The Relationship Between Socio-Economic Status and the Academic Achievement of Culturally Diverse Students

Yvette P. Ford
Kennesaw State University

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

By

Yvette P. Ford

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education In Teacher Leadership for Learning Inclusive Education In the Bagwell College of Education Kennesaw State University

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Dissertation Signature Page

Name: Yvette P. Ford

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The dissertation titled:

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was submitted to the Bagwell College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Education

has been read and approved by the Committee:

Tak Cheung Chan
Dissertation Chair Signature

Binbin Jiang
Committee Member Signature

Binbin Jiang
Date

Joya Carter Hicks
Committee Member Signature

Joya Carter Hicks
Date

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

by

Yvette P. Ford
Kennesaw State University, 2013

Test results have shown that culturally diverse students from both high and low socioeconomic groups have continued to underperform when compared to the dominant group.

The study focused on high achieving minority students in order to gain deeper insight of factors that lead to high academic achievement of culturally diverse students (Hispanics and Blacks) from both high and low socio-economic groups. The data for this study included the 2012 CRCT of middle school students, and interview records with 4 students, 4 parents and 4 teachers. The quantitative data were analyzed and sought to answer the following research questions: (a) Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic group? (b) Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from high socio-economic group? (c) Does the gender of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement? (d) Does the grade level of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement? The quantitative data revealed that no significant relationship existed between culturally diverse students’ socio-economic status and their academic achievement. The qualitative data were
analyzed and sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic student? (b) What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students? Through analysis of data from student, parent and teacher interviews, four predominate themes were determined: (a) communication, (b) cultural awareness, (c) motivation, and (d) teaching and learning supports.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, communication, cultural awareness, culturally diverse, motivation
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

When teachers teach their subjects well and if schools emphasize the importance of academic tasks and permit no distractions, children should be able to learn (Rothstein, 2004, p. 106). Some cultures are academically advantageous; however, poverty or culture should not be the predictor of students’ educational destiny (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Socio-economic status and ethnicity by themselves do not influence or cause academic achievement difficulties, but the collections of characteristics that define social-class differences have influenced students’ achievement (Harry & Klingner, 2007; Neito, 2010; Rothstein, 2004). Most economically disadvantaged children have effectively mastered the usual developmental childhood tasks of motor and language skills, and have learned the values of social practices of their homes and neighborhoods (Harry & Klingner, 2007); but they may not have learned particular forms of language or the ways in which schools use specific forms of language to the extent that their middle income peers have. Therefore, it can be assumed that students’ failure to achieve academically may be explained by other factors. The amount of money that a family has or the color of a child’s skin should not influence how well that child learns (Rothstein, 2004).

As part of President Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty”, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965. It provided federal funds to help low-income students, which resulted in educational programs such as Title 1 and Head
Start. Since the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) has been passed, the federal government poured billions of dollars into Title 1 and Head Start in an effort to close the poverty and the racial academic achievement gap. The primary goal of these initiatives was to help economically disadvantaged children catch up academically (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). However, the results have been extremely disappointing. The academic achievement gap continued to persist in American classrooms, and Bainbridge and Lasley II (2004) called on educational practitioners to examine the social inequities that are created by demographics and educational practices. Educational practitioners, policy makers, and other school officials in the U. S. continue to struggle with academic achievement among students who represent the diverse cultures in public schools which has resulted in goals under the current federal policy to raise the achievement level of diverse learners and close the achievement gap that persists (VanSciver, 2006; Ferguson, 2002).

Goals 2000, which was a significant step in education reform, was signed by President Clinton on March 30, 1994. It incorporated eight national goals that focus on:

“readiness for school, school completion, student achievement and citizenship, teacher education and development, mathematics and science, adult literacy and lifelong learning, the school environment (safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools), and family participation in children’s schooling” (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006, p. 22).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) embodies Goals 2000 and Title 1 and requires that states must have educational standards and that they must report annually on the progress of all students toward meeting those standards. Title I was designed to support school reform efforts tied to challenging state academic standards in order to reinforce and enhance efforts to improve teaching and learning for students. Title I
programs must be based on effective means of improving student achievement and include strategies to support parental involvement -
(http://www.gaosa.org/reportinfo.aspx#C1a).

School policies and practices should not be based on the perceptions of group stereotypes, but rather on knowledge about student’s strengths and needs (Ramirez and Carpenter, 2005). Causey-Bush (2005) pointed out that as the student population in the U.S. increased, it reflected an increase in the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classrooms. School officials have been using standardized testing as the means to rate students’ achievement and as an essential basis for major school reform. At the same time Causey-Bush (2005) cautioned educators that standardized testing should not be used to determine a student’s overall academic capacity in terms of student learning, critical thinking, and higher-order reasoning skills even though they provided insights to diagnose weaknesses in students’ performance. There are multiple factors, such as environmental experiences, economic status or even participation in English as a Second Language program that can affect the achievement of culturally diverse students. Poverty, detrimental homes and community environments, or lack of opportunity to learn can impact students’ overall school performance (Harry & Klingner, 2007; Ramirez & Carpenter, 2004). As a result, placing students of the same ethnicity/race into a single comparison group when reporting student achievement may create a “phantom gap” (Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005).

Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) ascertained that since the Brown v. Board of Education decision there has been keen focus on “between-group” differences in terms of academic achievement, which resulted in policies and practices that are designed to
reduce the “between-group” differences in educational achievement. Very little attention was paid to “with-in” group differences that are probably as important as those between groups and may even be more relevant in helping to figure out how to narrow the achievement gap between groups.

Leonard (2008) postulated that past discrimination and economic constraints were factors that contributed to underachievement among minority students. Rothstein (2004) averred that common sense would dictate that the poor achievement was the fault of schools. Each child regardless of cultural background should be given the opportunity to advance academically in schools. Love, Stiles, Mundry and DiRanna (2008) argued that the learning of every child was the collective responsibility of educators. The learning environment should be a representation of all cultural groups in which the context and climate is conducive to the learning and academic success of all students in which students feel a sense of membership and belonging (Ford, 2010).

Problem Statement

Cushner, McCleeland and Safford (2009) declared that prior to the middle of the twenty-first century the idea of providing meaningful educational experiences for all students, including students of color was non-existent. In 2001 the No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and dictated that schools worked to alleviate academic intergroup disparities (Ferguson, 2002). As calls for accountability and improved test scores increased under the provision of the No Child Left Behind Act educators continued to seek ways to increase student achievement. However, there still existed an educational achievement gap between our dominant
culture and our minority groups. As a result, an explicit goal of the federal policy was to raise the achievement levels among minority groups in the US (Farkas, 2002) and had since become a driving force in curriculum development. It became necessary to recognize, develop and implement multicultural education in the United States (Delpit, 2006; Farkas, 2002). Multicultural education, according to Nieto (2010), is “an anti-racist education that is firmly related to student learning and permeates all areas of schooling” (p. 218) which include curriculum, instructional strategies, and interactions among teachers, students, and families. Multicultural education is a process of educational reform that is relevant in influencing positive classroom interactions and that attempts to ensure that all students from diverse backgrounds gain access to equitable educational experiences that will help them to be successful academically and socially (Nieto, 2010; Noel, 2008). Bennett (1998) argued that multicultural education was not just merely including content about ethnic groups into curriculum, but also included the manner in which knowledge in schools is transmitted and constructed.

Student factors, school factors, and home environment all contributed to students’ academic achievement (Fan, 2012). Shah, Atta, Qureshi and Shah (2012) found that student’s family economic status played important roles in their lives both inside and outside of school, and the researchers concluded that a family’s economic status had the most significant influence on student learning. Akhtar and Niazi (2011) shared that the general perception was that students who belonged to families with higher socioeconomic status would have greater opportunities to interact with the learning environment which resulted in greater achievement as opposed to students who were from lower socioeconomic status who had less opportunities and less resources that caused them to
lag behind academically. Vygotsky’s constructivist theory suggested that students’ learning was affected by their social interactions (Schunk, 2004). It was therefore necessary to understand the underpinnings and the impact of socio-economic status and other factors that are related to the academic achievement gaps of culturally diverse students. The relationships need to be examined so that educational practitioners respond to the underlying issues that are impacting diverse learners.

Theoretical Framework

The two frameworks used in the study of the relationship of the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement were Vygotsky’s social constructivist/constructivism theory and cultural responsive teaching. First, social constructivist theory emphasizes the need for “socially meaningful activity as an important influence on human consciousness” (Schunk, 2004, p. 293). Social constructivist theory was developed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, who was born in Russia in 1896. He studied psychology, philosophy, and literature. Vygotsky asserted that unlike animals that react to the environment, humans are capable of altering the environment for their own purposes. Next, culturally responsive teaching stressed the importance of educators to learn from and respectfully relate to other cultural backgrounds, heritages, and traditions by acknowledging and understanding one’s own culture and values while respecting those of others (The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements, 2009). Scholars such as Kathryn H. Au (1993), Gloria Ladson Billings (1994), Lisa Delpit (1995), Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2003), Luis Moll (Moll & González, 2004), and Sonia Nieto (2010) constructed the theory of culturally responsive
teaching (Gay, 2010, p. x). The development of culturally responsive teaching was based on the education of culturally diverse students in response to concerns for racial and ethnic inequities (Gay, 2010).

Constructivism

“Constructivism had only been recently applied to the field of learning” (Schunk, 2004, p. 290). Vygotsky's constructivist theory is also referred to as constructivism. Social constructivist theory emphasized the importance of social interactions in the acquisition of skills and knowledge and placed the interactions between experts and novices at the center of how one learns (Hairston & Strickland, 2011). Cushner, McClelland and Stafford (2009) referenced Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory as “the ways in which individuals construct their world are strongly influenced by cultural factors” (p. 366). For Vygotsky, the culture gave the child the cognitive tools needed for development because social constructivism emphasized the critical importance of culture and the importance of the social context for cognitive development. The theory of social constructivism highlighted the interaction of individuals and their situations in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge (Cobb & Bowers, 1999 as cited in Schunk, 2004). One of the assumptions of constructivism was that people are active learners and must construct knowledge for themselves (Geary, 1995 as cited in Schunk, 2004). As individuals interacted, learners were provided with the means to construct meaning of what they were experiencing both externally or interpersonally which was then internalized. As learners constructed meanings they were influenced by their socio-historical experiences that they had encountered throughout their lives (Hairston & Strickland, 2011).
A major tenet of constructivism is the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), which argued that students can, with the help from adults or other children who were more advanced, master concepts and ideas that they could not understand on their own. The constructivist theory emphasized the importance “of interpersonal (social), cultural-historical, and individual factors as the key to human development” (Schunk, 2004, p. 294). In the ZPD, a teacher and learner worked on a task that the learner could not perform independently. “The ZPD reflects the Marxist idea of collective activity, in which those who know more or are more skilled share that knowledge and skill to accomplish a task with those who know less” (Bruner, 1984, as cited in Schunk, 2004, p. 295). The cultural-historical aspects of Vygotsky’s theory addressed the idea that learning and development were based on the context of the situation and in the interactions of the learners and their environments (Schunk, 2004).

