to understand the experiences of the participant and the meanings he or she makes out of their experience. Rapport is the common term used to describe the established relationship between the researcher and the participant. Maintaining a good rapport is one of the most important aspects of this research process. For this reason, a good rapport with my participants had to be

maintained in order to promote an environment in which the participants were comfortable talking about their experiences. I reassured the teachers that their stories have value and is the most important aspect of the research paradigm (Yin, 2006).

In this life history research study, the rapport established between myself and the teachers was not merely a relationship that was established for the sole purpose of collecting data, but it involved a unique journey in which we shared our collective understandings of the lived experiences expressed. These connections fostered an intimate relationship in which qualities of mutual care, friendship, respect of personal vulnerabilities and attention to issues of relational reflexivity, power, and ethics were evident (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Yin, 2006). Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis (1997) note that the relationship between the researcher and participant is complex and “central to the empirical, ethnical, and humanistic dimensions of research design as evolving and changing process of human encounter” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p.138). Due to my ability to build solid rapport with the teachers, the teachers felt comfortable sharing their experiences, and granted me access into their professional and personal experiences. One teacher remarked after the final interview, “I feel like you’re one of the family now; you’re like my daughter. I hoped you got something out of this and learned something too.” His statement indicated his level comfort and ability to express his most intimate experiences with me.

Telling one’s life story of experience involves more than just a discussion of events and ideas. It is not merely just a research experience, but it is a life experience. The nature of sharing personal experiences, reliving various events is an experience for both the researcher and participant. It is critical that the researcher understands the significance and sensitive nature of retelling one’s life story. Engaging in self-reflection and viewing the research from the

participant perspective allowed for my development of a sensitive and reflexive research approach. Cole and Knowles (2001) conclude, “When researchers place themselves in the position of “the other” in a research endeavor, they can enhance their experiential understanding of what it means to be researched. Such knowledge signifies the role of empathy in research practice.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.43) The success and quality of the research is dependent on the relationship that the researcher develops with the participant. It is important that the relationship between the researcher and participant is genuine and authentic. Cole and Knowles (2001) further assert, “Authentic findings will only emerge from authentic relationships.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.27) When the relationship between the researcher and participant is not genuine, not only will the research suffer, but more importantly, the participant will feel uncomfortable and unwilling to share the complete life story; thus leading to an inaccurate depiction of their experiences.

In life history research, special attention to the relationship of power between the researcher and participant must be considered. Power relations naturally exist, but the researcher’s ability to create an atmosphere of mutuality can reeducate the negative effects of such relations of power. Negotiation is the common term used to describe the researcher’s and participant’s response to power relations. I negotiated the spaces of power by allowing my participants to assume a more active role in the decision making process. In this regard, the teachers selected the interview site (their individual classrooms), dates, and times. The individual classrooms represented “their turf,” and as a researcher, I was entering their spaces of power and authority, which allowed the teachers to feel in control of the overall interview conversation and setting.

3.4 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Data collection began in the spring (April 2009) and continued until the end of the summer (August 2009). The data collection consisted of a series of taped recorded semi-structured interviews. The interviews served as the primary source of data. During the interviews, the teachers shared their life stories, teaching philosophies and practices. Informal conversations, emails, and other written correspondence served as an additional source of data collection. During the informal data collections, information pertaining to subsequent interview dates and follow up interview questions were also discussed.

3.4.1 Interviews

Interviewing allowed the participants to “tell their story” and provide a rich account of their life experiences. These conversations offer the researcher an “inside look” into the life experiences that have shaped the beliefs, ideas, and understandings of the participant. For this life history study, I chose to use semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, while maintaining the overall focus of the research (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

I met the teachers in their classrooms, at the end of the school day. The interviews lasted approximately two hours. Initially, I proposed conducting three interviews with the teachers, but due to the nature and length of the first two interviews, it was not necessary to conduct a third interview. A general set of interview questions were used to serve as a basic guide for each interview. Interview questions covered a range of topics, focusing on the teachers’ life experiences from their childhood to their current teaching experiences and pedagogy. These

questions were broad enough to allow for open response, and not too vague that the research focus was lost (Bailey, 2007; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

At the end of each interview, I returned to my office and reflected on the interview experience. During this time, I retyped the field notes gathered before and throughout the interview and added additional questions and comments that needed clarification or further discussion. Field notes taken during the interview can be helpful for researcher interpretation and understanding during later phases of analysis and questioning (Riessaman, 2002). I also recorded teacher comments provided during additional informal conversations that took place before and after the interview.

During our informal conversations, the teachers would often continue sharing their thoughts about an experience or topic discussed. Sometimes there after the official interview responses revealed deeper meanings and explanations of the events and experiences tape recorded. For example, during our first interview, Mr. Kevin Roberts briefly discussed his transfer from Proctor High School to Clifton High School. In the interview, he stated that he experienced some difficulty working at the school and many of his problems involved the administration of the school. After the interview, as we were walking down the steps to leave the building, I remarked about the new change in the school administration at Bradley. He quickly commented that it was great to have a principal that supports you and that his experience at Proctor was the total opposite. The principal made his teaching experience a miserable one. He stated that she was a racist, white woman threatened by an educated nonconformist, Black man. He felt that she was “out to get him” and did not agree with his teaching philosophies. As he continued to elaborate on that experience, his physical demeanor also reflected this negative teaching experience. He later added that he was so happy when an opportunity to transfer to

another school opened. It was important to record statements from this conversation because it provided rich information of Mr. Robert's experience at Proctor High School. Information lacking in the tape recorded interview.

3.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The life history is a personal encounter, and it challenges the researcher's ability to objectively analyze the stories told. Analyzing the story for internal consistency demanded that I employ a level of objectivity. To check for internal consistency within the personal narrative, I reviewed the statements, making sure that statements concerning life experiences in one part of the narrative did not contradict what was stated in another part. Unfortunately, there are inconsistencies in life, and people may react to things differently at one particular time than at another. Regardless of the difference in reactions at various times, the storyteller should be consistent with their stories of what happened and their response to the situations. Determining the truthfulness of the story sometimes challenges the researcher to define their own understanding of truth (Cole & Knowles, 2001). In this regard, I took into account that the events in life do not have fixed meanings but are influenced by subsequent life events. Identities may shift over time and lead to changing memories that reflect varied understanding and telling of an event. The researcher has the complicated task of locating truth within the memories of the heart. Understanding that this truth may not always be the whole truth, but was the true stories that the teachers wanted to tell, enabled me to better understand the teachers' perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, 1990; Lichtman, 2006).

Like all research studies, in this life history study the ethical and conceptual issues that stem from the use of human subjects for the research agenda were carefully considered. Cole and Knowles (2001) state:

Ethical issues infuse [life history] research projects at every point of their implementation...With the advent of more intrusive research methods and the requirements of personal investment in research, consideration of ethical issues takes on a new prominence. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.37)

Understanding the ethical issues involved, researchers are required to address issues such as confidentiality, consent, and access to data during and after study. To maintain the teachers' confidentiality, I employed pseudonyms in place of their true identities. Also, before submitting their interviews for transcription, I obtained the teachers' consent to have their interviews transcribed by an outside source. In addition, interview tape recordings were kept in a secure locked cabinet.

The study of teachers' lives did not only serve as a personal encounter for me, but it also exposed the teachers' personal life experiences and deepest feelings. This intimate research demanded a level of care and respect. The principle guiding treatment of human subjects used for research state that the research must "do no harm"; thus for this study ethical requirements of confidentiality and consent were most important. Life history researchers have the difficult task determining the balance between doing harm and exposing life experiences that may evoke painful feelings and emotions within the participants. Thus, it was very important for me to be very sensitive to the information gathered and maintain an open and honest relationship with my participants, providing the teachers the space to determine the level of self-disclosure (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

3.6 THE DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The analysis process of life history interviews and artifacts involve different ways of reading and working with the research material. Although there are no standard formulae for life history analysis and writing, Plummer (1983) describes the analysis of life history data as a process that “is truly the creative part of the work. It entail brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data for long periods of time until “it makes sense” and “feels right”, and key ideas and themes flow from it...The standard technique is to read an make notes, leave an ponder, reread without notes, make new notes, match notes up.” (Plummer, 1983, p.99) Cole and Knowles (2001) describe three levels of analysis that involve different ways of reading and working with the research material. Each of these levels, provide different levels of meaning making. This process is a “multilevel, recursive process with coherent and interconnected elements.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.116) From a second, more in-depth reading, patterns or themes regarding the experiences help add shape and texture to my overall understanding of each teacher. A third reading offered greater perspectives and dimensions about the contextual information and material in regards to the teachers situated within place.

In life history research, the stories that the participants share, reveal elements of their identities. Memory is a selective reconstruction of events, and the stories that are remembered and told, “Reflect who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we wish to be seen.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.116). This process in which the teachers recalled their experiences to share, served as the very first level of analysis. In this initial level of analysis, the teachers filtered through their experiences and chose which stories to share. Cole and Knowles (2001) assert, “The [participants] abbreviate or condense even their most rehearsed versions of events or experiences. No matter how much time we spend in conversation with participants their

revelations to us are always constrained or limited. This is the nature of retelling experience.”
(Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 119)

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim, for analysis purposes. As the sole researcher for the study, I initially decided to transcribe all the interviews myself. After some consideration and to ensure that I met my dissertation defense/graduation timeline, I contracted the services of a local transcriptionist. For the initial analysis, I listened to the taped recorded interviews while reading over each corresponding transcript. This was to ensure that the teachers’ statements were accurately transcribed. During this time, I also provided general comments on the transcript and sketched out basic details of the experiences that the teachers discussed.

Following this first initial analysis, I emailed each interview transcription to the teachers for feedback. The teachers were asked to print out the transcripts and make corrections or comments. They were invited to include any extra details omitted in the transcription or mark parts of the transcript that they wanted to omit from the analysis and future publication. The teachers are not just “subjects of interest”; instead they are collaborative, equal partners in which decision making is a shared responsibility. Cole and Knowles (2001) refer to this relationship as not a negotiation, but a “partnership research...the notion of mutuality in purpose, process, and result.” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.29) After the teachers completed their transcription analysis, I began my own thorough analysis of the transcripts. During the first and second phase of analysis, I carefully highlighted the experiences of the teachers. I paid close attention to the details of each story shared, and noted the significance of a life experience or event that was discussed or referenced multiple times throughout the interview. Life events referenced on multiple occasions

indicated that these particular events were of great significance in the teachers' lives and were highlighted in the analysis process.

After all interviews and initial and secondary researcher and teacher interview analysis were completed, I combined the interviews and sketched a basic profile of each teacher. In this basic profile, I chronologically listed the main dates and events described. From this list, I was able to create a rough outline of events highlighted in the life history. Next, I composed a first rough draft of the life history. This draft was revised and rewritten in portrait style for submission to each teacher. Portrait form of narration is holistic and acknowledges the intersection of personality, structure, and history in the narrative. It uses life stories to make connections between the voices of the storytellers, the narrator, and the audience (Atkinson, 2002). The goal of the portrait is to bring together science and art by painting a picture to capture the essence of the subject of study. The complete portrait provides a picture that details the past, present, and future of the subject. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann-Davis (1997):

Portraits seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of people, documenting their voices and their visions-their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann-Davis, 1997, p. xv)

Each teacher was asked to critique the portrait for accuracy and presentation. After the teachers provided their critique, I revised the portraits and presented the teachers with a final version of the portrait. Also, during this third phase, I searched for common themes and experiences that the teachers shared. This development of emergent themes was manually coded and linked to various represented quotes and actions. Charmaz's (2008) guidelines were used in this process of constant comparison which consisted of the following steps:

1. Comparing data with data
2. Labeling data with active, specific codes
3. Selecting focused codes
4. Comparing and sorting data with focused codes
5. Raising focused codes to tentative analytic categories
6. Constructing theoretical concepts from abstract categories
7. Comparing category with concept
8. Comparing concept and concept (Charmaz, 2008, p.472)

Although the teachers grew up in different communities and attended different schools, some of their experiences and teaching reflected notable similarities and common themes. To highlight these occurrences, I created a chart illustrating the common themes and similarities that emerged from their stories and experiences. Next, I composed a descriptive narrative of the themes, carefully linking the themes to the appropriate literature.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of life history methodology used for the study of the life experiences of three African American social studies teachers. A short description of the participants and location for the study is presented. The source of data collection which included teacher interviews is described. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis process. The data analysis process involved the creation of teacher portraits and the development of emergent themes based on the life experiences that the teachers' shared.

4.0 PORTRAITS OF THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

“We live in a world of stories, and though we help shape those stories, we are shaped by them.”
--(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 316)

This chapter presents the life histories of three African American social studies teachers. Each life history reveals portraits of the individuals in relation to the broader social context. The histories of each teacher are divided into chronological themed sections beginning with early childhood experiences and concluding with current teaching experiences.

4.1 A TEACHER’S STORY: KEVIN ROBERTS

4.1.1 The Early Years: Learning about the Importance of Family and Community

Mr. Kevin Roberts has served as an educator for thirty years. A native Pittsburgher, Kevin was born in 1956 and spent his early childhood years on Burrows Street located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. Historically, the Hill District was an ethnically diverse community with its inhabitants including, central and eastern Europeans, Jews, African Americans, Chinese, and others. In the 1920’s, African Americans living in southern cities, migrated to northern cities, like Pittsburgh to in search of opportunity, better education, and to escape poverty and Jim Crow

oppression. During this period known as the Great Migration, millions of African Americans left the confines of the South and moved to the industrial cities in the North to work in mines, mills and various industrial businesses. With this massive African American migration, the cultural landscapes of numerous northern cities changed, and in Pittsburgh this racial and cultural change was evident in the Hill District community.

The number of African American residents in the Hill grew, and by the late 1940's, African Americans were considered the dominant racial group living on the Hill. Although Pittsburgh proved to be the land of opportunity for many African American families migrating from the South, the daily struggle for equality and civil rights was a major part of African American life in Pittsburgh. Segregation and discrimination experienced by many African Americans in Pittsburgh, proved to be the same and sometimes greater than Jim Crow oppression of the South. Systematically segregated from the Whites of the city, African Americans developed institutions of their own, and over the next thirty years, the African American community flourished. Numerous businesses owned and operated by African Americans were established, and the Hill became a cultural center for arts, music and literature (Glasco, 2004; Hays, 1989).

By the 1950's, the Hill District was considered one of the premier African American communities not only in the city of Pittsburgh, but in America. Thriving African American businesses and close-knit communities in which families shared a common sense of ownership and belonging epitomized the Hill District community. Various community events celebrated the unity and African American pride of the residents of the Hill. The Hill served as a safe community in which African Americans could freely live, work, and relax. Kevin recalls, "It was your typical African American community. Where the community watched over itself and took

care of itself from within the community, because we did not have the trust of the outer community, so we took care of ourselves.”

One of ten children born in the Roberts home, Kevin recalls never lacking anything, and always having what was needed, food clothes, shelter, and parental guidance and love. His father worked as a laborer in the steel mills, while his mother held various marketing and management positions in companies around the city. He describes his parents as hardworking people, determined to see their children succeed. Describing his education, Kevin states:

My education was highly valued in the family. You were always working; you could not bring home a C. There was severe punishment for a C or below. And so you had to work. You came home, you did your chores and you did your homework before you went and did anything else, and if your homework wasn't done you couldn't step out the door. That was instilled from a very young age.

Kevin vaguely recalls his elementary and middle school experiences. He does however recall, one sixth grade African American teacher, Ms. Thomas, who encouraged him to do his best, and refused to except any excuses for inappropriate behavior or academic failure. He recalls, “You couldn't put anything past her, and she didn't take no mess. And if you tried you got the consequences was punishment in the room and then she called your home, and you got the consequences at home. So to avoid all of this, you did your work, and you did it good...” Ms. Thomas was the first African American teacher Kevin encountered in his schooling. She was committed to her students' success and set high expectations for academic achievement and student behavior. To Kevin, Ms. Thomas' classroom expectations were just as important as those of his parents, and because of this, he was compelled to do well. In essence, the classroom

represented an extension of his home life and the same expectations that were required at home were required in the classroom.

4.1.2 Young Adult Years: Experiences with School and Community Racial Tensions

After some years living in the Hill District, the Roberts family moved to Northview Heights, located on the Northside of Pittsburgh. Like the Hill District and other parts of the city, the Northside consists of several communities, Spring Hill, Fineview, Manchester, Troy Hill, Observatory Hill, and Allegheny East. These communities contained predominantly White residents, from ethnically diverse European backgrounds. Small community pockets of African Americans were sprinkled throughout the Northside. During the 1960's, in an attempt to integrate and revitalize various parts of the city, Pittsburgh's newly formed Department of Urban Renewal began developing new housing projects. Various African American families throughout the city were given the opportunity to live in newly built integrated spaces (Glasco, 2004; Hays, 1989). The Northview Heights housing community served as one such development. Kevin recalls how moving to the Northview Heights community was considered a privilege and only certain African American families were chosen to occupy this new premier housing project.

Describing the Northview Heights community, Kevin states:

We came from a new project area Northview Heights, where you had two families in each row that were selected to be African Americans in a row of eight or ten families and you were selected. You were chosen in those homes...we knew just about everybody because it was a small, tight community.