As it was applied to the study, Vygotsky’s constructivist theory held that I would expect students from culturally diverse backgrounds regardless of socio-economic status to achieve academic success when they interacted positively in their school environment and constructed meaning through different modes of learning because an individual’s interaction with the environment contributed to success in his/her learning. Additionally, if teachers used integrated curricula and materials so that all students were actively involved, active learning should take place.

*Cultural Responsive Teaching*

The theory of culturally responsive teaching posited that there were discontinuities between culturally diverse students’ school and home cultures which consequently impacted these students’ academic achievement (Gay, 2010). Cultural
responsive teaching focused on the importance of culture in schooling and did not focus on race and racism as they were related to the historical patterns that existed in patterns of schooling in the U.S. (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). A central tenet of culturally responsive teaching is that if teachers recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of their students into their teaching then their academic achievement will improve. Ford and Kea (2009) asserted that when teachers were culturally responsive, they were student centered; they broke down barriers to learning, and therefore influenced students’ success. Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, and Stuczynski (2011) postulated that “culturally responsive teaching addressed the needs of students by improving motivation, and engagement” (p. 4).

Ford (2010) postulated that culturally responsive teaching required that teachers be proactive in their efforts to address the needs of students so that students experience success. The theory of culturally responsive teaching argued that “when teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they eliminate barriers to learning and achievement and, thereby, open doors for culturally different students to reach their potential” (p. 50). Culturally responsive teaching included showing respect for all students’ racial/ethnic cultures, and encouraged students to be themselves by supporting students culturally in a way that produced the kind of teaching and learning environment in which students thrived (Sleeter, 2010).

The beliefs and attitudes about teaching in general and teaching students from different cultures set the climate of the classroom (Ford, 2010). As it was applied to this study of the relationship between the socio-economic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students, the theory of culturally responsive teaching
maintained that if teachers learned about and integrated their students' backgrounds and personal experiences into the teaching and learning environment, they would positively influence the academic achievement of all students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed design research study was to investigate the academic achievement of students within similar and among different diverse cultural groups. The study of the relationship of socioeconomic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students added new dimensions to this series of educational research. The relationship between the socio-economic status and the achievement of culturally diverse students in a metro-Atlanta school district was examined. Student academic achievement, particularly as it related to cultural groups and economic status was examined to find out the underpinnings that related to the academic achievement gaps of culturally diverse students in schools so that educational practitioners could respond to the underlying issues that have been impacting their learning. The data from the study might serve as an impetus for school policy makers to retreat from practices that do not seem to enhance academic learning for all students and to move forward with practices that are perceived by students, parents and teachers as essential practices for improving student achievement and overall academic success.

Rationale and Significance of Study

Academic failure and success have been at the center of educational policies for many years (Nieto, 2010). Policies in education such as Elementary and Secondary
Education Act, Goals 2000, and No Child Left Behind Act (2001) were indications that educators were seeking to address concerns about the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged and minority students.

Problems with achievement of culturally diverse students had deep roots in the history of the U.S (Nieto, 2010; Noguera, & Wing, 2008). Racial issues in schools in the U.S were often posed as “black and white,” or Latino and white in the Southwest (Ferguson, 2001; King & Funston, 2006; Tukel, 1992 as cited in Wing, 2007). While we cannot change the past, we can address issues for a more successful academic future for culturally diverse students. As such, the academic achievement of culturally diverse students needed to be examined in relation to their socio-economic status to unpack the components of the underlying assumptions of students’ academic achievement. Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) suggested that within group differences were important to recognize when we looked at student achievement. As a result, the study was important in examining and shedding light on the underlying evidence of academic achievement among diverse cultural groups and would therefore help policy makers and other educational practitioners respond to changes in culturally diverse classrooms.

This study was significant because it measured the relationship of socio-economic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students and provided insight from the perspectives of culturally diverse students, parents, and their teachers’ perception on academic achievement. The results of this study should be beneficial to researchers in the field of multi-cultural education, educational policy makers and educators in general and should help to guide professional practice that will support the learning of culturally diverse students. It should also be a contribution to research on
multicultural education, cultural diversity, and academic achievement of students. The findings from this study could help policy makers and educators consider and implement effective ways to serve low achieving culturally diverse students.

Research Questions

Grounded in the conceptual framework and based on the stated purpose of this study, the following research questions will guide this study. A major research question was developed:

What is the relationship between the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement?

Sub-questions of this study include:

RQ1. Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic group?

RQ2. Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from high socio-economic group?

RQ3. Does the gender of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement?

RQ4. Does the grade level of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement?

RQ5. What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic student?

RQ6. What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students?
Operational Definitions

The following terms need to be defined in this study.

- **Academic achievement** for the purpose of this study will refer to the academic gains that students make in math and reading as evidenced by the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), 2012.

- **Achievement gap** refers to difference between the academic achievement of White, middle-class students and their peers from other social and cultural backgrounds such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Pacific islanders (Nieto, 2010, p.90)

- **Culturally diverse** is the variety of races and cultures represented in each school setting. The culturally diverse groups will include American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, Multi-racial and Asian/Pacific Islander.

- **High socio-economic group** will refer to students who do not qualify for free or reduced lunch.

- **Intercultural competence** refers to the “specific behaviors that are evident in individuals who are effective at living and working across cultures” (Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2009, p. 149).

- **Low socio economic group** refers to student in the school setting who are qualified to receive free or reduced lunch.

- **Minority group** is a race, ethnic or cultural group that does not make up the dominant majority of the school population. The minority groups include Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial students.
• **Multicultural education**, as defined by Cushner, Mcclleland and Safford (2009), “is the process of educational reform that assures that students from all groups (racial, ethnic, socio-economic, ability, gender etc.) experience educational equality, success, and social mobility” (p. 22).

• **Teacher experiences** refer to the number of years teachers engage in full time classroom teaching.

• **Teacher qualifications** refer to the level of teacher certification: T4 (with bachelor degree), T5 (with master degree), T6 (with specialist degree), or T7 (with doctoral degree).

• A **Title 1 school** is a school that is identified as having high numbers or percentage of poor children (economically disadvantaged) (consistent with Ed.gov US Department of Education, [http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html)). That is, they host a number of students who are qualified to receive free or reduced price lunch due to their families’ low socio-economic status.

**Summary**

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) required states to set educational standards and mandated states to report annually on the progress of all students towards those standards (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). Educational standards should be established so that through the development and maintenance of appropriate teaching and learning conditions, all students would have a fair opportunity to learn.
The study was grounded in the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism and culturally responsive teaching which helped to shed light on how students could achieve academic success.

In sum, as a response to Ramirez and Carpenter (2004) suggestion that attention be paid to “with-in” group differences so that policy makers and practitioners avoid ineffective and counterproductive programs for minority students, the study of socio-economic and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students was conducted.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the review of literature is to report research findings relating to the purpose of the proposed study. The literature reviewed was organized based on the following topics:

1. Achievement Gap
2. Head Start
3. Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement
4. Culturally Responsive Teaching to Close the Achievement Gap
5. Minority Schooling and Achievement
6. Cultural Similarities and Differences on School Learning
7. Model Minority Group
8. High Achieving Minority Students

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is a term that has evolved over the past decades to describe the academic achievement primarily between racially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized and poor families and other students (Nieto, 2010). Barton (2004) asserted that the basic rights to equal school access eventually became a reality, but that equal access had not led to equal achievement. The average Black and Hispanic 12th grader
performed at about the same level as the average 8th grade white student in reading and math (Nieto, 2010). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that the average 8th grade minority student performed at about the level of the average 4th grade student (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 as cited in Barton, 2004).

“The racial gap in achievement has been documented as early as kindergarten/first grade and continues to grow as students matriculate through the public school system” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 66). Ogbu (1992a) shared that in comparative studies conducted minority groups, such as African Americans, had disproportionate and persistent problems in school adjustment and academic performance and that community factors contributed to the barriers that minority groups faced in schools and society overall. These factors influenced choices that resulted in individual differences in school outcome. The researcher found that even when minority groups were advanced in terms of years of school completed and on performance of tests of academic achievement and cognitive skills they were faced with the challenge of attaining educational parity with the dominant groups. There is a public awareness of a persistent gap between Black and White students (Bainbridge & Lasley II, 2004; Rothstein, 2004). Even when Blacks and Whites came from similar families with similar incomes there continued to be an academic achievement gap. Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) asserted that the achievement gap between the dominant and the minority groups was often misapplied which led to ineffective and counterproductive programs for students. They added that the media contributed to the misunderstanding about the academic achievement and oversimplified complex data that were related to minority groups. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) found that Hispanic students performed just a little better than African American, and
Asians performed about the same as Whites with the exception of math where they tended to be ahead (evidenced by NAEP scores).

Teachers, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender, can help to alleviate the achievement gap among students through quality teaching and caring attitudes toward all students (Nieto, 2010). Noguera and Wing (2008) argued that:

“Teachers also play a role in perpetuating the achievement gap. They do this through lowered standards and expectations; by giving some students more attention and encouragement than others; and through the passion, organization, and skill they bring to their teaching. Teachers can be unconscious in their complicity with respect to the reproduction of inequality, or they can simply accept the failure of a large number of students as normal and blame the students for their failure” (pp. 198-199).

Bainbridge and Lasley II (2004) argued that even though humans are born with similar ranges of intelligence, the different nurturing practices that take place in a child’s formative years have tremendous impact on students’ ability to learn. Rothstein (2004) and Barton (2004) asserted that different child rearing practices and patterns were class differences that affected the academic performance of students. The researchers stated that low income families who had difficulty finding stable housing were more likely to be mobile, and students’ mobility is an important cause of low student achievement. Rothstein(2004) argued, however, that minority students who were from families with average family income as the dominant groups should not be scoring lower than whites, but shared that these minority children were ranked differently in social class structure. Nieto (2010) asserted that the achievement gap could be likened to as the resource gap, “because the gap is often a result of widely varying resources provided to students based on where they live and who they are” (p. 227).
Head Start

Head Start is a large scale program that serves millions of black children (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 137). It is a major early childhood program that provides low income children aged 3-5 years, and their parents, with schooling, health, nutrition, and social welfare services (Ludwig & Phillips, 2008, p. 257). In 1965, during President Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty”, the federal government stepped in and launched two important programs (Title 1 of the Secondary Education Act, which provided federal funds for compensatory education in high poverty schools, and Head Start) that focused on poverty and that should ultimately help to overcome racial achievement gaps in educational opportunities (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). A major aim of the Head Start program was to increase family involvement, which was seen as an important resource for enhancing early learning among children in poverty (Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2011).

The comprehensive Head Start program addressed the developmental needs of low-income children and their families by providing cognitive stimulation and emotional supports in the learning environment for young children. At the same time, the children’s health needs are addressed through the provision of health services which include nutritious meals and snacks, hearing and vision screening, and opportunities for vigorous exercise and rest (Halle, Hair, Wandner, & Chien, 2012). Ludwig and Phillips (2008) argued that critics believed that Head Start has been a failure from its inception. Since 1965, the federal government has invested billions of dollars into both Title1 and Head Start in an effort to close the poverty, and indirectly, the racial-gap in academic achievement, but the results and effectiveness have been disappointing and remained
uncertain even though the ideas behind Head Start appeared to be right (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The National Assessment of Educational Program (NAEP) indicated that after kindergarten black children do not catch up with their classmates academically, instead, they fall behind.

Over the years, the Head Start program has improved in quality (Ludwig & Phillips, 2008), and even though the returns are disappointing “neither the federal government nor the states have abandoned their commitment to educational programs aimed at helping disadvantaged children, a great many of whom are African American and Hispanic” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 227).

Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement

In addition to race/ethnic and language differences, there was a growing disparity in wealth among the population in the U.S. More than 22% of Blacks and more than 21% of Hispanic population live in poverty, while just over 9% of Whites live in poverty (Nieto, 2010). African Americans were 3 times as likely to come from America’s poor families (Viadero, 2000 as cited in Bainbridge and Lasley II, 2004). Living in poverty meant that families were less likely to provide enriching cultural or educational experiences for their children. Bainbridge and Lasley II (2004) found that many children of non-English speaking immigrants who entered the US whose parents have little or no formal education and who lacked the resources to provide academic stimulation were 2 times as likely to live in poverty as White children and had less academic achievement gains.
Doing well academically will result in students doing well economically later in life (Altschul, 2012). However, many students’ chances of academic success were reduced due to poverty (Altschul, 2012, p.13). Schmid (2001) believed that the influence of family income, the occupations of parents, and the general family structure contributed to students’ school achievement. Therefore, parents’ socio-economic status (SES) had a strong and positive effect on children’s achievement. Students from higher socio-economic status, experienced greater parent involvement in their education (Vellymalay, 2012), which enabled these students to receive the necessary skills, knowledge, behavior and values that were needed by their children for academic success. Children whose parents were better educated, made more money, had higher-status jobs, and lived in two-parent families tended to attain higher levels of education than do other minorities. Children who came from intact immigrant families in which both parents had higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, tended to have higher academic achievement (Bainbridge & Lasley II, 2004; Ogbu, 1992a; Schmid, 2001).

Farkas (2002) posited that increases in the learning gap between ethnic minorities and White children existed because children attended neighborhood schools that were segregated by race and family income. Wealthy neighborhoods with families that placed high value on education were likely to have strong schools, attracted good teachers, and had healthy interactions between parents and teachers while communities that were characterized by low family income were likely to have schools with fewer resources to attract highly qualified teachers (Barton, 2004; Farkas, 2002). School systems were organized so that less resources were allocated to schools serving high concentration of low income and minority students (Nieto, 2010).
Bainbridge and Lasley II (2004) argued that educational practitioners and policy makers needed to respond to the social inequities that were created by the demographic realities in schools and that they were to apply instructional practices that influence greater student school achievement. The researchers argued that the academic achievement levels of students’ parents and their socioeconomic status of student’s families were more relevant than race to predict their academic achievement (consistent with Schmid, 2001). Findings from a National Educational Longitudinal Study indicated that parents’ abilities to invest economic, social, and human capital in their children’s education led to higher academic achievement (Altschul, 2012).

Culturally Responsive Teaching to Close the Achievement Gap

Culturally responsive teaching consists of using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and learning styles of culturally different students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them (Saifer et. al, 2011; Ford & Kea, 2009; Leonard, 2008). Educators sought strategies to assist in the teaching and interaction of their diverse students in an effort “to ameliorate the effects of cultural discontinuity” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 66). Ford and Kea (2009) suggested that educators create culturally responsive classrooms in an effort to help close the achievement gap. At the same time, teachers need to become culturally competent if they are to respond to the learning needs of the growing diverse student population (Saifer et al, 2011). Teachers should avoid coursework that drilled students in academic skills and “teaching to the test”, because it created classroom environments that put teachers and students “miles apart” from each other (Cammarota & Romero, 2006), because the educational content had no significance
or meaning to the students’ lives. It is therefore essential that educators pay particular attention to students’ cultures and create opportunities for students to make meaningful connections to their lives.

Schools in the United States are experiencing rapid demographic changes in the number of students of color, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and students from low-income families (Howard, 2007). Ford and Kea (2009) shared that in 1972 students were predominantly white (78% of the public school population). By 2005, approximately 42% of students were culturally different (African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The authors posited that teacher demographics, which have remained relatively stable, could be ignored. The majority of teachers in K-12 classrooms are White females. “Some teachers, administrators, and parents view their school’s increasing diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity” (Howard, 2007, p. 16). Ramanthan (2006) believed that the traditional curriculum in American classrooms transmitted Euro-American norms that were seen as the primary American culture. The implication was that the continuation of traditional teaching practices that privileged the status quo of the White middle class may not be as effective for teacher and student success in the current culturally diverse classrooms. Educators needed to examine everything that was done in the classroom, because business as usual would mean continued academic failure for the culturally diverse students.

Cushner, McClelland and Stafford (2009) asserted that proponents of multicultural education in the past decade have continued to pursue the goal of equal educational opportunity, and to argue that a truly equitable education will be excellent at
narrowing the achievement gap between cultural groups. Cultural clashes (misunderstanding and miscommunication) in the classroom settings will happen, however they could be lessened if educators became more self-reflective, recognized cultural differences between themselves and their students, strived to become more culturally competent, and created classrooms that were culturally responsive (Ford and Kea, 2009). When teachers had the benefit of extensive and long term multi-cultural professional development and multicultural teacher education preparation they were less likely to embrace a cultural deficit view, were more confident, and believed they were effective in their instruction of culturally different learners (Saifer et. al., 2011; Ford and Kea (2009). Rigor and relevance must be stressed so as to ensure that students were meeting academic success (Saifer et al, 2011). Educators of all racial and cultural groups would have to become culturally competent in their abilities to form authentic, caring and effective relationship with students across cultural differences (Howard, 2007). Educators should hold consistent and high expectations for all students and use curriculum and their instructional practices in a manner that honor individual student’s culture and learning needs. Above all, educators should communicate respect for each student’s intelligence (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McKinley, 2005; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997, as cited in Howard, 2007).

Minority Schooling and Achievement

Kozol, Tatum, Eaton, and Gándara (2010) postulated that when African American parents fought for the end to school segregation, they were not seeking the companionship of white children, but they were seeking access to better educational
resources. The parents felt that equal access to publicly funded resources such as school facilities, equipment and supplies and curricular options were their children’s right. Ogbu (1992b) asserted that poor school achievement is not only a result of minority children attending schools that are inferior, but found that lower school performance of some minority groups occurred in good as well as in bad or inferior schools. Minority children started school lacking the cultural capital of the White middle class (Ogbu, 1992b; Rothstein, 2004). Farkas (2002) found that many low-income African-American, Latino, and American Indian children’s family circumstances caused them to begin schooling at a disadvantage when compared with White and middle class children. Phillips, Crouse and Ralph (1998) as cited in Farkas (2002) observed that Black 6-year-olds’ vocabulary scores matched those of White 5-year-olds, which indicated that African-American students began school approximately one year behind White students. Farkas (2002) posited that the Black-White school performance gap would be eliminated if educators focused on performance at school entry. “Latina/o students experience course work that is often remedial and unchallenging – benign at best, a dumbing-down at worst” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006, p. 16). Such limiting curriculum denies the Latina/o students the educational opportunities to develop their intellectual capacity, which makes it a widely accepted belief that academic success is unattainable for them (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Ogbu (1992b) shared that among African Americans, students and parents of all socioeconomic status expressed a strong wish to succeed academically, yet African American children did poorly in school when compared with their White peers at every class level.
Harry and Klingner (2007) noted that African American students represented the Educable Mental Retardation twice the rate of their white peers; and in some states Native American and Hispanic students were overrepresented in Learning Disability. Harry and Klingner (2007) asserted that as “the provision of services for students with disabilities became a legal mandate, clear patterns of overrepresentation of Mexican American and African American students in special education programs emerged” (p. 17).

“It is not children’s poverty or race or ethnic background that stands in the way of achievement; it is school practices and policies and the beliefs that underlie them that pose the biggest obstacles” (Love, Styles, Mundry & RiRanna, 2008, p. 4). VanSciver (2006) found that parents of low income and minority students placed extreme trust in the hands of school officials with educating their children, and in making essential academic decisions for them. At times these parents were unsure about their roles in advocating for their children in the academic setting, particularly when it came to having them placed in the more rigorous classes.

Allen (2007) suggested that educators needed to engage in dialog with students’ families throughout the year and that they needed to utilize other cultural informants such as teaching assistants, secretarial and custodial staff, parent volunteers and other people in the school who have different experiences to increase educators’ “cultural intelligence” (p. 58). Bouillion and Gomez’s (2001) shared:

“A challenge facing many educational institutions … is the disconnect between schools and student’s home communities. Schools are in communities but often not of communities… Teaching and learning are often disconnected from the day-to-day life of the community …” (p. 879).
Therefore, as Allen (2007) suggested school-community partnership should be created so that students connect their school experiences to their home environments, because it would help to increase students’ academic achievement.

School segregation has affected the academic achievement of minority students, because they perceived ongoing patterns of discrimination and prejudice (Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005; Ogbu, 1992b). This perception inhibits their academic achievement. Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) posited that there was an oppositional culture that was prevalent in schools from a percentage of minority students. This has resulted in the minority students’ disengagement and lack of participation which caused their achievement to suffer and contributed to increased achievement gap between them and the dominant group (Ogbu, 1992b). Cushner, McClelland, and Stafford (2009) asserted that language played a critical role in minority student achievement. U.S schools are faced with a number of students for whom English is not their first language and with varying patterns in communication. This has resulted in communication break down between teachers and students, and impeded the learning process.

The NCLB legislation stated that every school must demonstrate adequate yearly progress toward meeting the goal that every student must demonstrate academic proficiency by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Therefore educators need to help all students regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status show “continuous and substantial” improvement (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Ward (2003) argued that teachers in the United States played important roles in alleviating or exacerbating the educational inequalities and achievement of students. Such inequalities were sometimes based on ethnicity, class, socio-economic status as well as other cultural factors. In order
for educators to respond to the needs of culturally diverse students, they need to understand what culture is, their own cultural background, and how individual cultural background influences student learning. Educators need to improve their intercultural (Cushner, McClelland, & Stafford, 2009) skills so that they can better meet the needs of their culturally diverse learning community.