Living in an integrated community prepared Kevin for the challenges that he would face attending high school. He learned quickly that certain behaviors were not acceptable around his White counterparts, and there was safety in the community.

The Northview Heights community and other Northside areas fed into two local high schools, Riverdale High School and Clifton High School. In the early 1970's, Kevin entered Riverdale High School at the height of school integration in the Pittsburgh Public schools district. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* had been decided over a decade ago, similar to many cities around the country, school integration in the city of Pittsburgh was a slow and delicate process. Pittsburgh residents, both Black and White were uncertain about the integration process, and how this would change the climate and landscape of the schools. Attending high school during such a volatile time was one of the toughest experiences for Kevin. He recalls the daily friction, fights, and occasional race riots that occurred between White and Black students. The community dynamics mirrored the complex relations that were evident not only in the local schools, but also in cities throughout the United States. Whites, who once lived in predominantly White communities, were being forced to integrate. Refusing to change and overcome with deep racism and anger, many Whites in the community discriminated and often terrorized Blacks integrating these communities.

The African American youth living in the community also suffered from some of the racial backlash of their White neighbors. Kevin talks about the long walks to school and having to leave the comforts and safety of Northview Heights and pass through the Perrysville community. Learning how to talk and walk in a different environment, adjust one's behavior to in order to avoid trouble with Whites who assumed control over the neighboring community was

necessary for survival. Kevin recounts the daily walk to school through the neighboring communities:

The walk to Riverdale was sometimes a danger zone... You had to run the gauntlet... So from Northview to Riverdale High School there's a place, it's now a major road. It's now 279, but it used to be East Street Valley. You had to walk from Northview past this residential area up to Riverdale High School... You had to, I got to get pass this person he's got a mean dog; he'll let the dog on you. You got to go over here. You know, if you go in the store, why, is just one person allowed in the store, when that group over there all of them go in the store. But we're only allowed in there one at a time. You know, you had to figure out what to do and how to manipulate those types of things.

This understanding of the dynamics and expectations of the community was an important tool that would serve Kevin well later in a similar experience, later on in his life.

Quickly, Kevin learned how to navigate the two very different communities in which he passed. He states:

Each small community has its protectors. And in your travels from one particular part of the community to the other, especially back then when it was more of a White and Black thing; in order for you to get through certain parts, you had to deal with the White community, and what they expected you to be like, their expectations of you. What they thought they knew about you and how they dealt with you. You had to learn how to adapt and adjust to that situation so that you stayed out of trouble.

In Kevin's case, trouble could involve a trip to the local authorities, or a home visit and conversation with your parents. Regardless of the trouble, at all cost, Kevin always tried to avoid it. He realized that as an African American adolescent, trouble was always present, and it was up

to him to not allow trouble to come his way. If it required him taking an alternative route to avoid trouble, always having identification in order to not be mistaken for another, and keeping a calm, level head when those in authority used their power and influence to mistreat you because of your race, age, or gender, then the negative experiences were worth the lessons learned. These served as very important life lessons that he would later incorporate into his teaching philosophy.

Kevin does not remember many of his high school teachers, but one particular teacher, Mr. Hainey had a lasting impression on Kevin. Mr. Hainey, the biology teacher took an interest in his students and their families. He knew the parents and siblings of the students he taught and would not hesitate to contact home when students were falling behind in their studies. Kevin recalls how Mr. Hainey pushed his students to work, always providing assignments to would require long hours and concentration. “He was a hard teacher, but you could tell he really wanted us to learn. He would give us the hardest work, but it really made me like biology that much more. Thinking about it, we complained, but we really liked the challenge. And he knew you too; he knew what we were capable of doing, and if we didn’t perform, he didn’t hesitate to let your parents know”. Kevin acknowledges that he also sets high expectations for his students and often incorporates activities that present a challenge to his students and require extra student effort. He attributes some of this instructional approach to his experiences with Mr. Hainey.

4.1.3 College Years: Developing an Understanding of Collective African American Community

Upon completing high school, Kevin received a football scholarship and decided to attend Clarion University. Clarion University is a small university, located about two hours from

Pittsburgh. For the next four years, Clarion would become Kevin's home away from home. His first year at Clarion proved to be a challenge. Starkly different than the confines of his Northview Heights community, Clarion provided access to a larger world, one that was foreign, exciting, and also scary. Kevin states:

I was lost like most freshmen. I had no idea that this was about the education. I was up there to play football. I enjoyed playing football...I maintained my grades to keep my parents off my back and because that was of major importance...Clarion was a unique place. It was good but it was bad. It was good because it showed me a bigger world besides the African American community that I came from. It was bad because it showed me a bigger world. It was bad also because it was just this little microcosm of the world. Some good memories at Clarion; some bad stuff.

Sadly, although Clarion was a home away from home, the same racial dynamics that existed in Pittsburgh during this time, was also apparent in the Clarion community. African Americans were the minority, and often the victims of racist attacks by the local community. During his senior year, Kevin describes one such experience. He explains:

It's my senior year at school and I get a summons from the court system, to come to court. And I open it up and it's from the local store. And I go down to the store, and manager of the store sees me when he comes in the door. And says, I know what you're here for, and I say what? And he says, "I know why you're here. It's not you, it's not you. A big Black guy came in the store and stole some stuff and wrestled away from me, and left. So we went through the college records and found a big Black guy and we got a summons for you. So I'll go with you to the judge and tell him that it's not you. And that you don't have anything to do with it." When the date came, he walked in there and he

told the judge, “he has nothing to do with it, this is not the person” and the judge said, “I should throw you [Kevin] in jail right now. I don’t care what he said.” Luckily I wasn’t a hot head and I didn’t have to spend time in jail because of this judge.

This experience with racism was nothing new to Kevin. His ability to remain calm and handle the comments of the judge was due to the many life lessons he learned from the various experiences he encountered growing up in Pittsburgh, particularly, the walks to school from Northview through the White community and the treatment of some White store owners.

Although, Kevin’s time at Clarion was test of survival, despite some bad experiences, he fondly remembers socializing and forming friendships with the small group of African American students on campus. They created a small community and worked together to ensure that their needs were met. Kevin explains:

Four years of Clarion, you become friends. You know, if you were a friend with those persons, not the superficial. No you became friends and there were times when the African American community at Clarion had to band together really, really strong in order for us to maintain ourselves....Because we were the Black community; we were the Black community. So all of the things that were necessary for the Black community to survive we learned how to do...We had our fraternities, our sororities; we had our student government situations. We became very involved in Clarion because if we didn’t do it, it wasn’t going to happen for us. The White community at Clarion didn’t like the fact that we were getting a little bit of extra money, from the state. And they tried to eliminate that little bit of money for the Black Student Union. And we had to band together to go through certain channels and make sure we were able to get our money and even ask for more because we didn’t have all the things we needed to have.

These experiences of speaking out against inequality and learning to come together as a collective African American community to voice grievances and demand appropriate change would later serve as some of the main ideas that Kevin imparts in his instruction to his students. As he reflects back on his experiences at Clarion, Kevin realizes that those experiences, both good and bad helped shaped his understanding of racism and how collectively African Americans must work tirelessly to combat racism and ensure equality and a better future for others. Such ideas are central to Kevin's mission as an African American educator.

The relationships with fellow Black students and Ms. Anderson, the lone Black faculty and student advisor, were some of the good memories that Kevin recollects from his days at Clarion. Ms. Anderson was instrumental in Kevin's future career choice. When asked to decide on a major, Kevin undecided, was advised by Ms. Anderson to pursue the social sciences. Recalling Ms. Anderson's advice, Kevin says, "It was time to decide your major, and I was still not decided. When I went in I was undecided, undetermined and she [Ms. Anderson] said you're going to be a history teacher and that was it. You'll be good at that. You can make children listen and learn." Following her advice, Kevin obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science and returned home to Pittsburgh, ready to teach.

Upon returning home to Pittsburgh, Kevin eager to begin teaching, applied to many school districts around the City and in neighboring suburbs. His ultimate goal was to return to Riverdale High School, no longer as a student, but as a teacher, ready to share his wealth of knowledge and experiences with the students. Unfortunately, Pittsburgh Public Schools district did not have any openings, and Kevin was only able to secure various substitute positions at schools in the district. However, for part of this period, he did obtain a long-term substitute position at his former high school.

4.1.4 Early Teaching Experiences: Teaching Boys to Become Men

After growing weary with the employment process and the need to provide adequate support for his family, Kevin decided to work for the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU), an organization that offers alternative educational services for local schools districts within Pittsburgh and surrounding areas. Through the AIU, Kevin was employed as a GED and social studies teacher. During his five year tenure with the AIU, Kevin was assigned to a boys detention home located in the Lincoln-Lemington section of the City of Pittsburgh. As a social studies teacher, Kevin believed that it was important that these young men acquire the skills necessary to become productive citizens. Thus, teaching his students a set of historical facts and concepts, seemed of less importance, and the majority of his instruction focused on teaching his students necessary life survival skills, some of the same very skills he acquired and learned through his experiences as a young man. Kevin explains, “We had a little history program. We had life skills program. They [the boys] needed to learn the life skills that would later help them when they left. They needed to make it out there.” While working at the boy’s detention home, Kevin also helped create a GED program for the young men. He felt that many of the young men needed guidance and a second chance to turn their negative experiences into positive outcomes. He pushed the young men to complete their GED, and enter trade schools and other training programs. These programs were designed to help the young men establish a means of employment and foster behaviors and attitudes of productive citizens. Kevin recalls:

We were convincing some of these guys that if you stay out on the street you’re not going to do much, so you might as well get your GED. So we designed our program around them passing the GED, and it worked pretty good. Because you know you recognize and realize that if they don’t do it now, they probably won’t succeed once they get back into

mainstream. So you're labeled a criminal, so what did you do? I accomplished my GED. And also there was along with the GED program, they had carpentry, plumbing, electricity program, and once they passed their GED, these guys were afforded state money to attend that school. And they could acquire a trade and a lot of them did that which was good.

Kevin's diligent work with the young boys was very rewarding. Many of these young men completed their GED and trade programs, yet Kevin longed for a break from the intense emotional and physical stress that resulted from the work with the boys' detention program. He kept his professional focus on acquiring a permanent teaching position in the Pittsburgh Public Schools district.

While working for the AIU, a social studies position in Pittsburgh Public Schools district became available, and Kevin was assigned to Allegheny High School. His time Allegheny was short lived, and he was later transferred to Riverdale High School. While at Riverdale High School, Kevin worked to increase his knowledge of history and teaching. He began taking various educational courses offered by the district, and local universities. He recalls, "My goal was to obtain all the knowledge necessary to be an effective teacher...I received my certification, and I used graduate course that were offered to learn more about teaching." At Riverdale High School, he taught for some time before he was later transferred to Weaver Middle School.

4.1.5 Successful Teaching Dedicated to Collaboration and Truth

Weaver Middle School, located in the Mount Washington area of the City of Pittsburgh was established in the early 1990's as an African American school. African American students from around the city were bused to Weaver. Although the school was considered an African

American school, the courses and curriculum did not truly reflect African American culture, other than the students attending the school was Black. While teaching social studies, Kevin worked with several colleagues to establish an African American curriculum for the students. This curriculum was created as a result of the African American community's demand for an equitable learning environment and experiences for African American students. The work that Kevin and other teachers started at Weaver would later propel into the creation of an African American history course offered in all Pittsburgh Public high schools for all students. Kevin explains:

They were trying to establish an African American curriculum. We went through and revised a lot of things. And some of it was used and some of it wasn't. It was later put in the schools, it started to put into play some African American history courses because of some demands the students and community had made.

Kevin's success with the curriculum at Weaver would serve as the foundation for the educational work he would continue to do with regards to the implementation of curriculum and pedagogy designed to address the needs of African Americans students.

Due to another district transfer in 1994, Kevin Roberts was assigned to teach social studies at Clifton High School, located on the Northside of Pittsburgh. Kevin recalls his teaching at Clifton as one of the most remarkable and memorable experiences in his professional career. Teaching in the community in which he grew up and lived proved to be an ideal situation. Kevin has always been dedicated to the families and people in the Pittsburgh community, and coming back home to teach the Northside youth was a special opportunity. He had developed and improved his instructional practice and acquired a wealth of knowledge and materials to share with his students. Also working with the various school sports team, in which he could mentor

and share some of his athletic expertise with a group of promising young men, was just as important as teaching. Upon arriving to Clifton, Kevin was placed in a unique situation in which he served as one of three African American male social studies teachers for the school. He, Ron Wright, and David Johnson were able to establish a brotherhood and professional support system. Describing this brotherhood, Kevin states:

That was a good experience, something real special. David Johnson and Ron Wright are lifelong friends. Just the opportunity to sit around with African American individuals, not necessarily do they have to be African Americans, but because they were, it was just like a brotherhood, a kinship, a bond that formed.”

During this time, Kevin says he learned the meaning of true collaboration and teacher reflection. Engaging in conversations with Ron Wright and David Johnson, allowed Kevin to reflect on his practice and also collaborate with other African American colleagues to establish a curriculum that was culturally relevant and culturally centered specifically for the students at Clifton High School. Describing his work at Clifton High School, Kevin recalls:

And we would have many conferences, I call them now, but actually it would start out as a five minute talk about something. We would look it up, and it would be three or four hours later. We had pulled out all kinds of materials, and we were showing each other, teaching each other, using materials. And would say this is how I do it, and this is what I do, and this is here. And then we'd share all those things in our little group. The African American history course became a whole lot stronger one because of the materials and things that we added to it. You know, in the book, they could suggest and say well here, this is that, but until you have the materials and can line it up, and put it together, and show that it's effective, then it doesn't mean anything. The reason why we decided that it

was effective because the kids sat up and started saying, “Woo, hoo, what is that, where is that coming from,” and those types of things and questions.

This collaboration that Kevin experienced supported his work in the classroom, but more importantly provided rich learning experiences for his students. He was able to present a variety of resources to help further engage his students in uncovering true history not described in the text and curriculum.

After teaching at Clifton for several years, Kevin was again transferred to Proctor High School, located in the South Hills area of Pittsburgh. While at Proctor, Kevin coached the boys’ basketball, football, and track teams. When discussing his teaching at Proctor, Kevin shared very few memories of this experience. He indicated that his teaching experiences at Proctor were some of the most difficult times. After leaving Clifton, a place where he daily collaborated with others, Proctor proved to be a completely stifling and oppressive situation. Kevin quickly realized that many of his colleagues and particularly, those in administration did not share his enthusiasm or support additions to the social studies curriculum and content.

I was at Proctor for about eight years. And the reason why I left Proctor because it was an administrator that we just did not get along. And in this system you have administrators that can literally make you miserable and stifle your ability to effectively teach. They control every aspect of your existence and can make you teach what they want you to teach. They can make it [teaching] heaven or hell, and I ended up in literal hell. So I chose to leave to stay true to what I knew was right.

Kevin spoke of how this particular administrator felt threatened by an educated nonconformist Black man. He noted that he had experienced racism several times in his past, so when issues with this particular person arose, he knew the true the underline problem and how to

respond to the oppression. He states, “This racist woman did not scare me. I have dealt with worse, so I was going to be me, and speak the truth, whether I was liked or not.” Despite the hostile environment, Kevin remained firm in his teaching. He also continued to coach and mentor, and was finally given the approval to transfer to his current teaching assignment.

Kevin Roberts is currently in his fifth year at Bradley High School. Bradley High School, located in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh, will serve as Kevin’s final teaching assignment until he retires. He serves as the department head of the social studies program and teaches various academic tracks of U.S. History and World Cultures. He also works with the young men, coaching boys’ basketball and track and field. He feels that his work as an educator and coach will continue, although it may not be in the classroom or school building, Kevin knows that he will always have the opportunity to share knowledge with the young people he encounters, whether, they are his future grandchildren or the local kids in the community. Describing his future work in education, Kevin explains:

I feel that I have worked with a lot of kids and hopefully helped them acquire some valuable lessons on how to succeed in life. Maybe they leave my class knowing a little more about themselves, about what it means to be Black and proud, and about how to survive and make it in the world today. Nothing comes free, you have to work hard for everything, and there are so many more opportunities today, that kids need to take advantage of. Teaching for me, has been my life, and I’m proud to have been a teacher that has not wavered in standing up and speaking the truth.

Kevin hopes that his teaching continues to inspire and challenge his students to work hard and achieve their full potential. He understands that the complexities of life, and designs his instruction in order to help his students acquire valuable lessons and skills that will help them

navigate and be successful in life. He continues to teach truth and through his teaching encourages students to not only know and celebrate their African and African American historical legacy, but also aspire to greatness.

4.2 A TEACHER'S STORY: RON WRIGHT

4.2.1 Early Experiences: In Pursuit of Academic Excellence

Ron Wright has worked as an educator for over eighteen years. Born in Washington, D.C. in 1953, the second oldest of eight, four brothers and three sisters, Ron recalls spending much of his early childhood in the Northwest area of Washington D.C. The Northwest section of the City consisted predominantly of working class African American families. In the 1950's, Washington D.C., the nation's capital, which contained the highest law making and governing bodies in the United States, dedicated to sustaining the liberties, freedoms, and rights of all citizens, was a glaring example of the contradictions that existed in American society. Segregation and discrimination served to divide and oppress African Americans. Despite the racial discrimination and oppression that existed, African Americans maintained close ties within their communities, and were able to acquire some levels of economic and educational success. This success was due largely to their support for each other. African Americans supported their local community businesses, schools, and churches.