Cultural Similarities and Differences on School Learning

Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) argued that within group differences were important to recognize when we look at the achievement of culturally diverse students, because they were as important as those between minority and the dominant groups, and could help researchers to figure out how to narrow the achievement gap. Ogbu (1992a) posited that all minorities are faced with certain similar barriers in school, such as inferior curriculum, denigrating treatment, and cultural and language barriers. They were also faced with social and economic barriers in the wider society. However, Ogbu (1992a) found that some minorities were more able than others to adjust socially and do well academically in school. He argued that immigrants or voluntary minorities, people who have moved more or less voluntarily to the United States, even though they experienced subordination once they were in the United States, the positive expectations that they brought with them influenced their perceptions of the Whites. As a result, their children usually do not experience disproportionate and persistent problems in social adjustment and academic achievement like that of the involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1992a). Also, voluntary minorities have cultural models that led them to get ahead in the United States and to interpret their economic hardships as temporary problems that they could and
would overcome through education and hard work. As a result, in voluntary minority communities there was a climate or orientation that strongly endorsed and supported academic success as a means of getting ahead in the United States (Schmid, 2001; Ogbu, 1992a).

Schmid (2001) revealed essential information on issues that included the role of family status, family expectations, race and ethnicity, and English-language ability on individual performance. Schmid (2001) shared that economic and educational progress among immigrant groups was extremely uneven. For example, Asian immigrants, on average, performed better economically than most Latino immigrants, particularly Mexicans. The educational gap among different immigrant groups was also substantial. Reading and Math scores varied significantly among different immigrant groups. Factors such as background, cultural patterns, family expectations, language ability, and school segregation and ethnic discrimination, as well as the “context of the reception” also played important roles in school achievement.

Model Minority Group

Wing (2007) argued that race is closely linked to academic achievement and found that Asian Americans continued to excel while African American and Hispanic students continued to lag behind academically. Results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading and Math for students in 4th and 8th grade indicated that White and Asian/Pacific Islander students continued to have higher overall scores than their Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Asian Americans comprise the racial minority group that is
described as high achievers. Yong and Wei (2008) shared that Asian Americans were seen as the model minority groups, because in the published school report cards that was mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act they performed much better than other minority groups. Brydolf (2009); Yong and Wei (2008) found that Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders routinely posted the highest scores on standardized test, and were most likely to graduate from high schools. The Asian Americans were over-represented among winners of National Merit Scholarship and were also overrepresented at America’s most prestigious universities (Flynn, 1991 as cited in Yong and Wei, 2008), and they scored higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT), especially in Math. Asian cultural values emphasized the importance of education, because Asian children were expected to repay their parents for their sacrifice by attaining high educational achievement. In addition to their cultural values, the Asian’s academic and educational pursuit represented a response to racial, cultural, and social barriers experienced by them and they were encouraged to pursue higher education in order to gain equal opportunities (Ma & Yeh, 2010). Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) shared that Asian children usually do well in schools, because their parents insisted upon it, and the children felt obliged to comply with their parents’ wishes (consistent with Ma & Yeh, 2010).

Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) shared that impoverished Asian students at inferior inner city schools outperformed Black and Hispanic students even when they had the same class, and the same teachers. The authors explained that the process of racism and internalized racism helped to explain why some Asian groups outperformed other minority groups. “Although Asian-Americans experienced racism, they usually do not get
stereotyped as less intelligent than Whites, so they internalized and transferred messages about themselves that were different from those of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans” (p. 84).

A 2004 Cornell study indicated that many Asian American students were more likely to require remedial work in English and Reading (Yong & Wei, 2008). Wing (2007) found that the achievement gap was a multi-racial problem that could not be well understood only by trajectories of Blacks and Whites, because Asians were represented at both the lowest and highest ends of the academic achievement spectrum. However, they were more likely than their white counterparts to graduate from college (Brydolf, 2010). Ma and Yeh (2010) found that many Asian immigrants who lived in low income, urban environment experienced many social and academic challenges. Although most Asians shared high academic expectations for their children, strategies for offering support differed based on the parents’ socioeconomic status (Louie, 2001 as cited in Ma & Yeh, 2010). Brydolf (2009) stated that “Contrary to stereotypes that cast Asian Americans as model students of academic achievement, many Asian Americans students were struggling, failing, and dropping out of schools that ignored their needs” (p. 39).

High Achieving Minority Students

Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) argued that the educational system in the U.S was geared at providing opportunities to all students to grow academically and to reduce inequality in achievement. While minority students such as African Americans and Hispanics have made gains in their achievement, they continued to score at significantly lower levels than Whites and Asian American students (Jamar & Pitts, 2005).
Researchers have not given much attention to the experiences of high achieving culturally diverse students, especially those who are African Americans (Griffin & Allen, 2006). The academic success of high achieving African American students has been attributed by some to their educational resilience, which is characterized by “the heightened likelihood of success in school and in other aspects of life, despite environmental adversities, brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Griffin & Allen, 2006, p. 480). Griffin and Allen (2006) shared that resilient African American students have translated their difficult environments into a source of motivation by maintaining high expectations and aspirations, being goal oriented, having good problem solving skills, and by being socially competent.

High expectations should be communicated through educators’ words and actions if all students are to reach high levels of achievement (Jamar & Pitts, 2005). Teacher effectiveness was believed by educational researchers to be central in promoting student achievement (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011). Researchers have emphasized that minority students who had teachers with high expectations usually reached those expectations when they were given adequate encouragement (Gardner, 2007). Students of all racial and ethnic groups tended to experience academic success when teachers’ behaviors communicated high expectations (Ferguson, 2003).

Summary

Efforts to close the poverty gap have been documented since 1965, as evidenced by President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, which launched Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Head Start to preschoolers who were
growing up in impoverished households. President Lyndon Johnson declared that these programs would help to “rescue” children from poverty and would give them “even footing with their classmates as they enter school” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The returns and the results of these initiatives have not produced the desired academic results in the targeted culturally diverse groups of students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that the national gap between the poor and affluent children have widened. Halle, Hair, Wandner and Chien (2012) posited that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds "lag behind their more affluent peers in cognitive and social outcomes even before kindergarten … and may negatively affect their academic trajectories throughout their school years” (p. 613).

The underachievement in minority students has been well documented (Jamar & Pitts, 2005). Factors such as race or ethnicity, home-based variables including socioeconomic status, home language, parents’ background and school involvement, school based variables such as school segregation, teacher quality and teachers’ level and application of intercultural skills were contributing factors to the achievement gap between the dominant and minority groups. The achievement gap and academic achievement of minorities consisted of multiple gaps that existed between and within minority groups (Rothstein, 2004). Nieto (2010) suggested that educators examine school policies and practices in education and the sociopolitical context of education in addition to cultural factors, because they all played roles in student learning. Socioeconomic status and acquisition of English language were significant factors that affected school achievement for all groups of students (Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005). Vellymalay (2012) found that parents’ economic status affected how involved they were
in their children’s education which ultimately affected their children’s academic achievement. The socio-economic status of students’ families combined with cultural preferences (Altschul, 2012) influenced the extent to which parents invested in their children’s education. The level of investment was then reflected in children’s academic outcome.

Educators who teach culturally diverse students needed to adjust traditional instruction and curriculum to being more culturally responsive if they were to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2010). Teachers and policy makers needed to be aware of and respond to the educational needs of all students. Teachers must adjust their instruction and their teaching styles and strategies for students who are not benefiting from the current instructional practices. Educators need to be culturally competent in order to be culturally responsive in the classrooms (Ford & Kea, 2009) and teach to and through the strengths of culturally diverse students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Educators should develop effective rigorous curriculum and lessons that engage all learners and that will help them to meet high educational expectations.

There is a noticeable increase in the minority student population in American schools; however, the teaching population is substantially less diverse than the student population (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). To meet the needs of the changing demographics among our students population, educators need to be more prepared to function effectively in their diverse school environment (Howard, 2007). For effective teaching and learning to take place opportunities must be created for students to make connections between their home-community and school culture, which will demonstrate
to the students that what they bring to school is valued (Allen, 2007; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ford, 2010).

The review of literature indicated that educational researchers consistently acknowledged that there is a persistent gap in academic achievement between white students and their minority counterparts. However, why the gap persisted has not been fully explored. One of the research questions seeks to find out if cultural diversity makes any difference in the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic group. One explanation offered in the review of literature is that Black and Hispanic students, on average, came from families with lower income and less parental education than white students, and that they lacked the social capital of their white counterparts therefore their academic achievement is negatively impacted. The review of literature also demonstrated that there were differences in academic achievement among students of various socio-economic backgrounds and diverse cultural groups. However, the perceptions of teachers, parents and students should be explored to gain insight on school and home factors that contributed to culturally diverse students’ academic achievement. The fact that student achievement can be predicted so easily and clearly based on students’ culture and their family’s economic status should propel the need for further studies on cultural diversity, economic status and student achievement.

Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) argued that a focus of the No Child Left Behind Act was to close the achievement gap and to ensure that lower achieving students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds reached academic proficiency. The literature review indicated that the roles that teachers play in the academic achievement are paramount in student success.
Research that simply identified which factors were significant in explaining the gap told only part of the story. The need to explore and share factors and strategies based on the perceptions of culturally diverse students, their parents and teachers would be significant contributions to the series of literature on the education of culturally diverse students.

Jamar and Pitts (2005) argued that despite the attempts at school reform and restructuring such as ESEA, Goals 2000, and NCLB, some cultural groups, particularly African Americans, continued to lag behind academically. One of the research questions seek to understand what factors contribute to the high achievement of minority students. Griffin and Allen (2006) postulated that it will be necessary to gain a greater understanding of how high achieving minority students have managed to translate their struggles and limited access to opportunities into success (p. 478).
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

Grounded in the conceptual framework of Vgotsky’s Constructivist Theory and Cultural Responsive Teaching, the study examined the relationship between the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement. The aim of the research was to shed light on the underpinnings of culturally diverse students’ academic achievement in relation to their socio-economic status so that educational practitioners can respond to the underlying issues that are impacting diverse learners.

Research Questions

The major question that will guide this study is:

What is the relationship between the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement?

The following sub-questions that will guide this study include:

RQ1. Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic group?

RQ2. Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from high socio-economic group?

RQ3. Does the gender of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement?
RQ4. Does the grade level of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement?

RQ5. What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic students?

RQ6. What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students?

Research Design

Mixed method research design has emerged as a third methodological movement in educational research (Truscott, Swars, Smith, Thornton-Reid, Zhao, Dooley, Williams, Hart & Matthews, 2010, p. 317). A mixed method research design combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the research methods portion of the research process when a researcher has both quantitative and qualitative data that can provide a better understanding of the research problem than either type of data alone (Mertler & Charles, 2008, p. 290). The emergence of mixed method in educational research has helped researchers to move beyond quantitative versus qualitative research arguments (Truscott, et. al., 2010). The mixed method research design allows the researcher the opportunity to create a multifaceted picture of the topic being studied and draws from the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to minimize their limitation (Mertler & Charles, 2008; Truscott, et. al., 2010). Bartholomew and Brown (2012) shared that in a mixed method research design, the researcher “collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study” (p. 179).
The study followed a mixed method research design that utilized in depth data collection of the 2012 CRCT assessment results of middle school students and semi-structured interviews with 4 middle school teachers, 4 parents and 4 students in a metro-Atlanta school district. The mixed method research design combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study and was more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data, but utilized the use of both approaches in tandem (Creswell, 2009). The analysis of the quantitative data provided empirical data on the relationships of the variables that were examined. The variables were analyzed using IBM PAWS Statistics 18. The semi-structured interviews helped with the triangulation of data by providing teachers’, parents’, and students’ perspective on students’ academic achievement. The interviews were transcribed and then coded for categories/themes using ATLAS TI computer software.

Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry. The basis of interviewing participants was to show interest in the lived experience of other people and the meaning they made of that experience. Interview is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues (Siedman, 2006, p. 14).

Positionality as Researcher

My experience has taught me to be open minded and that I should not limit myself, but to thrive for the best. My ongoing efforts to improve or gain success were direct connections to the way I was raised. I was raised in Jamaica where there existed a rich make up of cultures. As a child I never considered myself to be poor even though
based on the stratification of society, I was very poor. Neither of my parents acquired beyond a high school education, but it was not an excuse why my siblings and I should not have a tertiary level of education. Success in school always brought joy to the entire family and working older siblings would take on responsibilities of the younger in order to help guarantee school success for our family members. My parents had to ensure that expenses for traveling back and forth to school, money for school lunch and textbooks, writing utensils and the necessary exam fees were covered by their menial jobs as a seamstress and a tailor/subsistence farmer. Self-pride and gratitude for very little were firmly entrenched in my siblings and me as children.

Daily attendance in school was not an option; neither was attending “Sunday School”. In both settings as a child I was deliberately taught to show respect for authority and our elders, to value individuals and to show appreciation for all as we were constantly reminded of our country’s motto. The motto is “out of many one people.” The central tenet of this motto taught me that even though our national heritage is a representation and reflection from many nationalities and diverse cultures as a group of people we should aim to live in unity. Nevertheless, at some point during my teenage years, I realized that these practices did not transcend throughout my small Jamaican society, as families and society as a whole showed indifferences to individuals and children with darker complexion and preferences to individuals whose skin tone closer approximated Europeans. This contributed, at times, to unequal opportunities and issues of conflict in schools and workplaces.

I completed a teacher preparation program in Primary Education and later a degree in International Relations, because I was undecided about the career path that I
really wanted to choose and with the background knowledge that schooling was an essential means to get ahead. I soon realized that I was closely connected to teaching as a profession and therefore pursued further studies in education.

I was strongly influenced by family members who were living in Canada and the U.S. and who glamorized the lifestyles in these foreign countries. This was evidenced by remittances to us back at home. After migrating to the U.S. and pursued further studies in education, it was quickly realized that I would have to learn to immerse myself in some of the practices of the dominant culture if I intended to gain success and to make myself be understood. Throughout the working days, I focused on my job requirements as friendships appeared superficial. It was always welcoming and refreshing to return to my home environment which kept me connected to my roots in a non-threatening and non-judgmental environment.

As an educator in the U.S., I understand more fully the need to be connected with family and to be identified with individuals who understand my own culture. Such understanding made me think of the implication for culturally diverse students and how students’ lack of cultural identity can be attributed to academic failures. My experiences and background have helped me to integrate in the U.S. society, but now I wonder about the students who do not have the skills and support that allow for their adjustment. My cultural awareness has influenced my desire to investigate how culturally diverse students acquire school success. As an educator, I set high expectations for all students and develop and implement plans that will help my diverse community of students rise to meet these high expectations.
I still maintain my cultural values and I try to instill those values in my own children, but at the same time I embrace the “good” principles of America. I maintain relationships with other cultural groups in America while maintaining my cultural identity which I consider to be a part of my integration process. Based on my experiences, I believed that there was a need to understand and recognize students’ cultural socialization and the effects on students’ cultural identity and their economic status on their academic achievement.

My family, background, and overall experiences are the primary factors that have helped to shape who I am in the mix of cultural influences and, more than economic factors, have influenced my desire to pursue and achieve academic greatness. These factors, combined with my integration with other cultures and the desire to be an effective educator, are the driving forces behind my desire to engage in research study on cultural diversity, socio-economic status and students’ academic achievement. While racial, ethnic, economic, school related factors, and social factors can partially explain who I am and how I achieve academically, my family, community and self-drive are the most influential forces behind my overall school achievement.

My perceptions on the achievement of culturally diverse students have been shaped primarily through my own background and my experiences with teaching students of diverse background as well as my experience as a minority teacher from a culturally different country. It is my view that all children if given the opportunity to learn and are of similar intelligence they should not be performing differently regardless of their socio-economic status or cultural background. Although every effort will be made to ensure objectivity (Creswell, 2009, p. 197) my position may help to shape the way I view,
understand and interpret the qualitative data collected. I will focus on the variables to be studied in the quantitative data as they will be detached from my personal experience or point of view. Aggregate information will be reported.

Figure 1

Data Triangulation in the Mixed Method Research Design

(Adopted from Mertler & Charles, 2008, p. 292)

*Quantitative research participants.* The quantitative research participants for this study consisted of approximately two hundred and seven (207) middle school African American and Hispanic students in 7th and 8th grade from a metro-Atlanta school district.
The students’ 2012 CRCT data was analyzed. The CRCT was taken when the students identified were in 6th and 8th grade, respectively. The students’ results was selected from Title 1 school, because a number of economically disadvantaged students are hosted at Title 1 schools.

_Qualitative Research Participants._ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 middle school teachers, 4 parents, and 4 students in a metro-Atlanta school district. In studies involving interviewing, it is not possible to employ random sampling, because it would be prohibitive and it also depends on a large number of participants (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, the participants for an interview must consent to being interviewed. Therefore, purposive methods to identify students appropriate for this study was employed. Students were selected based on a balance of race and level of academic achievement to create a sample which provided the best insight into the study’s research questions. High achievers were identified based on their achievement of a level 2 or better in all subject areas on the CRCT. Teachers were selected based on their experience with teaching African American and Hispanic students for at least one academic year at the middle school level. The teachers selected taught the selected students for the study. Teacher selection consideration were also be made based on teacher qualifications and experiences.

_Instrument_

_Quantitative Research Instrument._ The 2012 CRCT results data in Reading, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Math for 6th, and 7th grade students from metro-Atlanta were used.
Variables

The dependent variables in this study were the achievement scores in Reading, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics in the 2012 CRCT results. The results of students who were assessed in one or more areas of the modified CRCT were eliminated because the measurement and score reporting of the alternate assessment were different. According to the Georgia Department of Education, the CRCT-M is an alternate grade level assessment for eligible students who receive special education services. This assessment is designed specifically for students who struggle because of their disability. The CRCT-M is available in the content areas of Reading, Language Arts, and Mathematics for students between grades 3 and 8 (http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/CRCT-M.aspx, accessed October 30, 2013). The range of scores reported for the CRCT-M are different from those reported for the CRCT. Therefore the researcher thought it was necessary for those data to be omitted from the data analysis. The independent variables were socio-economic status (determined by the percent of students who were qualified to receive free or reduced-priced lunch) and cultural diverse groups (determined by the demographic data collected per student that met the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act). Other independent variables (extraneous variables) that were examined for a more in depth understanding of culturally diverse student achievement included students’ gender and grade level, teacher qualifications and experiences.

Qualitative Research Instrument. Self-developed interview protocols were used to gain insight on students, parents and teachers’ perspective of the academic
achievement of culturally diverse students’ academic achievement (see Appendix D). The questions were aligned to the theoretical framework.

**Sources of Data**

The multiple sources of data that were collected for this study represented a triangulated approach and an effort to assess the relationship between socio-economic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

*Quantitative data source.* The quantitative data for this study was obtained from the 6th and 7th grade CRCT 2012 results that were published on the State of Georgia – Governor’s Office of Student Achievement: [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us). Also, the detailed collection of the students’ data were obtained from within the metro-Atlanta school district database (Thinkgate). Data that related to the socioeconomic status, gender and grade level of the culturally diverse groups and teacher qualifications and experiences were obtained from the published information on Thinkgate within the metro-Atlanta school system.

**Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are important aspects of all research designs. The validity of the data is the quality of the data that indicated authenticity, which implied that the data were in fact what they were purported to be. The reliability of the data is an index of the consistency of the data (Mertler & Charles, 2008).

According to the Georgia Department of Education, the reliability of the CRCT is evaluated by statistical method. The total test reliabilities ranged from 0.79 to 0.86 for Reading, 0.85 to 0.89 for English/Language Arts, and 0.87 to 0.91 for Mathematics, 0.89
to 0.90 for Science, and 0.88 to 0.91 for Social Studies. All CRCT items are written by qualified, professional content specialists specifically for the Georgia CRCT. Curriculum specialists and committees of Georgia educators review the test items. The test items are evaluated for quality, clarity, content coverage, appropriateness, alignment to the curriculum, and grade appropriate stimuli with emphasis on higher order thinking. There is also only one clear correct answer with relevant and reasonable distracters per test item. The Georgia Department of Education is confident that the CRCT is reliable and valid (Georgia Department of Education: 


**Qualitative data source.** Pan (2008) argued that qualitative research “seldom attempt to employ random sampling” (p. 26), but instead they strive for purposive samples where participants are purposively selected because they are likely to be good sources of information for the study. Siedman (2006) cautioned inexperienced interviewers who are also teachers to avoid interviewing their students. The teacher researcher should seek to interview students who they do not teach, because “a student will hardly be open to his or her teacher who has so much power and so much invested in the situation” (Seidman, 2006, p.41). Consequently, every effort was made to avoid interviewing students that I taught.