In comparison to many cities within the United States, Washington D.C. was considered a progressive city. Although segregation was a nationwide political and social issue, African Americans in Washington D.C. prospered and established their own educational systems,

economic and political stability and social relations. Like in other cities that contained historically Black colleges and universities, the presence of Howard University provided African Americans in Washington D.C. a quality education that came with opportunity to enter the professional workforce. Howard University produced African American doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and other professionals that became a part of an emerging, successful African American working and middle class not only in Washington D.C., but throughout the country. Many African American families embraced the principles of upward mobility through education. For African Americans, education served as a means for social, economic, and political advancement. This notion that even in the midst of discrimination and racial segregation obtaining an education would provide opportunities for a better life was a key principle that African American parents emphasized daily to their children.

Like so many, Ron's parents embodied this philosophy. They were hard working and expected that their children excel in their schoolwork. Ron explains:

There was my family, there was expectation that you do well in school. I can say that it was a general expectation to do well academically, and there wasn't much discussed beyond well. What you're going to do once you get an education was not stressed; instead understanding that you have one and things will be better if you get one was important to my parents.

His parents valued education and viewed education as a tool for obtaining a better life. They encouraged their children to participate in activities that expanded their knowledge and exposure to new enriching experiences. Devout Catholics, the Wrights ensured that their children received quality academic and religious instruction and sent their children to the local Catholic elementary and high schools. Ron recalls, "Growing up, my family is a Catholic family, so it

was very important to our family that all of us got a Catholic education, so we went to the parochial schools.”

During Ron’s early educational years, he attended a neighborhood elementary Catholic in which the student population consisted of 99% African American students. As like with many schools in Washington D.C., despite the ruling of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, many states did not begin desegregating schools until the late 1960’s. Fearful of the racial implications and uncertain how integration would affect the school climate, many school administrators and state legislators attempted to stall the school integration process. In addition, many racist White parents, angered by school integration reform fought to maintain segregated school systems. Like Ron’s elementary school, numerous schools in Washington D.C. and throughout the United States remained segregated.

Reflecting back on his early educational experiences, Ron recalls his classroom experiences with two African American elementary teachers who emphasized academic excellence for their students. Ron attributes some of his teaching philosophy of setting high expectations for his students to his experiences with various African American teachers who instructed him. He explains, “As a young kid, the thing that I recall about Black teachers is that they consistently had high expectations of us. These Black teachers had high expectations. I guess that’s the thing that holds special for some of the Black teachers, particularly my fourth grade teacher, Sister Theresa Atkins.” Sister Theresa Atkins did not only set high expectations, but she served as an example of the unlimited opportunities and careers that her students could achieve. Serving as a nun, a position that was historically reserved for White women, Sister Atkins, redefined Ron’s understanding of society’s prescribed roles for African Americans and opened his eyes to unlimited possibilities. He recalls:

Sister Theresa Atkins was the first Black nun that most of us had ever seen to start off with that. So we were very curious and would ask where are you from? And she would say with a smile that she was from Africa, and we would say, no for real, where are you really from? We thought she was joking, I mean because she said she was from Africa. And honestly, I don't know if she really was or not, she never wavered one way or the other but even that experience, I think planted a seed where she represented a view of Africa that could have very well been my first view of Africa that had a positive connection to it. Anything other than that was either not spoken or negative.

Sister Atkins, not only illustrated the opportunities available for African Americans, she also served as a positive cultural representation of Africa to her African American students. By stating she has African, Sister Theresa caused Ron to consider his own personal connections with Africa, and provide an image of Africa that countered negative, traditional Eurocentric descriptions.

With the support of his parents and teachers, Ron excelled in his studies and enjoyed learning. He recalls some of the learning activities he participated in during the summers of his seventh and eighth years. Ron participated in the Higher Achievement Program (HAP). The HAP was sponsored by the local high and was designed to provide enrichment opportunities for boys from various Catholic schools around the city. Ron attended enrichment classes in math, English, and reading. On Saturdays, the students were taken on field trips to museums, plays, and other cultural activities. Ron recalls one particular activity that he experienced in the HAP that served to spark his interests in theater. He states:

One of the earlier experiences I had, it was great experience we did. We went on trips on Saturday...One of the earlier books that we were required and expected to read and have

a good grasp of, Lorraine Hansberry's book *Raisin in the Sun*. And given that we had a chance to see the play, which was different, it was in a theater.

This initial exposure to an African American work in both literary and artistic form would later become a critical aspect of Ron's teaching. Exposing his students to African American authors, and engaging his students in not only the written text, but making it come alive through a visual presentation or experience is constantly incorporated in his teaching. After attending HAP for two summers, Ron decided that he would join the high school baseball team. Unfortunately, unsuccessful in his endeavor, very disappointed, and too old to attend HAP, encouraged by his mother, Ron decided to return to HAP and see if he could work as a volunteer. Recalling his decision, he explains:

So I volunteered, they said that it wasn't a paying thing. They provided me with bus tickets to get back and forth from school to the program. In working with the students there in reading, and I wasn't an avid reader; I frankly did not like reading all that much, but just having that experience working with peers. I guess part of my role was peer tutoring among other things that I can trace back as to a landmark early experience that would eventually influence me into becoming a teacher later.

Volunteering with HAP did not only serve as something to do for the summer, but provided Ron's first experience in a teaching/mentoring capacity, and later one of the motivations behind his teaching.

4.2.2 Young Adult Years: An Exploration in African American Culture

After some years of living in Northwest D.C., in 1966, the family moved to Southwest, Washington, D.C. Growing in D.C., during the 1960's at the height of the civil rights movement

in America, Ron recalls hearing about the various events, sit-in, protests, and marches that were occurring around the country and even in his very city. He learned about the events from the television, newspapers, his siblings, and children in the neighborhood. His parents and other adults did not discuss these matters around the children, in order to shield them from some of the harsh realities of racism and discrimination, although it existed all around. Ron recollects two instances in which the outside events of the civil rights movement were mentioned in his home.

He recalls:

Now I can remember some of the major events in civil rights that were going on. As far as directly experiencing it, I mean they were not household talk when children were around. I remember it was a Saturday. I might have been about eleven or something, but CBS had this piece called *20th Century* and Walter Cronkite used to do this. I remember there was an interruption. It was a bulletin, and they mentioned something about this person named Malcolm X who I had never heard of being assassinated. I'll never forget it because that was all I thought it really kind of odd when they announced that bulletin that my father made only one remark and he said "good". And I thought it was odd that they're talking about somebody getting killed, and he's saying "good". I later came to understand why he with many other African Americans had a problem with Malcolm at the time. Also, I remember I was a library that was three blocks away and sometimes I'd go to the library because that was a little bit more quiet. I remember when I came home; it was dark. When I came in my parents were sitting in front of the television, and they were just looking at it, something that was going on, and they didn't say anything. I was just like, what's going on here. And King had been shot. And my parents didn't say much, but I could see that they were really upset.

These two tragic events and his parent's very different responses would become a topic of great interest for Ron. Ron reflects:

So those are like real eerie moments for me that just kind of stayed with me, and I know really peaked my interest in pursuing social studies...I did read the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. And it was just a big book that I could not put down. His experience and his evolution, I thought was a really profound thing to see. The rhetoric about him, whether good or bad, and for many people Malcolm was still a radical to a lot of people.

In later reflecting on his parent's response to these very similar, yet uniquely different experiences, Ron believed that like his parents, many African Americans admired King, and despised Malcolm X. He contributed these attitudes, partly to their lack of understanding regarding the positions and messages of the two men, but also the portrayal that each man received in the media. Whereas Malcolm X represented self-defense and was not intimidated by Whites, King represented cooperation and nonviolence, and many Whites were not as intimidated and accepted him. In his teaching, he would later examine these ideas regarding King and Malcolm and engage his students in critical analysis of their positions and representations to African Americans and the influence of the media in shaping the images of these men.

Ron believes that although his parents did not discuss political issues in the home, they were actively supporting change for African Americans in their own right. Encouraging their children to excel academically, and working hard to ensure a better life for their children, served as their form of activism. However, Ron does recall his father mentioning local civil rights leaders. He explains:

When I do think about on what positive recollections he had about any African American who was doing something that helped the cause, the names that come to mind would be

Roy Wilkins, leader of the NAACP. I didn't hear all that much about King spoken, but I didn't hear anything bad spoken. But it was Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, who was in charge of the Urban League at the time, and A. Phillip Randolph, and I chuckle a little bit. I mean A. Phillip Randolph was tough, he was very ahead of his time.

Hearing his parents speak of other leaders besides the well-known King, gave Ron a different perspective on the African American struggle for equality. He explains, "There were many people working on the front lines and behind the scenes for the rights of African Americans. I learned this early on that regardless of the presentation of the message, the message was the same, equality and civil rights for African Americans." From these experiences with his father and Ron would later realize that the civil rights movement and fight for equality consisted of many known and unknown participants, and although the cause and the goal were the same, the fight and process by which equality would come differed. This understanding of variety and difference in activism in the African American community is an important concept that Ron shares with his students.

As a young man growing up in Washington D., Ron recalls being exposed to all types of African American music. He really enjoyed listening to African American disc jockeys play the hottest new sounds, and his parents playing recordings of great jazz musicians. Although he wasn't an avid reader, music helped develop his reading skills and love for reading. He reflects on his development of a love for reading through music. He states:

I wasn't an avid reader, didn't care to read. In fact, part of my reading improved, basically I just got an interest in reading when I looked at music and album covers. Basically, I did like all kinds of music. My parents exposed us to all kinds of music. We knew who Louis Armstrong was growing up. We knew a little about Ella Fitzgerald,

Sarah Vaughn. We knew a little about Sammy Davis Jr. We knew about Wild Bill Davis, who nobody knows about, but was an avid organ player. He played jazz. But the thing that furthered my interest was when they started albums. I think the first time they started having albums where they put the lyrics on the inside of the album. That was great, but it wasn't until 68' when I really started reading the album lyrics. Sly and The Family Stone came out with an album called *Stand*, and the songs *Stand* and *You Can Make It If You Try*. *Stand* in particular was one of those albums; it was a personal and political piece. And what drew me to it was the music because those guys could play, and the song. Just looking at the lyrics, really, really reading it; just being able to read some of the lyrics just really meant a lot.

Ron's love for music helped him develop a love for reading, a necessary skill. Later, he would use this same approach in his teaching, using students' interests to engage them in the content and also incorporating his love of music into his classroom activities.

While Ron's love of music helped him develop his reading skills, it was the Jesuit teachers in his high school that encouraged him to excel in his studies. Ron's high school experience was similar, yet very different from his elementary school experiences. Unlike elementary school in which the majority of the student body was African American, in high school, African Americans made up about 20% of the student population. Being a minority in a predominantly White school was very different and a little unsettling at times. He recalls:

But one of the things that I will never, ever forget with my experience at a predominantly White school was it was either my junior or senior year. I remember it wasn't even a class activity. I think they called maybe the tenth and eleventh graders to watch this film on Black history. Bill Cosby narrated the CBS produced piece called *Black History, Lost*,

Stolen or Strayed. And the setting was in an elementary school classroom, and it was a Black teacher and there were Black students in the class. They were doing like fourth grade stuff, and he just mentioned some people, you might not know these people. But you know they were responsible for certain things like Dr. Daniel Hale Williams. These people made contributions to everybody, but you won't find them in your history books. This film touched on Black people who were strongly influenced by not only popular culture, the media, but history as well. And in one part, he reads excerpts from a 1950's textbook by two Pulitzer Prize winning historians who referred to Black people as Sambo. One of the things that he did he showed an excerpt from *Birth of a Nation* and how things were portrayed. One of them was how African American legislators were portrayed, and it showed all those negative things, and then it showed the portrayal of the Klu Klux Klan. In this case, the Black people were incompetent, ignorant, ape-like and all this. The Klu Klux Klan was the heroes and they saved the South.

Despite the courageous message about African Americans and their accomplishments, and exposing the negative racist ideologies of White America that Bill Cosby was sharing, Ron recalls feeling very uncomfortable watching the film with his White classmates. His classmates' laughter and insensitive comments devalued what should have been a good experience, and at the time he couldn't understand why his teachers showed the film. Later, he realized that it was an attempt to address some of the racial inequalities that exist in the United States, but unfortunately failed miserably. He would later draw from this experience in his teaching, and use it as a reminder of the importance of students being sensitive in their interactions with material that is addressed. He also learned that there is a need for a well developed lesson for discussion and reflection when controversial topics are introduced.

4.2.3 College Years: Becoming a Scholar of African American History and Religion

Excelling in his academics, upon graduation from high school, Ron received a scholarship to Long Island University C.W. Post campus. In 1971, Ron moved away from home and entered college at the ripe age of seventeen. Long Island, New York was a much smaller and quieter community, than Washington D.C. Ron spent the majority of his college life on campus, and rarely ventured into New York City. He preferred Long Island. The university and residents were progressive and Ron does not recall any incidents of racism or ill treatment from the White residents, professors, or students.

College was a new experience that provided many educational and life experiences that developed Ron into the teacher that he is today. At Post, Ron was able to increase his knowledge about African American history and the social and racial problems that plagued the United States. In two particular courses, Problems in African American History and Social Issues: Racism, he studied the systemic conditions behind history and racism and institutional racism. Ron recalls:

And that's it not about simply your prejudices, and it's that there are systems in place that make racism what it is and which make it difficult for many people to address and deal with it, because they look at it on such a personal and individual level. When you look at the history of the United States and look at just what the full dimension of that is institutionally you have to look at education. You have to look at banking. You have to look at public policy. You have to look at all of the things, and if you don't you're not dealing with the real issue behind it. And so the Problems in African American History class really prepared me to look more in depth at social issues and racism.

Understanding how institutions served to maintain racism and oppression was an enlightening, dis-heartening, and frustrating. This understanding really changed Ron's perceptions about society and he incorporates this understanding in his teaching. Having his students understand how institutional racism affects them and ways to achieve despite the racism that exists is one of his primary instructional goals.

While at Post, Ron formed valuable relationships with several teachers and students at the university. Katherine James, an academic advisor worked closely with Ron and taught him many valuable life lessons. Describing Katherine James, Ron explains:

She is a teacher, I mean she promoted education and her teaching involved not just valuing education, but really using what you have to empower and help other people...She was the type of person who would encourage students. If you had book money and you weren't going to use it all, there were students who did not get money, who weren't on scholarship, who were in need. So she would find out who they were, and we would help them along the way. So there were some life skill pieces that went with Katherine that really, really made a big difference.

While at Post, Ron also served as a peer tutor for incoming freshmen. Helping the new students navigate life at Post was a rewarding experience, and learning how to effectively share his knowledge and teaching freshmen the ropes of college life helped hone his presentation skills that he would later employ in his teaching. Ron appreciates the lessons he learned from Katherine James and others during his years at Post. After completing his B.A. in Sociology and Criminal Justice, Ron was accepted into a joint degree program with the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1977, Ron moved to Pittsburgh and began graduate school. He and his wife settled on the Northside of Pittsburgh. An ethnically diverse community, separated by various neighborhoods, the Northside would serve as their home. In the late 1970's the Northside of Pittsburgh was a thriving working class community. Many of the ethnic neighborhoods were beginning to become more integrated, although tensions between the races remained. Ron and his wife settled in the Manchester neighborhood. Manchester is a small neighborhood community, predominantly African American located close to Bidwell Presbyterian Church. Manchester served as a perfect place to settle and raise a family.

The graduate program Ron entered was very rigorous, requiring two years of seminary study, and two years of social work study. In seminary, Ron studied Martin Luther King, Jr. and his theology. He was also introduced to Black liberation theology and how it connected to King's work. These new insights gave Ron a new perspective on the work of King and Malcolm.

Recalling his experiences in seminary, Ron states:

And from my seminary experience it just got me to understand and then look at ways, which years later, I would develop to get students to look at King in a different way and Malcolm X as well. Many people know little about King after 1963 and many far less after the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Very few people know about post-Mecca Malcolm. And from my experience at seminary and just really holding on to some of these things, when it came time that I ended up teaching social studies, particularly teaching U.S. history and African American history, there was a direction that I could come to with students, where they just even get a glimpse of, yeah there's more to this guy.

While completing his MSW training, Ron took an internship at Schuman Center, a detention home located in the Lincoln-Lemington section of Pittsburgh and the Urban Youth

Action (UYA). Ron doesn't recall many experiences working at Schuman Center. At the time, the program was just starting; however, he recalls many positive experiences with UYA. This provided another opportunity for Ron to work directly with African American youth, preparing them for employment. Reflecting on his work at with the UYA, Ron states:

The thing that was good about UYA was that it afforded teaching experience for me because during the year I worked with students related to career awareness, career preparation, and career employment. And there were classes that they had to take for that, and so I worked with those students around that. Again, I had to come up with some creative and different ways in getting students involved.