First, the high achieving minority (Hispanic or Black) students were identified based on their achievement of the 2012 CRCT results. Next, the students were categorized based on their economic status. Two current 7th grade (one Hispanic and one Black) and 8th (one Hispanic and one Black) were selected for interview. The parents for
the interviews were selected based on the student selection. Finally, the teachers were identified based on their qualification and years of teaching experience. They were told that participating in the study was strictly voluntary. The students, parents and teachers shared that they were readily available and that they were willing to participate. All student, parent and teacher interviewees used the same interview schedules, respectively. The interviews were conducted at the interviewers’ convenience in their homes, after or before school, or at a public place that was convenient to the participants. Probe questions were used to elicit more information when necessary.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Patton (2002) explained that research findings needed to be credible to be useful. A number of strategies can be used to increase the credibility of qualitative studies: member check, prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data. The use of these strategies was important for producing credible research findings because they prevented distortion of the data in ways that served the researcher’s own interest. Member check and triangulation of data was used in this study to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the data. Triangulation involves examining data from different sources (Creswell, 2009). In addition to analyzing the results of the 2012 CRCT data, students, parents and teachers were interviewed for greater triangulation of data.

Additional measures to establish and maintain credibility and trustworthiness included tape recording the interviews and later transcribing them. The transcriptions were checked to ensure that they did not contain mistakes. The transcriptions were then be uploaded as primary documents in the Atlas TI Version 6.2 computer software
program where they were coded for themes. Memos were also written and served as reminders for specific situations or for definition of terms that were used during the interview process. The codes were checked by comparing the codes to the data.

Data collection procedures

*Quantitative data collection procedure.* The quantitative data gathering procedure included obtaining the CRCT data for 6th, and 7th grade Hispanic and African American students of Title 1 middle school in a metro-Atlanta school district. The results were broken into racial subgroups and low socioeconomic group (see Appendix A). In order to determine the relationship between the variables, the IBM PAWS Statistics 18 was used. This helped to determine the strength of dependence between variables.

First, all the demographic information of the participating students were displayed for the reader’s interest. Pearson’s correlation was used to examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement of the culturally diverse groups. Then, the difference in student achievement among the culturally diverse group of low SES students was determined by using Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with teacher qualifications and experiences as covariates. The difference in student achievement among the culturally diverse group of high SES students was also determined by using Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with teacher qualifications and experiences as covariates. Additionally, the extraneous variables (gender and grade level) was analyzed to ascertain if these variables impacted culturally diverse students from different socio-economic status academic achievement.
**Qualitative data collection procedure.** Each teacher was interviewed in one 30-minute session. Students and their parents were interviewed in one session, respectively. Each interview session was tape recorded and was then transcribed. The transcription of the interviews were uploaded in the Atlas TI Version 6.2 computer software program and were coded for categories/themes.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is defined as the process of making sense of data. Data analysis presents many challenges, such as identifying patterns, reducing large volumes of data, and creating a vehicle to communicate what the researcher has learned (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Figure 2

Summary of Descriptive Analysis of Data

- **Quantitative Data**
  - Descriptive statistics
  - Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA)

- **Qualitative Data**
  - Interviews
  - Coded for categories and themes
Descriptive analysis of data for all independent and dependent variables were shared. Descriptive analysis included the means, standard deviation, and the range of scores for the variables. The Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to determine the proportion of variability attributed to each group and compared the means of the achievement of student groups by minimizing the possible impact of teacher variables on student achievement. The data were analyzed by using the computer software program IBM PAWS Statistics 18. The data analysis were presented in tables and by using figures to interpret the results from the statistical data.

The qualitative data were uploaded as primary documents in ATLAS TI version 6.2 computer software program. The data were coded for themes which were later be collapsed into categories. The qualitative and quantitative data are presented and analyzed in separate sections.

Protection of Human Subjects

Mertler and Charles (2008) stated that educational research is done to garner knowledge and to shed light on human condition and should never be conducted as a means “to harm, denigrate, cast blame, find fault, deny opportunity, or to stifle progress” (pp. 10-11). As a result, in an effort to protect human subjects, prior to the engagement of this study, I sought the approval of Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and also the approval of the metro-Atlanta school district in which the data for the study will be collected. Permission to proceed with the study was granted from both institutions.
Each teacher, student, and parent was given a copy of the consent and/or assent forms that explained that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw their consent to participate at any time without penalty. The teachers were informed about the general topic of research and were assured that confidentiality would be maintained and that they would not be subjected to any discomfort or risk.

Each teacher, student and parent (interviewee) were assigned a code number that was used only for record keeping purposes during the interview. The interviewees were not be addressed by name or by any other descriptors that made them identifiable. Interviews were stored on an Android-powered electronic password protected device (Dell Streak 7 tablet). A username and password was needed to access the data. The transcribed interviews and consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet in my home study. No individual information was shared, only aggregate results were reported.

All data will be destroyed as soon as the requirement for the study is completed.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Data collected in this study included demographic data, quantitative data and qualitative data. These data were analyzed as described in Chapter Three. The results of the analyses are reported in three sections in this chapter: Demographic Data Analysis, Quantitative Data Analysis, and Qualitative Data Analysis as follows:

**Demographic Data Analysis**

For the quantitative data, the 2012 Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in the academic areas of Reading, English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies were gathered for sixth and seventh grade students who were federally identified as Blacks or Hispanics. Two hundred and fourteen (214) students were identified, but seven (7) (3.3%) of the student data were eliminated because all academic areas were not covered under the same CRCT assessment, because these students were assessed by an alternate form of the CRCT examination, namely Criterion Referenced Competency Test – Modified (CRCT-M), in one or more of the academic areas.

A total of two hundred and seven (207) (96.7%) of the total population of Hispanic and Black students in sixth and seventh grade academic achievement data were selected for analysis. Included in the data for analysis were 90 (43.5%) Black students in sixth grade, 77 (37.2%) Black students in seventh grade, 20 (9.7%) Hispanic students in sixth grade, and 20 (9.7%) Hispanic students in seventh grade.
Analysis of the participants’ demographic information showed that, out of the 207 students selected for the analysis of data in the Title 1 school 167 (80.7%) were Blacks and 40 (19.3%) were Hispanics. The participants comprised of 142 (68.6%) students who were categorized as low SES and 65 (31.4%) who were categorized as high SES. Of the low SES group 111 (78.2%) were Black and 31 (21.8%) were Hispanic and of the high SES group 56 (86.2%) were Black and 9 (21.8%) were Hispanic. Of the total population 94 (45.4%) were males and 113 (54.6%) were females while 110 (53.1%) were sixth graders and 95 (46.9%) were seventh graders. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Socio-economic Status (SES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Socio-economic Status (SES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Graders</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Graders</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantitative Data Analysis

Partial correlation test was administered to examine the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and student achievement while controlling for teacher qualification and experience. Results of the analysis showed that no significant relationship existed between SES and student achievement in total achievement and in each of the individual categories of achievement. (See Table 2)

Table 2
Partial Correlation – Relationship between the Socio-economic Status of Culturally Diverse Students and their Academic Achievement controlling for teacher qualification and experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Area</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to determine the nature of differences in student academic achievement between the low SES groups of Black and Hispanic students while controlling for their teacher qualification and experience. The statistics showed that Black students were doing better than Hispanic students in the study of English Language Arts ($F(111, 31) = 0.36, p > 0.05$), Reading ($F(111, 31) = 0.541, p > 0.05$), Science ($F(111, 31) = 0.003, p > 0.05$), Social Studies ($F(111, 31) = 0.650, p > 0.05$) and in their overall achievement ($F(111, 31) = 1.647, p > 0.05$), but the differences were not significant at the 0.05 level. In math achievement, the Black students achieved significantly higher than the Hispanic students ($F(111, 31) = 9.454, p < .05$). (See Table 3)
Using MANCOVA and controlling for teacher qualification and experiences, the researcher performed the test to determine if ethnicity made any significant difference in the achievement of the Black and Hispanic students of high socioeconomic status. Results showed that Hispanic students in general out-performed the Black students except for Reading, but the differences in student achievement were not significant in any of the academic areas, or in their total achievement. (See Table 4)
Table 4  
MANCOVA – High SES Group – Diversity Differences in Academic Achievement controlling for teacher qualification and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Area</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.143</td>
<td>.554</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.333</td>
<td>.707</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.946</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.222</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.328</td>
<td>.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.161</td>
<td>.458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.907</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.804</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>.576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.889</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.986</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.133</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the MANCOVA model and controlling for teacher qualification and experience, the data were analyzed to determine if gender made any significant difference in the academic achievement of the diverse students. Results of the analysis indicated that in the overall diverse group of students selected for this study, females were doing better than males in all academic areas with the exception of Social Studies. The data indicated that the female students were doing significantly better than males in English Language Arts (F (94, 113) = 15.969, p < 0.05), Math (F (94, 113) = 4.306, p < 0.05), Reading (94, 113) = 6.157, p < 0.05), and in total academic achievement (F (94, 113) = 5.112, p <
0.05). Even though females were doing better than males in Science, the difference was not statistically significant (F (94, 113) = 1.512, p > 0.05). From the overall group of diverse students, males were doing better than females in Social Studies, but the difference was not significant (F (94, 113) = 0.462, p > 0.05). (See Table 5)

Table 5
MANCOVA – Gender Difference in Academic Achievement of Diverse Students controlling for teacher qualification and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Area</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.969</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.979</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.257</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.306</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.841</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.157</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.043</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.204</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.521</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.766</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.876</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.883</td>
<td>.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.112</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.902</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.032</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was performed to determine if grade level made any significant difference in the academic achievement of the diverse students while controlling for teacher qualification and experiences. Results indicated that seventh grade students from the diverse cultural groups were performing better than
sixth graders in general. The main effects for cultural diverse students between grade levels were significantly related to Math (F (110, 97) = 0.531, p < 0.05), Science (F (110, 97) = 31.475, p < 0.05), Social Studies (F (110, 97) = 7.898, p < 0.05) and in their total achievement (F (110, 97) = 4.840, p < 0.05) in favor of seventh graders. Seventh graders were also doing better than sixth graders in English Language Arts, but the difference was not significant (F (110, 97) = 0.579, p > 0.05). The sixth graders did significantly out-perform the seventh graders in Reading (F (110, 97) = 10.913, p < 0.05). (See Table 6)

Table 6
MANCOVA – Grade Level Differences in Academic Achievement of Diverse Students controlling for teacher qualification and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Area</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>2.118</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.144</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>1.791</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.083</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>2.209</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.041</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>1.546</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.144</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>1.655</td>
<td>.670</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.072</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>1.864</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>2.097</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Out of the researcher's curiosity the data were run twice (controlling for teacher qualification and experience and without controlling for teacher qualification and experience). When the control variables were not included in the data, the results indicate that Black students of the low SES group were performing significantly better in Math than Hispanic students. Black students of the low SES group were doing better overall, but the difference in performance was not noticeable in their total achievement. Of the high SES group of diverse students, Hispanics achieved higher in all academic disciplines and in their total achievement, but the differences were not statistically significant.

When the control variables, teacher qualification and experiences, were not included in the analysis of data, irrespective of ethnicity, females were doing significantly better than males in Reading, English Language Arts, Math, and in their total academic achievement and males were doing slightly better than females in Social Studies.