Also while completing his seminary training, Ron worked as an intern at Bidwell Presbyterian Church, located on the Northside of Pittsburgh. At Bidwell, Ron served as the coordinator of afterschool programming at the Bidwell Education, Music, and Recreation Center. The church's mission statement "Faith without Works is Dead" attracted Ron, and from his experiences at Post, Ron knew service to others and the community was important. Recalling his decision to work at Bidwell Ron notes:

Bidwell was very much involved in community organizations. If you're going to be in the church, if you're going to be a minister in the church, you can do certain things that relate to their extended mission. You were involved with things in the community, so I was on the board of the Manchester Citizen's Corporation. They were involved with housing renovation and new home ownership. I met with people who would put in requests for having some of the older homes refurbished. When some new homes came up, I was involved in a lot of meetings for that, and there was still a part of the church side,

organizing Sunday school.” So it clearly was an activist piece that was as much church as it was service.

This commitment to the community and activism would represent a vital part of his teaching philosophy. This same participation in community affairs would later help Ron establish relationships with those students and parents that lived and worked in the community.

After completing the M.D. and M.S.W. program, Ron was hired as a drug abuse counselor for Outreach Teen and Family Services. He continued his work at Bidwell and on Sundays, he would travel around Pittsburgh and surrounding cities, preaching. Also, Ron worked part time at Shuman Center, conducting Sunday services for the students. Maintaining so many jobs throughout the city was very taxing, but Ron needed to financially provide for his family. In 1991, Ron’s running would come to an end. He recalls reading about the University of Pittsburgh’s Master’s of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program. Ron explains:

There was an article in the paper that came up about this new fellowship program that Pitt was going to put together. And the point behind the program was to see if they could get African American teachers. African American people who were in other professions to consider teaching as a second profession. So I saw that in the paper, my wife saw it also, and when we talked about it, and really looked at just the number of things that I was involved with from high school, and then as a drug abuse counselor, and then some of the stuff with Bidwell, and these other things. I had experiences with some community organization, with administrative things, with counseling one on one. The thing that I was most excited about was teaching and training, and that’s what did it and made me decide to enter the program.

Although the expectation of the MAT program required a full time commitment, Ron maintained his current employment in order to support his family. He had found his calling, teaching, and if he could make it through this one year program, he would be the best teacher that any student could ever want.

4.2.4 Surviving the MAT Program: Learning How to Teach

As a student in the MAT program, Ron was assigned an internship at Bradley High School. Bradley is located in the predominantly Homewood section of Pittsburgh. It is considered a neighborhood school, and the majority of the students and residents of Homewood are African American. Homewood in the early 1990's, like many African American communities was beginning to suffer a major decline. The drug culture, particularly crack and heroine, was seeping through the community destroying many lives, families, and homes. Amidst this turmoil, Bradley served as a beacon of hope for many young African Americans, trying to escape the negative influences of the community and establish a better life. The teachers and staff were dedicated to their students, and encouraged academic success.

At Bradley, Ron taught U.S history and Economics. He immediately realized that much of the materials and resources in the textbooks did not address his African American students, and Ron supplemented the material with several personal resources he collected over the years. After a semester at Bradley, Ron was transferred to Clifton High School on the Northside of Pittsburgh. At Clifton, Ron taught the Law magnet, U.S. history, and Civics. While teaching in his internship at Clifton, Ron recalls his experience with the PALS (Personalized Academic Learning Styles program. This program was designed for ninth and tenth grade students. English,

Math, and Social Studies teachers would collaborate on planning and instruction for the students.

Ron explains:

It [PALS] really opened the door for some collaboration and planning within subject areas too. So purposely the social studies and English were back to back. So if there were some things that you as a social studies teacher and the English teacher could work out that would involve each teacher working the content and the assignments, and the students' products would complement each other. So that experience at Clifton really afforded me an opportunity to be and see just a number of different ways, beyond what I would learn in graduate school that I could use and implement that would make the teaching. It was nice because it was a built in piece where students saw that teachers communicated with each other. Students also saw that teachers have a vested interest in them beyond their own subject area.

This experience with collaboration with other teachers would continue to be a key aspect of Ron's teaching.

4.2.5 Teaching Experiences: Working to Improve the Quality of Life and Education for African American Students

After completing his internship, a position in the social studies department at Clifton opened, and Ron became a permanent member of the teaching staff. Ron has taught at Clifton for eighteen years, and currently serves as the instructional leader for the social studies department. He teaches various levels of African American history and World Cultures.

Reflecting on his decision to teach at Clifton and maintain his residence on the Northside, Ron notes that his visibility in the community has an impact on how the students and parents

view the work that he does. As a member of the community, he shares the experiences, issues and concerns of the community and is able to work for his community. Ron explains:

Well, I tell you something, living in the community that you teach, it makes a difference. I found in some of the work I've done previously with social service organizations, church, I found that really in the community it does have some advantages. Students see you, parents see you, and there's a few that some parents have, which is a real key part of this whole thing. And students have when they see that you are more than a teacher, and that part of living in the community makes a big difference. It has some rewards in how students and how some parents view what I do working with their children. I remember there was a nuisance bar in Manchester, and it was near the elementary school, near Manchester Elementary School. There were just a number of appeals to try to get it closed, so the Manchester Citizen's Corporation and Bidwell Church were involved with it. And just having a series of protest at certain times, and we carried signs. Sometimes we had students involved with it. And I'd say within maybe six months, from the time we started protesting, the bar was closed. Because it was clearly a problem, and it was within a block of the school, and that was an issue.

Ron's students and parents have a deeper level of respect and trust in him, and this is primarily due to residing and also working in his community. Working for improvements in the community has always been a top priority for Ron. He has constantly supported initiatives that promote civil rights and equality. Ron understands that racism exists and too often African Americans are victims of discrimination, whether blatant or covert. Ron recalls his own personal encounter with racism, and the humiliation and helplessness he felt. Ron describes:

It was Christmas Eve, my son and I was walking out of Kauffman's. He and I were walking and we just walked out the store, and you know, there was a crowd of people Downtown. And the next thing I know, I was thrown up against the wall, my hands were put behind my head, and I just said, what's the matter officer? My son was just standing there looking, and really he was looking up. I said, 'what's the problem? What's the matter officer?' And the guy just said, 'just stay here.' And I said, 'I just purchased something here.' I had a bag in my hand, there's a receipt in my pocket. He said okay, just stay here. He just held me there. Around the same time, buses were going by, crowds of people walking, and I could just hear one of my students, uh, oh there goes Mr. Smith. I don't even know how long it took, but the guy let me go. He said, you know, I'm sorry for the mix up, but they just got some call that somebody matching your description took something out of the store. So I was like, yeah, okay. I've seen worse things happen, but I mean that's what the guy said, and I didn't resist. I just talked to him nicely, and my son was there, and I said okay, alright, here's a lesson for you.

Ron says he was lucky that he didn't lose his temper or impulsively say something that would have angered the police officer. Experiencing this blatant racist act, forced Ron to face the harsh realities of the injustices that exists. This experience also motivated him to teach his African American students the important life skills and behaviors needed to survive in such a society.

Over the years, Ron Wright has participated in a variety of district programs in an attempt to improve his instruction and students learning. He recalls working with the English instructional leader, Ms. Amanda Smith in Investing Now, a program sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh. Investing Now is a summer program designed to provide high school students with intense academic and enrichment activities. Ron and Renee team taught for four

summers developing lessons and activities that would engage the students in a variety of writing experiences on different subjects of student interest. Ron's recalls how his experience working with Ms. Smith enhanced his teaching. He states, "Honestly it was the best teaching experience I had ever had. What was funny though was that we would come up with these pieces, with these themes and topics. The thing that I learned from her was how you can really foster student creativity in their learning." Ron also recalls participating in collaborative work with the Manchester's Craftsman Guild. Social studies was one of four subject areas that worked with teachers at the Manchester's Craftsman Guild to develop unit projects that correlated to with the content. Students divide their class time between Clifton and the Manchester's Craftsman Guild. Describing this experience, Ron states:

But what was nice about it though, and the thing that was interesting, you started making comparisons with students that you had for a whole month, with students that you had for only three weeks. More often than not, the students that we had for only three weeks were doing as well or better than the students we had for month's time. Part of it was because it was just another dimension to what they were learning and seeing ways they could apply it with some projects that they were coming up with that they were doing at the Manchester's Craftsman Guild.

Observing the increase in the level of engagement of his students, Ron realized that incorporating projects and activities, similar to those that the students developed at the Manchester's Craftsman Guild, provides students a variety of methods to demonstrate their learning and assesses their overall competence.

Ron also reflects on his collaborative experiences with two other African American male teachers, Kevin Roberts and David Johnson that also worked in the social studies department at Clifton High School. Describing his experiences with Kevin and David, Ron explains:

This was a unique experience. Working with these men allowed me to develop an abundance of resources and materials for my class. We examined the social studies courses we taught and the materials offered, and we shared our materials with each other. The one piece that was so great about this experience was that I had the opportunity to collaborate with some African American brothers who shared many of the same experiences, beliefs and ideas about history and learning that I did. I learned so much from them, and it was so good to have that experience. I don't know if I will ever have one like that again.

Today, Ron Wright continues to collaborate with various educators. This past summer, Ron worked with a team of historians, researchers, and educators from the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University and the district, to develop a culturally relevant comprehensive curriculum for the district's U.S. and African American history courses. In this new curriculum, students are exposed to a variety of historical resources and primary source documents. Literature from a variety of sources, music, historical photographs, and other resources were added to the curriculum and provide students with a multiple perspective account and view of history. The course is designed to allow for true student investigation of history. Ron explains:

The curriculum is designed to just really hammer out some questions related to any area of African American history. One of the things is to take a look at some of the intricacies that are really important around this history. Part of it has to do with points of view. A

focus on historiography, how has the story been told, and how do we examine the changes behind how this story has been told, and how come there's been change. Some of it comes because of new evidence; some of it comes because the people finally acknowledging and recognizing evidence that has always been there, but has been typically ignored. To maintain a certain racial superior bias in some cases, many cases. Yet others that have not had that racial bias, look at how do you tell the story, and how do you piece together certain evidence to draw certain conclusions. So that's the curriculum side to it. The student side to this curriculum thing is how do you get students to work on skills where they can uncover what some of this history is. That's the doing history part that I mention. How do you support students where they can think as they read, recognize different points of view.

Ron Wright continues to teach at Clifton, and will remain at the school until he retires. Adding to his list of responsibilities, Ron also mentors MAT interns from the University of Pittsburgh. Ron is thrilled to work with new intern teachers trying to help them develop their craft. Sharing his insights and resources, Ron hopes to impact his interns in such a way that they are constantly seeking new ways to improve their craft and overall student learning and achievement. He encourages his intern teachers to incorporate culturally relevant materials and instructional strategies in the classroom. Ron's love for teaching remains, and he is excited each time students are able to uncover history for themselves and finally reach that "ah, ha" moment, in which they understand how history is shaped, constantly being created and evolving.

4.3 A TEACHER'S STORY: AMANDA SMITH

4.3.1 Growing Up: Understanding Family and Community

Ms. Amanda Carter has worked as an educator for over fifteen years. She was born in 1962 in Ambridge, Pennsylvania a small town located approximately fifteen miles outside of Pittsburgh. An industrial town known for supplying quality steel for bridges, Ambridge boasts of a legacy of high quality steel production, which has brought wealth and stability to the city and its residents for many decades. With the decline of the steel industry in Western Pennsylvania in the 1980's, many Ambridge companies and residents did not suffer significant losses and retained their employment due to the specialized nature of the City's steel manufacturing and resources.

Ambridge is a unique and quaint city that is ethnically diverse and consists of predominantly middle class people. Describing Ambridge Amanda notes:

The town is a place where you have Serbians; you have Ukrainians; you have Romanians. You have Polish; you have Greek; you have Greek Orthodox, then you would have the distinction of Black. So I grew up in a place that wasn't necessarily Black-White. It was Blacks, yes, but then the Whites divided into their ethnic groups...For every ethnic group you had a church, and for every church, you had what we call beer gardens or bars. So when you had that going on, every ethnic group belonged to a particular church and belonged to their particular bar, so everyone had the same stuff. You just didn't sometimes mingle.

Many of the residents of Ambridge reside in their ethnic neighborhoods and maintain their ethnic traditions. In Ambridge the social tensions that existed did not often involve issues of race; instead tensions around ethnicity seemed to prevail. Amanda recalls that many of her

childhood friends were permitted to play with her and not others who were of a different ethnicity. She states:

Growing up there [Ambridge] you sometimes didn't have the sense of racial issues but at the same time you would have to in that area, but then you have the issue of my girlfriend who was Serbian, whose "Bubba", which is grandmother, would not permit someone who was Ukrainian in her house, but may have let me slide in.

This distinction between ethnic groups was of great concern, while racial issues seemed to only enter the discussion when pressed by outside and state government officials. Amanda recalls the city having to implement a new school integration policy, something that was a greater issue in many other cities, such as Pittsburgh, but seemed of less importance in Ambridge. In response to state demands, schools were ordered to bus children so that each school in the area could meet the school integration requirements. Amanda recalls:

I remember when we had to quote integrate, and we only had twenty Black families. It ended up being that at each school regardless of where you live we have one Black child at that school. So I got shipped to elementary school that was the next town over because there were no Blacks there. And since they considered it all Ambridge Area High School, you have to have a Black here; you have to have a Black there, which is dumb. It was literally something dumb. So I spent one year at another school that I probably passed six elementary schools to get to this school that was like twenty minutes away. Where I could have walked to the rest, but taking a bus twenty minutes away was just bizarre. Then they just solved the problem by making massive elementary schools for everyone.

This was Amanda's first experience dealing with issues around her race in her community. Being singled out for her race didn't seem to bother her as much as the inconvenience of having to leave her neighborhood and travel a significant distance to school.

Living in the predominantly European town of Ambridge did not provide Amanda with many opportunities to engage in many African American cultural activities. The adjacent town, Aliquippa, provided a large African American community where Amanda would spend with family and friends. Describing her experiences with her family in Aliquippa Amanda states:

Across the river is a town called Aliquippa, where my mom is from. Which is kind of the reverse of Ambridge, so my Black experience came from that. There was not so much in Ambridge, per se, but my Black experience came from my mom's side of the family, and just going across the river every summer and things like that.

For Amanda, Aliquippa was a place where she really learned many cultural values and felt a part of a larger African American community. In Aliquippa, she wasn't considered extraordinary or out of place, instead she experienced a greater level of comfort around those who shared many cultural similarities values, and ideals.

Amanda's parents were hardworking people who provided a home for their only daughter and also the children of other family members. Although, Amanda was an only child, she grew up with several cousins, whom her mother raised as her brothers and sisters. She served as big sister to three brothers and one sister. She recalls when her cousins came to live with her.

Describing the new additions to her family, Amanda explains:

Then my aunt had two children, Didi and Maurice, and my mom got them when Didi was three and Maurice was in tow. So I was just going into high school when they came into the house. So all that other time I was raised by myself, basically then these little

creatures come along, and my mom ended up raising them. And so my aunt had some more children. And then she got Gale when he was a year and Kerry when she was six months. So we were raised as siblings even though we knew that they have a mother. She [Amanda's aunt] was always Mommy and my mom was Mama. My mom I think, tried to compensate for them not having a mother by being more lenient on them than she was with me, but I was their enforcer.

Amanda did not mind being a big sister and “the enforcer” to her younger siblings. She disciplined her siblings, and served as a role model for them. She understood her mother's desire to help and provide a safe and caring home for her cousins, and helping family, regardless of their circumstances was not an option, but a requirement. To Amanda's mother, family went beyond the immediate members to include cousins, nieces, aunts, uncles, neighborhoods, people on the street, and whoever was in need of assistance. Many of the same principles that her mother practiced would later carry over into her teaching. Helping and supporting students in their academic work as well as their personal lives is an important part of Amanda's work as a social studies teacher.

Amanda's parents also encouraged her to excel in her studies. Amanda was a good student and enjoyed school. She has fond recollections of her teachers, except for her first grade teacher, Ms. Glen. Ms. Glen was a teacher who recognized and supported the efforts of the bright and attentive students, while those who required extra attention and support, she would often overlook. Ms. Glen tracked her students based on their abilities, and gave preference to those who excelled academically. Although one of Ms. Glen's brightest students, Amanda thought that Ms. Glen's actions were unfair and mean. Amanda recalls, Ms. Glen, her first grade teacher:

We used to be in rows of deer, rabbits, and turtles. Every week we would do a timed math or reading test. And based on how you performed or how Ms. Glen felt you were going to perform, you would sit in the assigned row. A deer was based on speed and how well you would do on the test. The deer were the best, and then the rabbits. And a turtle was slow and not very good academically. And she would let the deer line up first and do special things, and the turtles, they always lined up last. I thought this was wrong, but I did like being a deer.

To Amanda, this practice of separation based on academic ability, and Ms. Glen's unfair treatment was a damaging, unspoken practice of educational practice. She was often separated from her friends, and desperately wanted her friends to learn and enjoy the privileges that she received as a member of the "deer" group. Describing one friend who was not a member of Amanda's group, she states:

I remember David Lamb, who was always a turtle. But when you look back, he would have been a deer, but once you got to your place, it wasn't like she [Ms. Glen] was going to bring you up. Me and David were cool. We had always been cool, I think we were in preschool together, and I was like man, you're supposed to be with the group. Everybody together, but because he was a turtle, he couldn't be with the group even though he was my friend.

Early as elementary school, Amanda received her first experiences with the disparities that existed in the American educational system. She quickly learned that excelling in her school work provided special opportunities and privileges. Also, she realized that most importantly teachers respected and were willing to help students that were academically successful. These experiences with Ms. Glen would later influence Amanda's teaching philosophy, and

understanding that teachers should respect student varying abilities and provide teaching that supports their development of at all academic levels.

4.3.2 High School Experiences: Working to Achieve Academic Success despite Tragedy

Amanda also recalls two other teachers who were significant figures in her high school educational experiences. Mr. Green and Mr. Tyson emphasized high academic achievement and hard work. Although each set high academic standards and demanded intense course work, Mr. Green's teaching style differed greatly from his counterpart, Mr. Tyson. Describing Mr. Green's teaching, Amanda recalls, "Mr. Green was one of those teachers who you didn't realize you were learning and working so hard. You just be working and you'd be like, I did all this?" Unlike Mr. Green, Mr. Tyson demanded hard work and students were aware that they were working at full capacity all the time. She explains:

Mr. Tyson, he taught me Calculus. He pushed me really, really hard, and he never allowed me to slack. He didn't give you a break not one time. It was my junior year, I had to drop my brothers and sisters off at daycare, then I would come to school late. He literally went to the principal and said I could not be a contender for the national honor's society. I was like, Mr. Tyson, you know my situation. And he said, "So you want me to excuse this behavior? No get up earlier and do what you have to do. He didn't cut me a break no way, but in all the times I recall now he was just like, 'Do you understand no one's going to give you a break, no one is going to...He was the one teacher who prepared me for the slap in the face. Because you don't think the slap in the face is going to come but it came and I was like, oh Mr. Tyson done slapped me so many times so hard that I'm okay, you ain't got nothing on me; I got you.

Although Amanda preferred the teaching style of Mr. Green, the tough stance and no nonsense teaching approach of Mr. Tyson prepared Amanda for the challenges and life experiences that she would later encounter. The teaching styles and her experiences with Mr. Green and Mr. Tyson would also shape Amanda's teaching philosophy regarding high expectations for quality student work.

Amanda did not only excel in her academic studies, she was also an excellent athlete and participated in a variety of sports throughout her middle and high school years. She participated in every sport offered in the schools as well as various intramural and summer league programs. She received numerous awards and honors for her athleticism, but by her senior year of high school, Amanda ended her sports participation. Maintaining a high grade point average, the desire to attend college, became the primary focus for Amanda, and sports were placed aside.

Also, during this time in her life, tragedy struck. Towards the end of her junior year, Amanda's father died. To this day, Amanda's mother contends that he died of a blood disease. Amanda believes that her father, who drank excessively, died of sclerosis of the liver. She recalls:

The man drank himself to death. That's a difference than oh my dad died. My dad drank and everyone knew. Everyone in the universe knew that my dad drank to that point. I can remember, I'm thirteen years old and the police are calling the house for me to come get my dad and drive the car home so it'll be out of the middle of the street. And my mom wouldn't even tell me that my dad died of sclerosis of the liver. I knew he drank; I knew what that was.

It was not until the following year, when she attended a school field trip to the morgue and witnessed a cadaver of a person with sclerosis of the liver, did she realize the true nature of

her father's death. Disappointed with her mother's inability to tell her the truth concerning her father's death, Amanda and her mother's relationship became strained, and Amanda vowed that when she established her own family there would be no secrets, and she would always tell the truth regardless of how difficult it may be for others to hear and accept.

4.3.3 College Years: Exploring New Ideas and the Big City

Upon completing high school, Amanda decided to attend Rutgers University. Attending college was not an option, and it was expected that she continue to excel in her collegiate studies. Many members in her family graduated from various institutions of higher learning. Amanda's mother graduated from nursing school and two of her aunts were college graduates. Amanda recalls her family's influence on her decision to attend Rutgers University. She states, "Going to college was something that was non-negotiable. They [family members] submitted a list of acceptable schools, and said this is where you can go. So I went to Rutgers; they had an engineering program and I picked Rutgers." Choosing to major in engineering seemed a likely choice, considering her academic abilities in math and science.

Amanda continued to excel in her studies, and after her first year, received a scholarship to intern at Babcock and Wilcox, a long-standing successful steel company. She returned home to Ambridge excited to begin her new job. The culture and requirements of working in the steel mill was nothing new for Amanda. She quickly purchased her steel toe boots and hard hat, only to learn that her work was not in the trenches, but instead in a cubicle located in the front office. Disappointed by her assignment Amanda expresses:

Being in the steel mill was no issue. You got lock out procedures and which line we're going to run on today and you're going to do the electrical lockouts and all that. So I'm

ready and they were like, come on. I'm thinking we're going down on the floor, and I'm getting ready to get in and they're like no, you're going over here. I want to do the lockouts. No, I walked in the room, and there are these cubicles and bald heads. All I saw was white shirts, white bald heads and cubicles.

Amanda quickly realized that the field of engineering was a White male dominated profession. She would always be the minority, and although the work was difficult and challenging, it did not excite her. She didn't want to deal with the issues of being a double minority, an African American woman in a profession in which she would experience some racial and gender bias. After completing her internship, Amanda returned to Rutgers and began pursuing other educational interests.

During her second year of college, Amada neglected her engineering studies and decided to pursue more radical ideas. She joined the campus socialist party, and began engaging in a variety of socialist party sponsored activities. She explains, "I was always and didn't know I was as radical as I was because at that same time at Rutgers there were some things going on, on campus. I was like power to the people, so I'm listening now's the time for me to learn. I went to some meetings, participated in some protests. I signed on to the socialist party." Taking a variety of courses, by her senior year of college, Amanda decided to double major in psychology and political science.

After graduating from college, unsure of her career aspirations, Amanda began working for a large investment firm. Working in the investment industry was financially rewarding, but morally questionable. Amanda felt that her work as an investment sales representative was in some instances, deceitful, and she didn't feel morally right selling false hopes to her clients. She describes, "Those people [investment sales associates] are wicked. I have some wickedness in

me, but those people, I'm not going to sell you something that's a lie. I can sell it to some people, but I can't sell it to everybody. Because you know, it'd be like my grandmother, and you shouldn't do that." Unable to embrace the cut-throat culture of investment sales, Amanda eventually sought out other employment opportunities.

Returning back to Ambridge was always an option, but Amanda enjoyed the bright lights, fast times, and excitement of the big city. Living on the border of New Jersey and New York, Amanda experienced a level of independence and adventure. There was always something to do or somewhere to go, and the party never stopped. Amanda and her friends would often frequent the various happening scenes and clubs of New York City. Describing her experiences in the city, Amanda recalls:

I loved New Jersey; I loved New York. I lost my mind. I went all over the city. I could be whoever I wanted to be and no one cared. This was the time period of Studio 54. The club scene, I loved the club scene. You could be lost. I didn't have to worry about this; all I had to do was shake my little butt, and I could dance. Dancing was always there. I could dance with my eyes closed and no one cared how you danced.

Hanging out with friends and having a great time, and dancing the night way, Amanda could forget the cares of the world. Partying, particularly dancing was a means of coping with the troubled experiences in her life. The death of her father and the strained relationship with her mother weighed heavily on Amanda, and she constantly sought to escape those issues.

Amid the excitement and thrills of independence, Amanda's priorities drastically changed. Expecting a daughter and in troubled relationship, Amanda decided to return to Ambridge. She weighed the options of remaining in New Jersey and completing her Master's degree in psychology or returning to Pittsburgh to pursue a Master's in teaching. With little

family and assistance in New Jersey, she decided that it was best to raise her child around a caring and supportive family. In addition, the Master's degree program at the University of Pittsburgh presented Amanda not only the opportunity to receive an advanced degree, but also a teaching certificate.

4.3.4 Early Teaching Experiences: Supporting Student Success by Addressing Issues of Race and Class

Upon leaving New Jersey in 1988, Amanda decided not to return home to Ambridge, but instead moved to Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh was the closest comparison to the city life that Amanda left behind. With the responsibilities of motherhood and the desire to work in the field of education, Amanda began searching for employment in various school districts in Pittsburgh and the surrounding suburbs. Without delay, she was immediately hired by Pittsburgh Public Schools to work as a paraprofessional, serving as a teacher's aide in various classrooms. The next year, Amanda was promoted to serve as director of the district's New Futures Program. The New Futures Program was designed to provide ninth grade students with additional academic and enrichment experiences to help prepare students for college and future professional careers. Amanda served as the New Futures Career Center director at Clifton and Princeton high schools. While helping students prepare for college, and exposing students to a variety of professional career opportunities, Amanda developed her desire to teach. The work with the students was very rewarding, and encouraging them to pursue their dreams through education would become a central element of her teaching philosophy. She worked with students at all academic levels. Oftentimes Amanda would reflect back on her experiences with Ms. Glen, and ponder the importance of supporting students at all levels. She explains:

The deer and the rabbits were going to do okay. And the deer, well they were going to be successful; teachers like Ms. Glen would make sure of that, but turtles, if they even finished school, didn't have a chance. And teachers like Ms. Glen didn't care, and if you were a turtle, you knew she didn't. The good thing about my work with the New Futures Program was that I could help some turtles make it. And not only just make it, but do well in life.

To Amanda, working with the New Futures program, was an opportunity for her to provide hope and motivation to those that didn't have any support. After three years as director of the New Futures program, Amanda decided to apply for the Master's of Arts in Teaching (MAT) social studies education program at the University of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Public School district established a partnership which encouraged African Americans to apply to the program and complete their year-long student teaching internship within the district schools. Upon successful completion of the program, if available, African American teacher candidates were offered teaching placements in the district.

Amanda knew that she wanted to teach, and working in the New Futures program, basically confirmed what she had felt all along. Reflecting on her motivations for becoming a teacher Amanda states, "Honestly, I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was young, but I had gotten distracted because I was told I was too smart to be a teacher. When you're in high school, the smart people are encouraged to be the doctors, lawyers, engineers, not teachers." For many of the influential people in her life, teaching served as a mediocre profession, and would not showcase her intellect and abilities, thus Amanda was discouraged from pursuing her true calling. After several years of denying her passion to pursue other areas of study, it was not until much

later that Amanda realized that she was destined to be a teacher. She completed the MAT program and in 1994 began working at Princeton High School.

Princeton High School is located in the Carrick community on Southside of Pittsburgh. The Carrick community is located between the South Hills and the lower part of the Southside section of Pittsburgh. German and Eastern European immigrants originally immigrated to the Southside and worked in the various glass and steel mills located in the area. In the mid 1960's, with the decline in steel and glass production, some Southside residents remained in their homes or relocated to newly redeveloped and growing communities, such as Carrick located on the outer edge of the City of Pittsburgh.

Princeton High School is a neighborhood school that offers a single magnet program, the Business Technology Academy. The majority of the students that attend Princeton are from the Southside community. Princeton High School's student population consists of predominantly White students, consisting of over sixty percent that come from middle and working class families. African American students, the second largest racial group, make up about twenty-five percent of the student population. During the time that Amanda taught at Princeton, the majority of the White students came from single family homes and some trailer park neighborhoods. The majority of African Americans students that attended the school came from two low-income housing projects located on the Southside.

The socioeconomic and racial dynamics often created tensions between Whites and African American students. These racial tensions were often fueled by the parents of the students, and even the teachers of the school were not immune to the hostility that existed. Amanda recalls an experience with a student's parent. She describes, "My second year there, I literally had a parent say that they didn't want a nigger teaching their class. I laughed so hard.

Because I had said some things in class that was in total truth mind you but in total opposite of how these people thought the world should be.” Early in her teaching, Amanda’s instruction was met with controversy from parents and students alike who were accustomed to a certain historical narrative. Challenging their ideas of truth and providing solid evidence that contradicted the mainstream, dominant historical narrative became an early element of her teaching philosophy and continues to be an important part of her instruction today. Reflecting on her teaching philosophy using an example of a class discussion she encountered with a student, Amanda notes:

In teaching civics, in teaching African American history, in teaching those classes, I have students discuss things, and share their opinions. I think it [class discussion] started from the fact that we were talking about ancient Egyptian and the one student said something about religion. And so I said, remember we talked about the Pharaoh? Now the Pharaoh and his family were an elite group of people. And you have conceded that the Egyptians based on geography were African, darker complexion. Okay, well remember the flow of the Nile and Moses was put in the basket and went down the Nile. Remember the story, they picked up Moses, and they raised Moses as their own. Remember that the royal family had to be of a certain group of people. You can’t have anything being presented as the royal family that doesn’t look like the royal family. So that tells you what Moses looked like. And the fireworks went off. But that’s how I teach a class. If you want to go there we’re going to go there. But I want my students to always beat me in the argument. I want them to come correct.

For Amanda, having students to closely examine the historical narrative and challenging what they have always learned and read as truth is essential. Amanda believes that discussion of

controversial issues, debate within the classroom, teaches students how to effectively formulate a clear and cohesive argument. Amanda understood that her teaching style was unconventional and did not follow the methods and training that her teacher education coursework taught, but she believed that her teaching was effective. If students were able to feel a little uncomfortable, rethink some of their beliefs and expose themselves to new perspectives, then regardless of the parent phone calls and summons to the principal's office, Amanda would continue to teach history her way.

4.3.5 Establishing Unexpected Teacher Relationships in the Boiler Room

The experiences with parents and students who protested her teaching helped Amanda develop a thick layer of self confidence in her teaching. She was not moved by the hostility, instead her instruction improved and eventually several students were requesting to enroll in her classes. Amanda did not only have to deal with the racial issues of some parents and students, but she also experienced gender discrimination among the staff. Reflecting on her initial encounters with the male staff at the school, Amanda recalls:

Then I'm in an environment where the staff is not necessarily the friendliest of people, because they literally had, it was called the "Boiler Room". And it was like, within my department of all males, well you can't go down to the boiler room. I said what do you mean? They said it's not about you being African American; it's about you being a female. A room where a group of men had put some tables and chairs in, read the paper and have their lunch, and no one went down there except this select group of men.

However, these men were the old school, they had some knowledge I just had to get, but not necessarily about educational philosophy because their philosophies were wack, but

they knew the system that I was in better than anybody. That was the old guard, the principals were not going to talk to them a certain way. I was brave enough to take my lunch and go down there. They were into some deep political arguments; someone was over there reading the newspaper; someone's over there working on their retirement plans. They didn't say anything to me because I guess they thought I didn't know. One particular teacher, John, he started talking to; he was the special ed teacher. In the halls, he would say hi, and I started going to him for help with my classes, since I taught the mainstream and inclusion social studies classes.

Having daily lunch with the men in the Boiler Room, Amanda worked to dismantle the gender inequities and biases that existed in the school. She was not afraid to serve as a catalyst for change, and welcomed a challenge from those who opposed her actions.

Eventually, some of the male faculty began to change their archaic ways, and she was able to establish working relationships with several of the male faculty. In particular, her relationship with John, the special education teacher, developed into a lifelong friendship. Amanda recalls how she learned so many life lessons from John, and to Amanda, John represented a surrogate father and friend. Like Amanda, John also was exposed to a different culture and new perspectives that he had not ever considered before meeting Amanda. Reflecting on their relationship Amanda remembers, "He literally taught me a lot of stuff. And one day he said to me, you're always thinking that you're learning and getting from me, but he said no, I was literally a redneck until you came along. And then you showed me some things." Amanda's friendship with John and his family blossomed and their families were inseparable, often spending holidays together and vacations. Today, Amanda and John are still very close. The

experiences with the men in the Boiler Room provided another level of confidence and knowledge to Amanda's teaching. Reflecting on her experiences at Princeton, Amanda states:

With being down in that Boiler Room those men gave me something that I don't know if I would have gotten at any other school. Because those men can't exist but at certain schools and their universe is only here. I do think that growing up in Ambridge helped me maneuver in there. Because if they said certain things, because I came from a predominantly White, ethnic area, I could respond and knew what they were talking about. It was weird realizing that regardless of how sexist and racist that these men were deep down inside, we could discuss things, issues, and on some things they had to agree with me."

Amanda realized that despite their personal beliefs and deep seated biases, she was still able to discuss important issues with these men. This was an idea that she also incorporated into her teaching. She focused her instruction on teaching students to look past a person's personal biases and engage in thoughtful discussion open discussion of controversial topics could unify two persons with starkly different belief systems.

4.3.6 Teaching in the Community

After several years at Princeton, Amanda Carter transferred to Crawford High School. Crawford is located in the East Liberty section of the City of Pittsburgh. East Liberty is an integrated community with residents from a variety of income levels. The city's push for redevelopment has revitalized many of the businesses and dilapidated homes in the East Liberty area. Many young professionals and families are moving into the surrounding neighborhoods. Crawford High School's student population is predominantly African America, comprising of over ninety

percent. Crawford offers a robotics magnet for students around the district, and provides health careers, information technology, and culinary arts academies for students. The academies offer students onsite as well as off campus courses from specialty schools that provide training in health careers, information technology, and culinary arts. Amanda serves as the department head of the social studies program and also the school athletic director.