Without controlling for teacher qualification and experiences, the data indicated that seventh graders were doing significantly better than the sixth graders in Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies, and in their total achievement. The seventh graders, even though they are doing better than the sixth graders in English Language Arts, the difference in performance was not significant.

Additional Data Analysis

The researcher examined the data to ascertain if there was any difference between the academic performance of the majority and minority students. The 2012 academic achievement data of 587 students from 6th and 7th grade were analyzed. Of the 587 students, 207 (35.3%) were identified as minority students and 380 (64.7%) were
identified as the majority group. T-Test was conducted to examine the achievement between minority and the majority students. The results of the analysis indicated that the achievement of the majority students were higher than the minority students in all academic areas of achievement and in their overall total achievement. (See Table 7).

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics between Minority and Majority Students in 6th and 7th Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>2.130</td>
<td>.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.280</td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1.930</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.090</td>
<td>.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>2.130</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.300</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1.830</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.060</td>
<td>.719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.120</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1.973</td>
<td>.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>2.168</td>
<td>.438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-Test was performed to determine if there was any significant difference in the academic achievement of the minority students and the majority students' academic performance. Results indicated that the majority were performing significantly better in ELA (F (207, 380) = 3.017, p < 0.05); Math (F (207, 380) = 3.049, p < 0.05); Reading (F (207, 380) = 3.693, p < 0.05); Science (F (207, 380) = 3.810, p < 0.05), Social Studies (F
(207, 380) = 4.144, p < 0.05); and Total Achievement (F (207, 380) = 5.195, p < 0.05).

(See Table 8)

Table 8
T- Test – Differences in Academic Achievement between Majority and Minority Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Area</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>3.017</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>3.049</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>3.693</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>3.810</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies:</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>4.144</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Achievement</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>5.195</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Data Analysis

Analytical Approach

The central premise for the qualitative inquiry was to examine the perception of students, parents and teachers of essential factors that contribute to improving student achievement and overall academic success. In an effort to shed light on the factors that contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse students the actual data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 4 students, 4 parents, and 4 teacher participants. All interview sessions were conducted individually and were digitally recorded using a Dell Streak 7 Android powered device with an installed voice recording application, namely, VRP mp3. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by listening and typing into Word documents. These documents were later uploaded into a
qualitative data analysis software program, Atlas Ti, which was used as the management tool that assisted with the development of codes and themes. These processes provided me the opportunity to become familiar with the data as it required listening and re-listening, and reading and re-reading parts and whole sections of the data. Codes were applied to the data.

Saldaña (2009) explained that a code in qualitative inquiry is often a word or phrase “that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute” for data (p. 3). Each code that was applied to the data represented an interpretive process as I engaged with the data. Single words and phrases were applied to salient information in the interview transcripts that captured the perceptions of the research participants. The codes were collapsed and merged into themes which served as “endpoints for the qualitative inquiry” (Creswell, 2009). An initial network of codes (see Figure 3) that were applied to the interview data was filtered and was later refined through ongoing interaction and careful examination of the data.
Initial Network of Codes Applied to Qualitative Data

Each color of the code nodes represents the density of the individual code to each interview.
The co-occurring codes (see Appendix E) prompted the invitation for careful examination of how the data relate to one another. This process was tedious and required many reads and revisions to collapse the codes into themes. Each read and revision process allowed the data to be revealed so that the emerging themes and supporting concepts were logical and also helped with the organization of the data. Additionally, a spreadsheet of codes (see Appendix F) which demonstrated how each code was applied individually and in aggregate to the data also supported the need for the emerging themes.

The data revealed four significant themes: communication, cultural awareness, motivation, and teaching and learning supports. For each of the emerging themes, the codes used to arrive are shared and discussed:

The codes that led to the theme of “communication” were: access to teacher, building relationship, communication, interest, expectation, satisfying curriculum expectation, parental level of support, feedback, classroom interaction to promote learning, students’ background and learning, and trust. Communication is the act of sending and receiving messages (Noel, 2008). The decisions that educators make that pertained to students’ potential and achievement are dependent on communication (Gay, 2010). For Nieto (2010), when there were discontinuities in communication between home and school, a student’s learning could be affected, because the students may be socialized to learn in a particular way at home which may not be incorporated in the school setting.

The codes that led to the theme of “cultural awareness” were: background knowledge, respect, belonging, making connections, ownership for learning, and cultural awareness/sensitivity. According to Brown (2007) educators’ knowledge of cultural
diversity need to go beyond awareness, respect, and recognition of different cultural
groups, but they should develop knowledge by acquiring detailed, factual information
about different cultural groups. A major difference pointed out by Yang and Montgomery
(2011) was that cultural awareness helped in the recognition of important differences
among cultures while cultural competence supported the ability to work with people from
different cultural backgrounds. Cultural awareness is multileveled and Cushner,
McClelland, and Safford (2009) shared that it involved understanding people who were
different from oneself. This awareness moved from superficial or visible cultural traits
such as skin color, dress, and language patterns to the ability to perceive that there were
“significant differences among cultural groups that lead to greater understanding and
ability to interact effectively with members of different groups” (p. 454).

The codes that led to the theme of “motivation” were building relationship,
teacher duties, interest, need for school success, perception, and parent level of support.
students and teachers which were:

(1) establish inclusion, creating learning atmospheres in which students
    and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another;
(2) develop attitude, creating a favorable disposition toward the learning
    experience through personal relevance and choice;
(3) enhance meaning, creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences
    that include student perspectives and values; and
(4) engender competence, creating an understanding that students are
    effective in learning something they value (p.59)

Teachers should realize that students have different motivations to learn, so teachers
should generate teaching styles that would meet the learning preferences and needs of
their students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).
The codes that led to the theme of “teaching and learning support” were: activities that support learning, modeling, background knowledge, classroom interactions, efforts to increase learning, school success, instructional practice, and individualizing. Kea and Utley (1998) as cited in Ford (2010) offered that philosophies of teaching were guided by the manner in which teachers believed that learning would occur, how they could intervene in the learning process, goals they set for the students, and the actions that needed to take in order to implement their beliefs and intentions. “The learning environment is about relationships, communication, and expectations—focusing specifically on students’ sense of membership and belonging” (Ford, 2010, p. 51). According to Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) schools should acknowledge the home-community culture of students and integrate students’ experiences, values, and understanding into the teaching and learning environment. (See Table 9 and 10).

After prolonged engagement with the data, I saw that some codes were suitable for more than a single theme that emerged because the supporting data could share the perception of the participants from different thematic approaches. The information gleaned from the data, theories and literature reviewed provided support for each theme.
Table 9
Common codes across participants’ responses that led to emerging themes:
Research Question 5: What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 2, 3</td>
<td>access to teacher, building relationship</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2, 4</td>
<td>communication, interest, expectation, satisfying curriculum expectation, parental level of support, feedback, classroom interaction to promote learning, students’ background and learning, trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2, 3</td>
<td>background knowledge, respect, belonging, making connections, ownership for learning, cultural awareness/sensitivity</td>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2, 3</td>
<td>building relationship, interest, teacher duties, need for school success, perception, parental level of support</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2, 3</td>
<td>activities that support learning, modeling, background knowledge, classroom interaction, efforts to increase learning, school success, instructional practice, individualizing</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10
Common codes across participants’ responses that led to emerging themes:

Research Question 6: What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1, 4</td>
<td>access to teacher, building relationship</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1, 3</td>
<td>communication, interest, expectation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>satisfying curriculum expectation, parental level of support, feedback, classroom interaction to promote learning, students’ background and learning, trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 1, 4</td>
<td>background knowledge, respect, belonging, making connections, ownership for learning, cultural awareness/sensitivity</td>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1, 3</td>
<td>making connections, ownership for learning, cultural awareness/sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>cultural awareness/sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 1, 4</td>
<td>building relationship, interest, teacher duties, need for school success, perception, parental level of support</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1, 3</td>
<td>need for school success, perception, parental level of support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>parental level of support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 1, 4</td>
<td>activities that support learning, modeling, background knowledge, classroom interaction, efforts to increase learning, school success, instructional practice, individualizing</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1, 3</td>
<td>background knowledge, classroom interaction, efforts to increase learning, school success, instructional practice, individualizing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this discussion the participants will be referred to as Student, Parent and Teacher, Participant 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Student Participant 2 and 3, and Parent Participant 2 and 4 were of the low socio-economic group, and Student Participant 1 and 4, and Parent Participant 1 and 3 were of the high socio-economic group. All the student participants were high achieving Black and Hispanic students (2 from each racially diverse group). The teacher participants had at least one year teacher experience and also had the experience of teaching both Black and Hispanic students. The discussions presented in this section are organized thematically according to each of the following research questions:
RQ5: What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic students?

RQ6: What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students?

Emerging Themes

The analysis was accomplished partly by including vignettes and quotations from interviews. These vignettes and quotations assisted in presenting the data of the 12 interview participants. The interpretation of examples and non-examples were also analyzed and discussed. These were compared with existing theories and literature reviewed and shared as components of the discussion.

Communication

For Dunlop (2012), communication is a critical part of school relationship and is essential in students’ academic success. According to Leonard (2008), constructivist theory supported the view that communication is essential to meaning making. Children are “part of a classroom environment in which individual and corporate meaning take place” (p. 21). Communication involves the sharing of “thoughts, emotions, and ideas with others” (Smart, Witt & Scott, 2012, p. 396) and relies on both comprehension and understanding. Dunlop (2012) cited an interview conducted with Dr. Maria Paredes where Dr. Paredes took the position that a necessary means of increasing student learning and performance is the enhancement of the quality of ‘parent-teacher communication and collaboration” (p. 34) and suggested that there should be two way communication between home and school in order to keep parents informed about their children’s
learning; use communication opportunities as means to build meaningful relationship with parents; and to engage parents with strategies that they could use to help their children meet and exceed academic standards.

All student, parent and teacher participants expressed that there were varying communications methods available between their home and the school. Examples of communication methods noted were conferences, use of agenda, emails, telephones, websites, and face-to-face. The participants shared that the methods were used for different reasons. Teacher Participant 3 shared that she used websites for notes, attachments, and announcements, phone calls were used when more immediate feedback was required, and conferences for more in-depth discussion about students’ school success. Teacher Participant 4 while he used varying methods to communicate with parents, he refrained from using e-mails as much as possible. He stated that a number of his students’ parents, due to their socioeconomic status, may not have access to computers or emails and stated that:

I don’t want to put a disadvantage on them on getting information by emailing the rest of the parents. So I try to be intentional in communicating by phone or in person.

Teacher Participant 2 suggested that she preferred to email her students’ parents, but found that she made telephone calls when her students were making failing grades on progress reports (approximately four weeks into each nine week grading period) and also when the students were displaying serious behavior issues.