Amanda Carter has embraced the students and staff at Crawford. When she received the assignment to teach at Crawford, she immediately began looking for housing in the East Liberty area. Describing her reasons for relocating to East Liberty, Amanda recalls, “As soon as I got the position at Crawford, I decided to look for a house in the area. I really liked East Liberty, but I really wanted to be close to my students and live in their community, and make it mine. It’s like I see them on the street, and they know if I catch them doing something, oh here comes, Ms. Carter, she’s going to say something to us. And I do just that.” Amanda understands the importance of living in the community in which she teaches. Her presence in the community extends beyond the classroom, and she genuinely cares about the complete well-being of her students. In addition, Amanda understands that her role as teacher also includes a role of “mothering”. She believes that her students are just like her children, and it is the obligation of the parent to make sure that their children are safe and stay out of trouble. She does not hesitate to stop students on the street in order to discourage them from engaging in irresponsible activities. She notes:

Sometimes I think I care more than their parents, but that’s okay. I’m not going to let them do anything stupid because some of them are dumb as door knobs. Take for instance, the student that skipped my class to go out and hang on the corner with his friends. When I saw him that evening, I said, so you’re going to skip my class to hang out

with these losers who didn't graduate from high school and don't have a job. Oh that's just great. And then he stood there looking all dumb. I said I better see you in class tomorrow, and you get going home now, so you can make it in time for school tomorrow.

Amanda believes that her students are sometimes influenced by negative pressures from others, and it is her responsibility to ensure that they do not fall victim to the influences of others. Embarrassing a student who skipped her class in front of his friends is a common parenting practice that Amanda feels is necessary to employ. In this particular incidence, since the student's parents were not present at the time, she quickly assumed the role as parent and encouraged the student to return to his home. This ability to interact with students outside of the confines of the school is largely due to her visibility as a resident of the community.

Amanda enjoys teaching and living in the East Liberty community and believes that she will continue teaching at the school until she retires. Currently she serves as the instructional leader of the social studies department and the school's athletic director. She teaches various academic tracks of Psychology and World Cultures. Amanda continues to provide lessons that engage her students in discussion around various controversial topics in social studies. She encourages her students to view the content from multiple perspectives and challenge their own understandings of history and truth. Teaching is her life's work, and Amanda is so thankful that several years ago, she decided against wealth and unhappiness in the financial industry and chose to and follow her dreams of becoming a teacher.

5.0 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents an analysis of the life stories of three African American social studies teachers. The themes that emerge from the teachers' life stories are focused around the following: (1) the teachers' beliefs and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy; (2) the teachers' beliefs and practices of African-centered pedagogy; and (4) the teachers' emancipatory teaching regarding racism in society and education. Within in each major theme, subsections detailing specific beliefs and practices of the three teachers are presented. The chapter concludes with implications for future research.

5.1 INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Each of the three teachers addresses the cultural competencies of their students using a variety of instructional activities. A characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural competence is defined as cultural knowledge and awareness of one's own cultural view and effectively communicating with others (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students bring certain cultural knowledge, backgrounds, and values to the learning environment that filter how and what they learn. Culturally relevant teachers provide instruction that address students' cultural knowledge and engage students in instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The next three subsections provide

examples of the approaches these three teachers use to address the cultural competencies of their African American students.

5.1.1 Activating Students' Prior Knowledge

Mr. Wright describes how he addresses the cultural competencies of his students within his instruction. Using an activity, entitled Sankofa Profiles, students are asked to select two Nguzo Saba Principles that describe African American historical figures. Next, students take those same principles to create their own Sankofa Profiles. Sankofa, an Akan symbol for wisdom and knowledge represents the idea of learning or reflecting on the past to reclaim the future. Through this activity, Mr. Wright asks students to incorporate the idea of Sankofa in their study of past African American leaders.

Mr. Wright described how using this activity and Nguzo Saba, relates to students' cultural knowledge of Kwanzaa, an African American celebration of family, culture, and community. Discussing his Sankofa Profiles activity, Mr. Wright stated,

One of the things that I ask is which of these principles you think best apply to this person? Or the goal behind this institution. And again, it just gets them to tie in. And many will go unity, some will go faith, and some feelings of self-determination with this person. It took so long in implementing a strategy, but this person didn't quit. Got others involved in it, collective work and responsibility. So they can pull all these pieces in. So with Nguzo Saba Principles in particular, African American students at least have heard of them. We do Kujichagulia, and a student goes, yeah, I know what that is. So those are pieces that for African American students in particular, some will be familiar with. Not

going into the whole thing with Kwanzaa necessarily, but you can see that this was created by an African American man that speaks of community.

By providing an activity, that better addresses African American leaders and also incorporates ideas that are embedded in the culture and community of his African American students, Mr. Wright understands that this approach helps students to become more engaged in the content. Kwanzaa, an African American and Pan-African celebration that celebrates family, community, and culture, is a familiar celebration that many of his students participate within their local community. By asking students to also use the Kwanzaa principles to characterize their own lives, Mr. Wright is encouraging students to make personal connections to the content. Furthermore, the “Sankofa Profiles activity enables students to connect their cultural understanding and knowledge to the content, and creates student confidence in their contributions to the overall learning environment.

5.1.2 Examining Racial Inequalities

Mr. Roberts uses a similar approach when addressing the cultural competencies of his students. He believes that his instruction needs to incorporate student interests in the subject in addition to cultural knowledge and understandings. Mr. Roberts understands that African American athletes represent public images of African American success to many of his students.

In his activity, entitled “Champions”, Mr. Roberts asks students name to prominent African American athletes and to describe the characteristics that make these athletes successful and great. Then, students analyze the qualities of these athletes, while also comparing them to African American athletes of the past. Describing the Champions activity, Mr. Roberts stated,

Students really like talking about their sports figures and idols. Then we look at the history of when and how these sports were integrated and the athletes that integrated these sports. Then I ask them what qualities make these current athletes great, and then we list what made the past athletes great, and compare. A lot of times the students mention ideas about having to deal with prejudice and racism, and the determination of the athletes, and then I ask them do they think that today's athletes would be able to withstand that type of situation or better yet, do today's athletes experience prejudice and racism too. Then it's great when one student says that today's athletes need to really be role models and not engage in negative activities, and thank those ones of the past. Then another might say, that yes, today's athletes do deal with the same kind of problems, but maybe not as open, but getting paid less or something like that. I think this activity goes over really well for the students, and they begin to consider what it means to be a public figure, particularly for Blacks in sports.

Mr. Robert's instructional activities address the cultural knowledge of his students. By providing an activity about sports, a topic of interest in which students hold a degree of knowledge, he is appealing to his students' cultural knowledge and ensuring that they feel connected to the content. He understands the role and importance of sports in the lives of African American youth. Using an activity that aligns with student interests enables Mr. Roberts to address issues of racism in sports. Unknowingly, Mr. Robert's students are engaging in critical examination of the how racism affects the experiences and roles of African American athletes of the past and present, alongside discussing the latest game highlights, exciting plays, and trendiest athletic gear. As well, Mr. Roberts is affirming his students' abilities to draw from their own experiences and understandings to embrace new ideas and concepts.

5.1.3 Incorporating Students' Knowledge of Cultural Art Forms

Ms. Carter addresses her students' cultural competencies of by creating learning activities that relate directly to their African American cultural knowledge base. She incorporates a variety of popular culture references in her lessons, and also infuses various African American cultural art forms, such as music and dance, when discussing historical topics in social studies. Ms. Carter discussed her practice:

Yes, I have students share their ideas, better yet, I have them do this activity in which we look at social movements and really what that's all about. So we compare the counterculture that took place in the 1950s and how parents and leaders responded to this, and then we look at the 1980s and rap music. So I have the students discuss rap music, the messages that were a part of the original rap music, and the change in the message that has occurred. And we discuss why this change, what does this mean for today's society? How has it become mainstream, and why did rap music become mainstream? You know they like that, because I bring in some music, let them listen to it because of course, that's what they know and enjoy anyway. So when the test comes along, they not only remember the stuff about rap music, but also 1950s counterculture.

Ms. Carter explained her belief that in order for teaching to be effective it needs to relate to her students' cultural knowledge base. This activity of analyzing rap music, addresses some aspect of student understanding and experience in such a way that they are able to also retain the content and make connections. The students can identify with the rap music and the topics discussed in the lyrics and then critically compare their cultural knowledge to the content and engage in critical analysis of the similarities of the two different music genres. Through this process, students internalize the content and learning becomes interesting and meaningful.

5.1.4 Summary

Each teacher used activities that active African American cultural knowledge and interests. Mr. Wright draws on his students' prior knowledge by using the principles of Kwanzaa to describe various African American leaders of the past and present. Mr. Roberts focused on establishing connections with students' interest requiring students to examine the role and experiences of African American athletes of the past and present. Ms. Carter incorporated her students' cultural knowledge by asking students to compare the cultural and artistic messages of the 1950's with those of the 1980's. Each teacher believed that incorporating students' interests and cultural knowledge into the content enables them to effectively deliver instruction that is culturally relevant and engaging. Although the teachers' activities differ in approach, the ultimate goal of imparting culturally relevant instruction that addresses African American cultural knowledge and competencies. Ladson-Billings (2001) and Banks (2007) argued that when teachers incorporate culturally relevant instruction that appeals to the cultural knowledge and experiences of African American students, their students are more likely to internalize the subject matter. As a result of their instruction, student learning increases which in turn results in an increase in overall student academic achievement.

5.2 SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

A second element of culturally relevant pedagogy that was identified in the data was high expectations for student achievement. Culturally relevant teachers believe that all students can learn and are capable of academic success. They set high academic expectations for their

students and explicitly challenge students to reach these expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Nieto & Bode, 2007). Each of the three teachers in this study described the ways that they encourage their students to work hard and to take advantage of the opportunities available in the school. They shared a strong belief that for their students, obtaining an education serves as a gateway to opportunity and a better future.

5.2.1 “To Sink or Swim”: Teaching Students for Success in Life

Mr. Roberts believes that setting high expectations is the best method of teaching his students how to accept challenges and overcome adversities. His experiences with his parents and teachers who required academic excellence has shaped his teaching philosophy. “My education was highly valued in the family. You were always working; you could not bring home a C...I know all my students’ parents for whatever reasons aren’t able to push their children to do well in school, but as long as I’m their teacher, I will push them like my parents did me.” In essence, Mr. Roberts accepts no less than full commitment to learning and academic achievement. He understands that some of his students require an “extra dose” of parental support, and he is willing to fill that void if needed in order to help his students achieve academic success.

His philosophy of high student expectations goes beyond preparing students for success in the classroom, to also preparing them for success in the world. He explained:

You know the statistics for these young people that don’t go to school and do well. How many Blacks drop out, in jail, live just above poverty, stay in the low positions, and I try to tell these young people that the system is set up for you to do well or go to jail. You basically have two options; there are no in between for us. You have to either sink or swim, not too often will you be able to just float around. So I’m going to help you learn

how to swim now. So I tell them, I'm going to challenge you; make you work for it because you will feel great when you finish whatever it is that we are doing.

Mr. Roberts' instruction is designed to motivate students to work harder, and develop a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence in their abilities. He believes if students learn the importance of hard work in school, they can learn "to swim" and apply these same qualities to their lives. When his students face challenges and are asked to exert themselves beyond their limits, Mr. Roberts argues that if one student remembers how he encouraged them to work hard, and challenged them to maximize their potential, then, his work is not in vain. In essence, Mr. Roberts believes that as a teacher, he is required to prepare his students for success in life. He is aware of the staggering statistics that indicate that some students may not "make it" or reach their full potential when they move beyond high school and refuses to accept such an outcome for his students. In contrast to popular views of minority students as incapable learners (Lynn, 1999; Nieto, 2003), Mr. Roberts believes that all his students are capable learners and maintains that high expectations and hard work is important to the overall academic development of his students.

Like Mr. Roberts, Ms. Carter also promotes academic excellence for her students. She too understands that when her students leave the confines of high school, life is going to demand that they perform at levels unexpected. She believes that setting high expectations for learning is preparing her students for the expectations that they will have to deal with in life, providing for their families and impacting change in their communities. By learning to improve their writing and to think critically, students receive valuable experiences that will translate to greater successes in the future. Ms. Carter explained:

They think it's cool not to be smart. You either are the jock with a lot of girls and no brains, the nerd, with no girls and a lot brains, or you're either the girl with all the additives and no brains, or the girl that is overlooked with lots of brains. Take your pick, but I want my students have it all. The brains, the brawn, the look, the total package. I tell them, I'm going to make you sweat. You're going to learn some stuff in this class. Yes, you're going to work, use your brains, think about stuff, write about it, and really make sense of the whole thing. I can't see you fail in here; it's just not going to happen. So if you try it, I'm going to ride you all the way. And you know it really works. They catch on. Some it takes longer than others, but they finally get it. That I'm not going to get off their backs until they come up. Because they have to be smart. They have to know some things to make it out here. They have to be able to write, construct an argument, all that, and it can't be done just with a couple of activities, no these things require work, and a lot of it. So that's what I make them do, work hard, and achieve.

In her classroom, Ms. Carter dispels ideas that emphasize being cool and athletic over being smart. She does not pacify students and although like many of her students, she was also very talented and athletic. She understands that her students need more than talent and athletic ability to succeed in society. She believes that there are certain ideas and concepts that students need to understand for success in the classroom and beyond.

Ms. Carter draws from her own experiences with teachers who motivated her to work hard and refused to lower the academic standard. She holds a strong image of the teacher as a role model. She recalled:

Mr. Tyson, he taught me Calculus. He pushed me really, really hard, and he never allowed me to slack. He didn't give you a break not one time. It was my junior year, I had

to drop my brothers and sisters off at daycare, and then I would come to school late. He literally went to the principal and said I could not be a contender for the national honor's society. I was like Mr. Tyson, you know my situation. And he said, 'So you want me to excuse this behavior? No, get up earlier and do what you have to do. He didn't cut me a break no way, but in all the times I recall now he was just like, 'Do you understand no one's going to give you a break, no one is going to. You expect because you've got this issue and that issue that you're an okay kid that we're supposed to. No, you're not with me.

For Ms. Carter, Mr. Tyson's hard-knock lessons and no nonsense approach to learning later helped her deal with negative experiences that she would encounter in her adult life. This experience shaped how she interacts with her students. She understands that setting challenging expectations discourages excuses and prepares students for the many challenges that they may experience later in their lives. She teaches her students the importance of prioritizing and sacrificing to meet the demands of school and life, despite the extra work, situations, and chaos that is all around.

Mr. Wright's teaching also reflects a philosophy that emphasizes student academic achievement. His educational experiences involved his parents and African American teachers setting high expectations for academic success. He has incorporated these same ideas into his teaching and requires full commitment to learning from his African American students. Mr. Wright recalled:

There was my family, there was an expectation that you do well in school. As a young kid, the thing that I recall about Black teachers is that they consistently had high

expectations of us...I guess that's the thing that holds special for some of the Black teachers, particularly my fourth grade teacher, Sister Theresa Atkins.

Reflecting on these experiences, Mr. Wright states that his instruction addresses many of same educational values and ideas that he experienced. He incorporates a level of rigor in the curriculum, requiring students to engage in weekly critical discussions. He understands that in order for students to uncover the true historical narrative regarding the role of African Americans, it requires that they research, read, and write from multiple sources and content. Although his course is not an advanced or AP course, Mr. Wright firmly realizes that regardless of the course level, students need to experience a level of rigor and high academic expectation in order to produce their best work.

5.2.2 Summary

Each of the three teachers set high expectations for their students. They challenge their students to work beyond their limits and pursue academic excellence. The teachers' understanding of high expectations and student success extends beyond the classroom. They believe that by providing instruction that is demanding and rigorous, they are preparing their students to meet the challenges of life. To the teachers, it is important that their students are confident in their abilities and develop a sense of accomplishment. Nieto and Bode (2007) and Lee (2001) asserted that African American teachers set high expectations for their students and encourage academic success. They do not approach their teaching from deficit perspective, one that regards African American students' as incapable of advance learning and limits student abilities, fostering low student expectations. In Lee's (2001) study, the African American teacher refused to accept mediocrity from her students and pushed her students to produce quality work. She believed that

her classroom was not just an academic learning environment, but also a place designed to prepare students for life. Similarly, the three African American teachers in this study approach their instruction and practice with a level of high expectations for students' success in the classroom and in life.

5.3 CREATING A COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY

The final feature of culturally relevant pedagogy that each of the teachers incorporates into their instruction involve the development of students attitudes of critical consciousness through participation in the community. The literature suggests that culturally relevant teachers understand the importance of community and work to create a community environment in their class. They also connect the class to their students' local communities, and they are visible and actively involved in their local communities (Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2007). The three African American teachers of this study believe that their students need to learn about the ways in which societal norms, structures, and institutions maintain inequitable systems and oppress certain groups. Through their example, they encourage their students work as agents of change in order to alleviate these societal problems. In addition, the teachers encourage their students collectively organize and promote positive change within their communities. The teachers view learning for their African American students as an extension of the collective goals of the greater African American community. Therefore, they view their classrooms as communities of learning, and constantly practice instruction that foster this idea of collaborative and cooperative learning.

5.3.1 Learning from Leaders in the Community

Mr. Roberts believes that his teaching must extend beyond the classroom and connect to the greater community. His experiences with leaders and people in his community provided an education that was embedded in collective responsibility for education of young people. He believes that his students must develop an understanding of this idea of collective community and that positive change can occur when people in the community come together. Mr. Roberts encourages his students to become the facilitators of this change, as he discussed: “It was a community. Kind of where you get that statement it takes an entire community to raise a child...everybody watched over each other and made sure, tried to make sure no one was in trouble. These community people were teachers in their own way.” Mr. Roberts asserts that his learning extended beyond the classroom and that the knowledge gained from those who lived in his community was as important as the information he acquired in school.

Understanding that learning can occur in a community context, Mr. Roberts requires his students to seek out individuals in their communities and discuss the issues facing them. For example, he discussed one classroom activity that applies to this idea:

They have to interview someone from the community and ask them about some of their concerns of problems with the community. I want my students to feel connected to the places that they live. Get to know the people in the community. This lets the students see what these people are all about, and it starts them talking in the community. For example, one student talked about the number of bars in the area. Next he talked about how it promotes violence and crime. He also went on to compare his predominantly African American community to other White communities in the area. He noted how there were less bars and crime, and then he began to question this whole concept. And why it's okay

to have several bars on every corner in the Black neighborhood, but not in the White. So I asked him, what does this say about how society, this city view different communities? He said that they don't care about our community; it's not worth fighting for, so I said you have to fight for it. You have to be better, do things different, and make people aware of the hypocrisy...

Through this activity, Mr. Roberts exposes his students to the inequalities that exist within their community and also encourages his students to become agents of change. By addressing such issues, students began developing a critical understanding of the ways in which society seeks to oppress certain groups and help maintain the social order of the status quo.

5.3.2 Being a Teacher and Visible Community Member

Ms. Carter focuses her ideas of the importance of community. She believes that her visibility within the neighborhood validates her teaching to parents and students. To Ms. Carter, she is more equipped to address the issues affecting the community. She does this, not from an outsider's perspective, but from one who lives within the community, a true insider. Describing her connection to the community, Ms. Carter explained:

I remember moving to Highland Park. It was great because not only am I walking distance of the school, but I get to see my students all the time. I see them all over the place, up and down the street. And I know what's happening here, because I live here. I know what the issues are. I shop at Shakespeare Giant Eagle, go to church right up the street there. It's like the old days, the parents and students see me and say, oh that's Ms. Carter, the teacher, and I'm right there. That's what's needed...I think if more teachers

lived in the communities that they worked in, it would definitely help their teaching, and how people see them and what they do.

Ms. Carter suggests that teachers are more effective in their instruction when they have first-hand experiential knowledge of the major issues affecting the community. Further, she believes that there is a need to return to the traditions of the past, in which African American teachers lived in the communities that they taught, and were revered within the community for their awesome responsibility of educating the youth.

5.3.3 Teacher as Community Activist

Mr. Wright's teaching philosophy focuses on his mission to protect students in their community. He believes that unwanted problems and people often enter the community, creating dangers for young people. Mr. Wright becomes actively involved in community protests and petitions. For example, he recalled his experience protesting a bar located near the local elementary school. He explained that the location and raucous crowds that would gather at the bar posed a threat to the children of Manchester and their education:

I remember there was a nuisance bar in Manchester, and it was near the elementary school. There were just a number of appeals to try to get it closed. And just having a series of protest at certain times, we carried signs. Sometimes we had students involved with it. And I'd say within maybe six months, from the time we started protesting it, the bar was closed...In the late nineties, I participated in a mass walk against drugs and violence through Northview Heights. I can't remember date exactly, but I remember there were some students there with me.

By protesting a bar, participating in a march against violence, and creating opportunities for students to engage in community service activities, Mr. Wright serves as a model of activism for his students. Describing the community service activities, Mr. Wright stated:

For extra credit, I have sponsored community service days, where me and group of students, whoever decides to come, go around the community and pick up trash. Just cleaning up the place a little bit. I want my students to take some pride in where they live. I'm out there showing them what types of things that they need to do to support the community.

From his example, Mr. Wright encourages his students to become actively involved in their communities, addressing the various issues that require active engagement and collective community support. He believes that in order for students to become actively engaged in their communities and politics, they must participate in activities that foster this engagement. He understands that in order for students to develop a long term awareness and involvement with political and community issues, they must engage in some form of active community or political participation during their early educational experiences. Mr. Wright believes that through early exposure to various local community issues and activism, his students will be more likely to continue their involvement as adults.

5.3.4 Summary

Each of the three teachers encourages their students to develop attitudes of collective community. They believe that their students need to understand the societal norms, structures, and institutions that seek to maintain oppressive systems. Their approaches differ, but they all share a commitment to raising students' consciousness and activism about various issues within

their communities. With a class activity, Mr. Roberts requires students to seek out members of their community to discuss community concerns. This activity enables students to extend their learning beyond the classroom, and obtain valuable insight into the issues and dynamics of their local community. In Mr. Wright's classroom, he focuses on leading by example. He believes that community and political activism is best learned through doing. He encourages students to participate in various community projects, and he also participates in community protests and projects. Ms. Carter's understanding differs from the other two teachers in that she believes that living in the neighborhood in which she works provides visibility for parents and students that also live in the community. She further believes that her insider's perspective of the community enables her to effectively address the local concerns and issues affecting the community.

In Foster's (1993) study, the African American teachers were directly connected to their communities. Many of the teachers in the study worked and lived in their communities, and encouraged their students to participate in activities that addressed the needs and concerns of the community. Several of the teachers participated in local and national civil rights demonstrations during the 1960s and, through their example, encouraged their students to also participate in local community demonstrations. Similarly, the teachers in this study practice collective community participation. They all share a similar understanding that supports teacher activism and visibility within the local community and encourages African American youth active community participation.

5.4 TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES CONTENT FROM AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

Analysis of the Mr. Wright, Mr. Roberts and Ms. Carter’s stories indicates that they also incorporate facets of African-centered pedagogy in their philosophy and practice. African-centered pedagogy is culturally relevant pedagogy specifically designed to address the cultural competencies, histories, epistemologies, and instructional needs of African American students (Asante, 1992; Akoto, 1994; Lee, 1994). Applying principles of Afrocentrism, these three African American social studies teachers provide their students with an African American perspective on history. This perspective begins with Africa, as the center of civilization and “centers” the learning in order to promote the students’ understanding of their roles within past and present historical, social, and cultural contexts (Asante, 1992; Akoto, 1994).

5.4.1 Rewriting and Re-centering the Western Curriculum

In Mr. Robert’s class, he incorporates an African-centered pedagogy that focuses on teaching the truth. His notion of “truth” is based on his beliefs that the social studies curriculum has purposely omitted the history and experiences of Africans. The limited information included in the historical record does not depict the true legacy of African and African American peoples. He believes that these omissions have been purposely designed to promote Western supremacy and dominance.

In his educational experiences, Mr. Roberts did not learn about the history of African Americans. The majority of his cultural knowledge on African American history derived from his experiences listening to various neighborhood elders and leaders discuss the contributions

and history of African Americans. Even during college, Mr. Roberts does not recall having the opportunity to study African American history. It was not until he began teaching and researching history on his own, did he realize the historical injustices that the curriculum and texts exhibited. Realizing that these omissions served to maintain a status quo of White superiority and did not promote any positive contributions and histories of Africans and African Americans, Mr. Roberts believes that this awakening moment changed his teaching philosophy. Now, he incorporates African American and African history into his teaching, regardless of the content, he would teach the truth. Mr. Roberts described his teaching philosophy:

I can remember just reading something, and saying this is something my students need to know. Then I remember looking at the text, and planning my lesson, and I said, this is all wrong. Here I am talking about all these White men who have founded this country, and focusing on their “great achievements” meanwhile, there is so much African American history that is not even in this book. Better yet, before there was a United States, there was an Africa, and my students need to know that, particularly my African American students. Because let the history book tell it, everything began with Europe, and that’s a lie. A flat out lie. Like I said before, I have to teach the truth. And that’s what I’m committed to, teaching the truth.

For Mr. Roberts, an Afrocentric perspective means directly connecting his African American students with their history. His knowledge of African American history did not come from his White teachers or the curriculum. Instead, he was exposed to “his” history through out-of-school experiences. He places the histories and experiences of African Americans at the core of his instructional philosophy. As a historian and educator, Kevin believes that the social studies curriculum is written from a Eurocentric perspective, in which the history Western domination

are highlighted and presented as historical truth, while that of the minority and oppressed are disregarded or omitted. The accomplishments of underrepresented cultures and groups are often stolen and presented as the successes and discoveries of the majority. For him, to teach solely from a Eurocentric perspective does not promote the truth. Mr. Roberts believes that teaching from an Afrocentric perspective is the only way to ensure that the truth is being taught.

Ms. Carter includes a similar African-centered approach in her teaching. She believes that the World history curriculum is historically inaccurate. As a result, she rearranges the curriculum to begin with the study of Africa. Ms. Carter believes that Africa is the cradle of civilization and at the start of her world history course she begins with a unit on African civilizations. She disregards the curriculum or focus on European civilization. Instead, she asserts that a focus on African civilization is the only approach that offers a true historical account of the development of world civilizations. Ms. Carter stated:

See this world history book. It starts out of course with Europe, and the European civilizations. You don't get to Africa until unit 3 or 4 I believe. And look at how short it is. Are you serious? So you want me to tell my students, first that it all started with Europe, and then that Africa isn't that important so let's only put a little blurb about it in the book. I guess, to make all the Black people happy. That's crazy, really. Every year, I start out with Africa. And that's just what I do. I believe that's where it all started. And it's not just my belief, but I show my students facts and stuff to back that up. For example, look at the ancient Kemet civilization and all the accomplishments of the Egyptians. You really want to tell me that Europeans did all that stuff first. Oh, but of course they try to tell you that Egypt isn't really Africa, and that ancient Egyptians were

light-skinned. Oh, the lies go on and on. So I basically have to challenge all these ideas in the books and the curriculum, and that's just what I do.

Ms. Carter believes that her African American students need to be aware of the accomplishments and legacy of African civilizations. Furthermore, she denounces the traditional view of world history that focuses on Western influences on African civilizations and provides an instructional focus that maintains Africa as the cornerstone of civilization. Her perspective promotes a positive cultural experience for African American students and places them in the world history narrative. She encourages students to challenge traditional ideas regarding world history and helps them understand their connection to the powerful, ancient civilizations of Africa.

5.4.2 Using Multiple Perspectives to Examine African American Historical Narratives

Although, Mr. Wright also incorporates an African-centered pedagogy in his teaching, his focus is very different than the two teachers. Whereas Mr. Roberts and Ms. Carter focus on incorporating the history and experiences of African and African Americans, Mr. Wright moves beyond incorporation to critical examination of African American history. He presents the histories and experiences of African Americans, and then he encourages his students to examine the fallacies and contradictions of that history. He believes that African American history often provides a one dimensional story that serves as the stand-alone historical record of experience, but Mr. Wright believes that presenting such a single perspective of African American history is just as damaging as not presenting one at all.

For example, he discusses his incorporation of having students examine multiple and evolving African American perspectives when discussing civil rights and activism in the United States. Mr. Wright stated:

Part of doing history [for students] is not only looking at inter-racial race relations, but intra-racial race relations. I mean, all black folks didn't look at resolving certain things or dealing with certain issues the same way. And some of that might of work where they were parallel to each other, where you might have people whose strategy was a clear integrationist one, and you might have one that was clearly Black Nationalist. Then you'll find some where they conflicted with each other. Students can take a look at what type of approaches did they take to deal with the issues of the time. And part of what they can see also, was that while in the past, the traditional piece is normally looked at from one view, you'll see that at times, that there are dynamics within a person or institution that may fall in one, but also within another category. That they're fluid, that it's just not static. Part of what that does, it gets student not just to see any of these people in a traditional rigid sense because it doesn't speak to how they evolved themselves.

For Mr. Wright, multiple perspectives means having students develop a critical understanding in African American history in order to provide a complete and accurate understanding of the African American experience.

He believes that the history of African Americans has been written in a similar fashion as mainstream Eurocentric-focused United States history, which rejects multiple perspectives. He has his students examine how this single perspective has served to stagnate change for African Americans of today. Mr. Wright explained:

When you present a one-sided perspective about how equality and change during the civil rights movement came about, then you get this idea that there can never be any difference in ideas on how to resolve the issues that African Americans face today. Because everybody has this idea that it has to be done the same way, and only one way works. But

look at the civil rights movement. King, Malcolm and the Nation of Islam, different perspectives and ideas, but a lot was accomplished by all of them. But they [White America] would rather us [African Americans] focus on one idea, King's because Malcolm's was too radical for them to accept, but sometimes you need radical also.

Mr. Wright believes that by using an African-centered approach to focuses on multiple perspectives of African Americans, he is allowing his students to critically examine how Eurocentric-characteristics of presenting history from a single African American historical narrative has influenced the historical record. In this regard, this single view rejects alternative ideas, and maintains divisions within the African American community. He encourages his students to denounce this one dimensional view and to seek multiple perspectives, understanding that of current issues within the African American community require collaboration and cooperative from those with varying perspectives and ideas for change.

5.4.3 Summary

Each of the teachers use an African-centered approach in their instruction. They incorporate instruction that directly focuses on the history and cultures of African and African Americans. For Mr. Roberts and Ms. Carter, their teaching emphasizing addressing the historical omissions of the African experience from the curriculum. They believe that a Western view of history does not present a true historical narrative, and the need to refocus and center the curriculum around their African American students becomes a significant aspect of their instruction. Aligning their instruction with the goals of African-centered education, Mr. Roberts and Ms. Carter redesign the curriculum and supplement the content in order to include the complete experiences of African Americans. In this regard, African-centered education centers the African American

student within the curriculum by providing instruction that legitimizes African knowledge base and incorporates the histories, experiences of people of African descent (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994).

Using a different approach, Mr. Wright addresses the need for multiple perspectives in the study of African Americans. He believes that a single African American perspective of history is not an accurate depiction of the variances within the African American experience, and fosters similar dominant perspectives that exist in Western approaches to understanding history. His instruction encourages students to develop multiple perspectives of the African and African American experience. African-centered education engages students in a critical examination of content and helps students develop personal understanding of their experiences in relation to their history and culture (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994; Dei, 1994). Each of the teachers believes that centering student learning around the experiences that relate to them is an effective approach to culturally relevant teaching for African American students.

5.5 EMANCIPATORY TEACHING ABOUT RACISM

When analyzing the teachers' life experiences through a critical race lens, a theme that emerged involved the teachers' personal experiences with racism and how their experiences shaped their beliefs about instruction in terms of engaging their students in understanding racism. Critical race theory suggests that addressing racism and institutional practices that support racist ideologies and Eurocentric notions of dominance is characteristic of the work of emancipatory teachers. The instructional strategies and experiences of these three teachers reveal that their teaching exposes students to the racial inequalities that exist in society. Emancipatory teachers

believe that by understanding the racial inequalities that exist, students are then able to uncover how institutions have been created to oppress minorities and through the development of a “consciousness” or understanding of these notions (Lynn et al., 1999; Pang & Gibson 2001; Perlstein, 2002).

Each of the teachers has experienced instances of racism in their lives, and these experiences have compelled them to approach their teaching, particularly for African Americans students in a more profound manner, seeking to raise student understanding about issues regarding race in society. The experience of being denied opportunity or being falsely accused based on the justification that you look like someone or just fit the profile of being Black are experiences that allow the teachers to speak openly and honestly to their students about racism. As members of an oppressed racial group, the teachers believe that they have certain knowledge and experience that authenticates their teaching with regards to issues and racism.

5.5.1 Using Experiences with Racism to Authenticate Teaching

Ms. Carter believes that her experiences with racism and as a member of an oppressed racial group authenticate her discussions of racism with her students. She explained, “Yeah, you can talk about it, and do a pretty good job, but I just feel that some things you got to really know about to talk about it. You can’t truly talk about something that you don’t know about.” To Amanda, “knowing about” something is not merely teaching a group of basic facts and ideas about a topic but it also involves a level of experiential knowledge. In essence, she believes that having a personal experience with racism gives her certain experiential knowledge that she is able to draw from when teaching. She also implies that many of her White counterparts, who have not experienced racism, are missing a key aspect needed to fully address the topic. As a

teacher who has encountered racism she is able to engage her students in authentic discussion, and her teaching is more effective because of her experience.

5.5.2 Teaching Students to Understand and Combat Institutional Racism

Drawing upon their experiences, the teachers believe that many of their students may encounter racism, and it is imperative that they teach their students how respond to various individual and institutional forms racism. Scholars argue that African American teachers firmly believe that their teaching must address issues related to race and racism and encourage students to critically analyze how race plays a role in society and impacts relationships and experiences that various groups encounter (Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lynn et al., 1999; Tate, 1997). In particular, in Lynn's (1999) study, the African American teacher felt obligated to discuss racism in his teaching, and he required his students to examine how racist ideologies influenced the actions of many powerful people and institutions, not only in the United States, but around the world. Drawing on these same ideas, Ms. Carter describes how African Americans students must be exposed to issues relating to race. Discussing how she constantly implores her students to look past the racist institutions that exist within their communities and strive to overcome defeatist mentalities through education she reflected:

Yes, I've experienced it [racism]. The secret security following you around the store, waiting for you to grab something, or the person who refuses to wait on you, but walks by several times, hoping you will not ask for help. Yes, in this city, I've told people, I've been other places. This is one of the most racist places I've been in. That being said, the Black community is satisfied with it and don't realize it. People will say 'this is the most racist place in the country, well then step up to the plate and knock the ball out the park!

Well it's just a racist city, racist. Okay, then stop accepting it, and do something to change it. You don't have to accept racism and oppression. Understand what it is, and then combat it every chance you get. Don't settle for what society has subscribed for you and labeled you, show and prove. Don't fall victim to the same old things, with the same old losers. So they can treat you the same old way as everyone else. I tell them, don't you do that. You can maneuver out of any situation, if you make a conscious decision to not be the victim, but the victor.

Ms. Carter urges her students to not revel in the mediocrity and apathetic complacency that some young African Americans suffer; instead she implores her students to challenge the “institutional structures” designed to stagnate their growth and eventually lead to their demise. Amanda teaches her students to challenge racism, by not only speaking up against injustices, but also by excelling in their studies and refusing to associate with peers who are not motivated to better themselves. She also believes that racist acts, whether verbal or covert, requires her students having the courage to stand strong and confront racism. To her, understanding about racism and how it affects many elements of society should not be a disabler, but a motivator, for students to prove that they can beat the odds and achieve success. Ms. Carter's ideas about racism support the research of many scholars that argue that African American teachers acknowledge that institutional systems were designed to oppress, and they encourage students to combat racism through academic achievement (Lynn et al., 1999; Pang & Gibson, 2001).

Similar to Ms. Carter, Mr. Wright describes his approach to student examination of the systematic and institutional racism in society that is used to oppress African Americans. By discussing these issues with his students, Ron feels that it allows students to critically consider the role institutional power plays in maintaining these oppressive structures. He explained:

With regards to my experience now, the experience in front of Kauffman's; that was an eye-opener, but at the same time I knew that racism exists and I am not immune to prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, for my experience, being denied opportunity-financially with loans and things like that; lets you know that institutional racism is not going away. As a teacher and really working with some students to understand the distinctions between prejudice and discrimination and institutional racism that empowers that gives the muscle behind that. One of the things that I've done with teaching African American history early was looking at opportunities for students to see that particularly in U.S. history and even in aspects of World history is to get them to understand in part, what racism is. I have them see distinctions between discrimination, prejudice, and racism. But I guess the definition of racism involves somebody who has this belief that they are superior to another group, but that's not enough. You have the political, economic, and frankly military power to reinforce that belief, and how that may come across in a number of different ways. Basically to draw some distinctions between what racism happens to be...So when they get the opportunity and occupy those positions of power, they can do the right thing and not follow the status quo."

The experience in front of Kaufmann's in which he was restrained and falsely accused of theft and his encounters with racist lending practices of financial institutions has shaped Ron's understanding of individual versus institutional racism. Ron feels that the racist actions of the security officer was an individual racist response, while the institutional practices that denied financial opportunity are the result of systemic racism that exists within the United States. In his instruction, Mr. Wright requires his students critically consider the definitions of racism,

prejudice and discrimination at the individual and institutional level. He has his students compare and contrast the differences between the abilities of individuals and institutions.

Mr. Wright also focuses on institutions designed to oppress African Americans, as well as other groups. He believes that by teaching his students about how the structures of power that exist to oppress various groups in society, then the students will be able to identify with others who share similar experiences. He also believes that students must challenge their own prejudices. Mr. Wright notes that having an ethnocentric perspective is not necessarily a negative position to hold, but he also believes that students must be able to see past themselves and their isolated experience and understand how their experience connects with others and the larger issues of racism.

Mr. Wright also teaches his students about how individual racism differs from institutional racism. He believes that students must make clear distinctions between one person's racist beliefs and actions, and those that are promoted by institutions and are fueled by political, military, and economic power. He also encourages his students to consider these ideas and hopes that his students will use their knowledge to make decisions that help others. It is clear that Mr. Wright believes that many of his students will one day be employed in these same oppressive institutions. It is his desire that his students remember his teachings, and challenge these institutions, by creating opportunities for others. Ron exemplifies the characteristics that scholars argue are important aspects of their pedagogy for African American teachers. Similar to the African American teacher in Lynn's (2006) study, in which students were presented an activity that required them to examine the ways in which institutions promote racism, Mr. Wright requires his students to critically analyze history, noting the ways in which institutional racism has functioned and promoted the goals of dominant Western ideologies.

5.5.3 Teaching Students to Handle Racial Confrontations

Mr. Roberts presents his understanding of racism based on the experiences he has encountered and encourages his students to practice attitudes and behaviors that will not lead to unwanted racial confrontations. From his experience of being falsely accused for robbery and also experiencing racially motivated insults, Mr. Roberts understands that it is imperative that he instruct his African American students on how to respond to racism and maintain composure in order to avoid unnecessary confrontations with others. Recalling his experiences walking to school and passing through the White community, he commented:

How could I forget those experiences, walking through the White community and interacting with those individuals that maintained control over the community? I learned to be very careful. Dot my I's, cross my T's. You see, you have to be cautious; you have to be careful because you never know. You try to be prepared for whatever. If you're African American, you have to make sure you have ID. All the things you teach young Black males to do. Have identification with you. When the police approach you don't go crazy because it could be your last move.

Mr. Roberts also recognizes that many of his African American students are fearful of the local authorities and they do not understand that certain behaviors can influence the perceptions of others and bring unwanted scrutiny to their actions. At the same time, he understands their fears. Mr. Wright also believes that many White males in positions of power are fearful of African American males, assume that they are involved in negative activities, and would rather see these individuals incarcerated. Mr. Wright attributes these racist notions to the negative images and influences of various media outlets, the ramifications of slavery, and the nation's

institutional design that maintains racial balance in which the mainstream Eurocentric agendas are promoted. Mr. Roberts explained:

The perception of our young Black males and females is horrible, and many people who see them are scared of them or feel a little threatened by them. The thug, the excuse me, the whore. You know that type of stuff. You can basically say those ideas are somewhat a result of how Blacks were viewed and treated during slavery. You know those relationships between the master and the slave women. But these young people are just kids. And when actually they're nice young men and young women. They're just kids that need to learn and a lot of times don't know any better. But because of peer pressure and the media, they feel that it's their right to do it. Not to respect themselves. They don't realize that this is what the majority wants to maintain these attitudes, so they can stay down and not be a threat to the social order of White America. That's just how it is. They want to maintain the racial order. I try to talk about this with them, so they can see what's really going on here.

Mr. Roberts believes that his students need to understand how these issues involve more than just a certain action or dress on their part, but reflects a negative ideology that has been promoted through dominant Western ideologies. This notion originating during slavery, that the African American male must be separated from the family and is a threat and danger to society, a savage and must be contained and the sexual promiscuous presentation of the African America female has been two very disturbing images that have the distorted truth and presented a false and depraved images of African Americans.

Based on his experience with the racist judge, Mr. Roberts believes that some of those who hold positions of power have embraced negative images and ideologies about African

Americans and are intimidated and fearful of the collective power and abilities of African American males, and as a result, will use their authority and resources to oppress and “contain the threat.” In his instruction, he addresses how many African Americans and even some of his students have become victim to the negative stereotypes and images of African Americans. Mr. Roberts instructs his students to consider how their actions perpetuate these negative images. He hopes that through his instruction of exposing students to these ideas, they will consider some of the behaviors and actions that they do, and not fall victim to the negative labels and agendas that have already been created for them.

5.5.4 Summary

All of the teachers reflect similar beliefs about the importance of addressing issues relating to racism in their instruction. Each of their experiences with some form of racism has fueled their motivations for teaching about racism. They all argue that racism operates on many levels, ranging from individuals to institutions, and helping students understand these ideas are central to their instruction. They encourage their students to critically examine racism, and to use their knowledge to combat racism. Through the act of addressing racism in their instruction and having students critically engage in analysis and discussion around the issues of race, institutional racism, and prejudice, these three African American teachers are raising their students’ level of “consciousness” and using their instruction to combat racist ideologies that work to oppress student thinking and overall productivity.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

The study of the life histories of three African American social studies teachers indicate their life experiences shaped their teaching philosophies and practices. This study has implications for the (1) practice and research of African American teachers' philosophies and pedagogies; (2) practice and research of culturally relevant teaching in social studies; and (3) social studies teacher education.

This study aligns with current literature that asserts African American teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogical approaches to teach their African American students. There is a substantial amount of literature that addresses the philosophies and pedagogies of African American teachers, but few studies emphasize how the teachers come to practice certain pedagogies and embrace various teaching philosophies. The study of the life experiences of three African American teachers helps inform understanding of how life experiences shapes the philosophies and pedagogies of African American teachers.

The salient role of life experience in the shaping the three African American teachers' philosophies and pedagogies indicates that studies that incorporate teacher life experiences into the educational paradigm is an important area that needs to be highlighted in educational research. This study begins the process of uncovering the significance of life experiences and teaching, but requires replication to further the understanding of the connection between African American teachers' life experiences and their philosophies and practices.

The study of the life histories of Mr. Ron Wright, Mr. Kevin Roberts, and Ms. Amada Carter has implications for understanding the process by which culturally relevant pedagogies can be infused into the social studies content and curriculum. The three African American social studies teachers' life histories and understandings of their racial and cultural identities required

that they incorporate culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies in their social studies instruction. As social studies instructors, the teachers believe that the majority of the social studies content and curriculum is written from a dominant, mainstream Eurocentric perspective, and to accurately address the experiences, histories, and cultural competencies of their African American students, they incorporate an Afrocentric perspective. This Afrocentric perspective involves pedagogy that centers their African American students in the curriculum, focusing on the histories and experiences of peoples of African descent (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1994; Dei, 1994). The social studies teachers in this study also concluded that to teach “the truth” they must challenge the existing narrative. Their instruction must include culturally relevant supplemental resources that offer a different perspective to the social studies content and curriculum and dispels notions of White supremacy and dominance within the historical narrative. Creating learning experiences in which students engage in critical examination of the social studies content and text is an important element of the culturally relevant pedagogies that the teachers of the study employ. Their use of instructional strategies that require students to interrogate the historical narrative presented, discuss multiple perspectives and understandings of history, and engage in critical thinking and self-reflection are important practices that all social studies teachers can draw upon.

The study has important implications for teacher preparation. Teacher preparation courses need to address culturally relevant and other pedagogical practices for African American and other minority students. Each of the three African American teachers in the study noted that their ability to effectively deliver instruction for their African American students resulted from collaboration with colleagues, not their university teacher preparation coursework. By addressing culturally relevant educational theories and pedagogies, and content in teacher preparation

coursework can help prepare pre-service teachers to engage in instruction that will provide quality and equitable educational experiences for their minority students. Having pre-service teachers engage the literature and discuss research-based culturally relevant practices can help increase understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Also asking teachers who incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms to share their practices and provide support to pre-service teachers can add to the development of pre-service teachers' practice of culturally relevant pedagogy. It is evident that the educational landscape is changing, and more students of color are entering schools each year; thus it is imperative that teacher preparation address such issues in education in order to help all students learn and achieve success.

Furthermore, this research advocates that teacher preparation instructors and field placement coordinators consider the variety of experiences and beliefs that pre-service teachers bring to their practice. The majority of pre-service teachers entering the profession is young White students and often lacks the cultural experiences and competencies necessary to teach their minority students. Understanding that these teachers bring experiences that are often vastly different than the experiences of the students they teach is significant to improving overall quality of the coursework and field placements that pre-service teachers receive. Teacher preparation instructors can create activities, such as reflective journals writing that ask pre-service teachers to reflect on their personal experiences and how they have impacted their teaching philosophies and practices. To further engage pre-service teachers, teacher education instructors can ask pre-service teachers to consider their experiences with members of minority groups and how their experiences have shaped their understanding of instruction for minority students.

In this study, the three African American teachers' lives illustrate that experience does affect practice; thus by having pre-service teachers reflect on their past lived experiences and engage in dialogue around how their experiences affect their understanding of quality instruction for minority students is a necessary element of effective teacher training. Also by exposing pre-service teachers to a variety of cultural experiences and teaching placements that involve students of color, they can receive quality experiences that relate directly to their understanding of effective instruction for minority students. This exposure will allow pre-service teachers to connect the theories of their coursework to their actual practice. The goal of all teacher preparation programs is to prepare pre-service teachers for lifelong quality work in education. Providing culturally relevant field experiences and training that address the demands of an ever-changing educational landscape will prepare pre-service teachers for a career of successful teaching and learning.

Lastly, the study of the life experiences of three African American social studies teachers is significant to the overall field of educational research on the experiences and pedagogies of African American teachers. Majority of educational research emphasizes the philosophies, pedagogies, and beliefs of White teachers (Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2007). The narrative life histories of three African American social studies teachers provide counter stories to this common educational research. These narratives incorporate the experiences of one African American female and two African American male teachers. Their stories alone, as members of minority groups, serve as a means to counter the dominant educational discourse that primarily addresses the practice and experiences of White teachers (Nieto & Bode, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Tate, 1997; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002) . In addition, their stories offer a different perspective to the educational dialogue and further the

educational goals dedicated to understanding the problems in education through the lens of communities of color (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Through their stories, these African American teachers share in their own words their professional experiences and give voice to minority teachers' perspectives often that allow the outside reader a glimpse into the distinct and personal elements of teaching and learning.

5.7 FINAL THOUGHTS

This study of the lives of three African American social studies teachers has been an extraordinary journey for the researcher and the teachers. It has fostered greater teacher understanding and self-reflection of pedagogy. The process of retelling personal experiences required self-reflection in which certain experiences and actions were validated and given some means of closure. By reflecting on past and present experiences, the teachers developed a clearer perspective and meaning of their life, future goals and aspirations. (Atkinson, 2002). For the researcher, self-reflection of my experiences in relation to my teaching philosophies and pedagogies has helped me make meaning of my past and present educational experiences and provided a clear focus of my future work in the field of education. To the reader, I encourage you to also reflect on your personal stories of experience and consider how they have contributed and shaped your beliefs, philosophies, and understanding of the process of teaching and learning.

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provides an analysis of the teachers' life histories. Emerging themes connecting the teachers' experiences to their practice indicate that the three African American teachers practice culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies as means of effective instruction for their African American students. Furthermore, drawing from their own experiences, the teachers promote high academic standards for their students and do not accept less than complete commitment to learning from students. In addition, themes address the three African American social studies teachers practice ideas of collective community in their teaching. Their experiences growing up with teachers and leaders who were visible and supported the youth in the community have influenced their understanding and practice of community. The teachers' narratives revealed that each of the teachers has confronted racism in various experiences, and these experiences have compelled them to approach their teaching, particularly for African Americans students in a more profound manner, seeking to raise the consciousness and overall understanding of their students. Their experiences with racism also require that the teachers focus their instruction on combating forms of institutional and individual racism. Also discussed are aspects related to critical race theory through the examination of race operating in education. Throughout their stories and in discussions of their practices, it is evident that the teachers are committed to effective teaching and learning for their African American students.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/INTERVIEW FOCUS TIMELINE

<p style="text-align: center;">Interview 1</p> <p>Background information, focus on broad life experiences, who they are growing up, and identity as African Americans</p>	<p>What are the personal and educational life histories of three African American social studies teachers?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Interview 2</p> <p>Teaching related experiences, being a teacher, motivations for teaching and other teaching experiences</p> <p>Planning and approaches, conceptual goals, focus on what they do in the classroom and why, being an African American teachers</p>	<p>How do the teachers' life experiences described in their life histories influence their teaching philosophies and practices for African American students?</p> <p>What types of culturally relevant teaching practices do they employ in their classrooms for their African American students?</p>

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW 1 PROTOCOL

Background, broad life experiences

1. Describe your experiences growing up?
 - a. Childhood
 - b. Community and neighborhood
 - c. School—elementary and high school
2. What was it like growing up as a young African American child/young adult?
3. Did you experience any negative treatment because of your race?
4. Who were your role models or people who positively influenced your life during this time?
5. Did you have any African American teachers throughout your elementary and high school career?
6. Where did you attend college and why did you decide to attend this particular school?
7. Describe your overall college experience?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW 2 PROTOCOL

Teaching experiences, Planning and instruction

1. What were your motivations and reasons for becoming a teacher?
2. Where there any persons or teachers who influenced your decision to become a teacher?
3. Where did you receive your formal teacher training?
4. Why did you choose to teach in your current district?
5. Describe your philosophy of education.
6. Describe your teaching style.
7. Do you apply many of the instructional practices learned in your formal teaching training in your instruction?
8. Do you sponsor any student clubs or coach?
9. Are you a member of any community or national organizations?
10. How would you describe the racial make-up of the students in your school, your classes?
11. Explain how you plan a lesson for your minority students? How do you relate the content to your students?
12. What concepts or skills do you feel are most important for your minority students? Why are these so important and what particular personal experiences have you encountered that cause you to stress these concepts over others?

13. Do you feel that race is an issue that needs to be addressed in education? Do you feel that your students are given equal opportunities and access to education?
14. Do you live the community in which you teach? Do you address the issues/concerns of your immediate and greater African American community in your classroom, if so how do you do this?
15. Do you feel any special responsibilities to the African American community because of your career choice?

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