Teacher Participant 1 stated that:
Anytime a parent obviously contacts me, I’m certainly open. I let them know from the get go … here is my e-mail, here is my phone number. Just contact me whenever you need for your kid. … so I definitely let the parents know that I am open if they ever want to come to me so they feel comfortable, but the way that I go about communicating with them is mostly e-mails. Sometimes I write in agendas if the kids have an agenda, or write notes home … and sometimes phone calls, if needed. If they are in the halls, I will chat with them in the halls whether it’s about personal … just building a relationship or if it’s about their child’s success or struggles or whatever …

All the parent participants acknowledged that they mainly communicated with the teachers during face-to-face conference: Parent Participant 4 shared that she was open to communicating with the teacher, but that there had not been any real reasons to communicate with the teachers outside of regular conferences, because she kept up with her child’s grade through Parent Portal (a grade reporting resource).

Parent Participant 2 expressed:

Emails are so much easier and quicker and you know that teachers usually check their e-mails frequently … and usually get a response.

Parent Participant 3 explained that communication was done mainly through emails and agenda book and that she attended conference that she was invited to. She further explained that emails were easy to use and that responses were normally quicker and they came right to her phone and can be sent or received from anywhere. Additionally, if teachers sign or send notes in the agenda books all that is required is to look and respond.

Parent Participant 1 used face-to-face meetings, emails and phone to communicate with
his child’s teachers, but mainly communicated by phone. He shared that the teachers would call to talk about disciplinary actions and that he would have face-to-face conferences mainly with the homeroom teacher. At times, he visited school to pick up work from teachers if his child was absent and/or missed notes/work. He used emails to keep the school informed of potential absences.

Under the No Child Left Behind act, schools are required to have planned programs that involve students’ families in order to support student achievement and that will enable clear communication with parents (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Webber and Wilson (2012) posited that “not all communication between parent and teacher needs to occur through conversations” (p. 34) however, opportunities for good conversations should be created. A suggestion made by Epstein and Jansorn (2004) was that teachers create two-way communication between home and school. This two way communication would make it easier for parents to be in touch with the school and would help the parents to keep up with their children’s progress. According to Smart, Witt, and Scott (2012), the act of communication by itself does not improve student learning. However, what a teacher does in the interaction and the classroom should make the difference to increase student learning and engagement.

From the interviews conducted with the teachers, it was indicated that the information or potential information could be used not only to differentiated instructional practices, but also classroom practices and interactions. Teacher Participant 2 said that:

Effective strategies within my classroom that help all my students achieve mastery is a combination of different things… to build rapport with them at the beginning of the year by explaining that to discipline is to show a form a love to
them … it stops them from making poor choices and facing worse consequences in the future. A student who understands why discipline has to be used and is in a well-managed classroom will perform better.

Teacher Participant 4 stated that he has learned “more what not to do than what to do” from parents in their communication. He shared an example of how he differentiated the manner in which he interacted with the students because of what he had learned about a female student who got very upset and offended if she perceived that the teachers were raising their voices at her. With the information garnered about this student, Teacher Participant 4 elected not to reprimand her in front of the class. He stated: “… so I address her individually outside of the class with a quiet voice.”

Teacher Participant 1 expressed:

I have always said, the more I know the more I can understand…. If parents are willing to tell me their child’s history, background, struggles, successes, medical issues, anything, family issues, divorce or emotions, anything you can tell me about your kid, I understand them as a person better… it makes me as a teacher be more patient, be more loving, be more helpful if that’s what the kid needs. I think the more you can share with me if you are comfortable, I see your child as a unique individual person with … individuality…

For Sleeter (2010), the theory of culturally responsive teaching included showing respect for students and supporting students in a way that they would be more responsive in the teaching and learning environment. Also, Ford (2010) shared that culturally responsive teachers learned about and integrated their students’ background and experiences in lessons.
Teacher Participant 3 stated that parents have shared their children’s learning styles, interest, medical, emotional issues, strengths and weaknesses. She explained that she tried to use word problems that were related to the students’ interest, and tried to introduce material in ways that accommodated the children’s learning styles. She also gave the students choices in activities.

Cultural Awareness

Knowledge of cultures is the central element in the development of cultural awareness. The knowledge, awareness and skills associated with being culturally aware will be constantly under revision and will evolve as we learn more about ourselves and other cultures (Baker, 2012; Saiffer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko & Stuczynski, 2011). In order to effectively teach culturally diverse students, teachers need to “possess the awareness, skills, and dispositions” (Fehr & Agnello, 2012, p. 34; Yang & Montgomery, 2011) that are necessary to engage in culturally responsive teaching. When asked directly – “Do you believe that your cultural background and/or the way your child learns are used to help your child to learn?” Parent Participant 2 retorted:

I think they just have to complete the standards and they are just trying their best to cover the subject matter for all … students … I hardly think they have time for this … to investigate the cultural background … how are they going to have time to do all this plus the administrative stuff that they have to do? They just don’t have time to be detailed in terms of backgrounds and so forth…

However, Teacher Participant 1 stated:
Background knowledge is important, because it helps teachers understand where to start and work from there. With the computer programs now you can know what kids have learning disabilities, socio-economic status issues, whose dad can’t ever contact about them or those kinds of things.

Saiffer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, and Stuczynski (2011) explained that it is “like a daunting challenge” (p. 9) to learn about all the cultures that are represented in a classroom, but stated the successes that teachers experienced were evidence that it was worth it. For Gay (2010), when teachers are engaged in culturally responsive teaching, “they teach the whole child” (p. 32). Fehr and Agnello (2012) cited examples of instances of culturally responsive teaching:

- Making learning more relevant to students by using their personal experiences, backgrounds and finding their strengths;
- teaching that is culturally aware of the students in the classroom; allowing students to maintain the cultural backgrounds and identities while in the classroom
- Teaching with an awareness of the cultural diversity in your classroom and being able to accommodate it with appropriate language, references and instructional methods (p. 37).

Teacher Participant 4 shared that he always used a cultural reference that his students was familiar with in his classroom, such as, musical or social media reference. He shared:

…I would have them take out their cell phones sometimes and type text messages I got the idea from a teacher at the school. I would have them type a text message in of their notes or something they have learned from the day.

He added:

I bring up pictures … there is a … I don’t know if he is a rapper or a performer. His name is Wiz Khalifa and I am not real familiar with him but the students, 90% of my students love this man for some reason. I don’t know anything about
him, but he evidently has tattoos all over his body so I pulled up a picture of Wiz Khalifa with a white t-shirt on my smart-board and I have my kids go up and draw tattoos on him of what we learned of the day.

Geneva Gay (2000) as cited in Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, Stuczynski (2011) found that even when there is minimal culturally related content included in the curriculum the result was usually increased level of student engagement with the skill or subject and improved school success. Vygotsky’s theory suggested that learning was based on the context of situations and in interactions of learners and their environment (Schunk, 2004).

Teachers may attribute their level of cultural awareness to causes such as training received, cross-cultural experiences, and having friends from other cultures. Yang & Montgomery (2011) argued that teachers who perceived that their cultural awareness was stable and controllable had a higher level of self-efficacy. Sleeter (2010) shared that culturally responsive teaching was showing respect for all students and creating a learning environment where students thrive. Teacher Participant 2 stated:

As far as racial or ethnic respect I make it a point that students are not to call people by any other name except their given name. As a teacher I try to connect to them through common language, music, or clothes as I get to learn about them personally within the classroom. Cultural respect is important to me due to my love of other cultures around the world, and as I teach I try to impart on my students that you have to get to know a culture well in order to really understand why people think the way they do about political or economic issues. As far as economics, I make sure that when I plan assessments that every student is able to partake in the learning with the supplies that they need.
Teacher Participant 1 stated “One thing though that I try not to isolate or single someone out.”

The theory of culturally responsive teaching is based on knowing and understanding one’s own culture and the culture of the students’ family and community (Gay, 2010; Saiffer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko & Stuczynski, 2011). A tenet of constructivism is that learners were influenced by social and historical experiences that they encountered throughout their lives as they internalized their experiences externally and interpersonally.

Teacher Participant 1 added:

“… personally, I have a story to tell the kids. I come from a rough family. I am the first one to go to college. My parents never had a penny to give me to go to college. I wanted better than what I have. I did not want to have milk grates for my side tables …. never go anywhere but the campground for vacation, because that was all that we could afford. I wanted more. And so, by God, I was going to do it, so I would want the kids to know like … I am living proof of my story.”

**Motivation**

According to Saiffer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko and Stuczynski (2011) when teachers’ instruction is relatable, meaningful, and is applicable to the students’ culture, knowledge, and experiences, students will be more engaged and more motivated to learn. “Motivation is the basic drive for all of our actions” (Ambedkar (2012, p. 1) and includes needs, desires and ambitions. It is “the driving force behind all the actions of an individual.” Darling- Hammond (1997) posited that in order for teachers to motivate their students to
learn, teachers have to understand what students beliefs about themselves are, what their beliefs about their abilities are, what they care about and the influential factors that will encourage them to keep working for success.

Teacher Participant 1 shared:

… students make good grades, because … I really try to know them and work with them individually and try to motivate them and build their self-esteem.

Similarly, Darling-Hammonds (2012) stated that teachers need to understand how and what helps students to learn, so they can identify and respond to the learners’ strengths and weaknesses. She added that teachers should not only construct task, but they should also provide feedback so as to encourage students’ efforts. Constructivism stressed the need for active learners to construct meaning for themselves in order to refine their skills and knowledge (Schunk, 2004).

Teacher Participant 3 explained:

Those that are making good grades are motivated to do well and review notes outside of class. Repeated practice and hands on activities do help the struggling learners achieve success.

She added that “positive and prompt feedback allows students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.”

Teacher Participant 4 shared:

…they make good grades because of encouragement, my personality that works with theirs, extra time that I take to work individually with my students. My students most of the time do not work well in lectures, don’t receive lecture time
very well so I have to be intentional in making sure they have some one-on-one time.

When asked who the participants believed were primarily responsible for students’ school success, the participants shared varying views: Student Participant 1 wanted to thank her third grade teacher because the third grade teacher taught her older, more advanced things and she believed that was helpful in helping her to be qualified for the gifted program. Student Participant 2 wanted to thank a teacher who helped him to “learn a lot”. He made mention of his mom and dad by adding:

   My mom always told me to study more and learn more, stay in school, don’t do drugs and study more and she always help me to stay focus like do my homework, do my project and my dad always help me to do my work.

Student Participant 3 would like to thank her teachers and her parents; her teachers for teaching all the information; and her parents for motivating her to do better. Student Participant 4 wanted to thank a math and science teacher, because she was fun and used the best examples. Parent Participant 4 believed that the teachers were responsible for her child’s school success, because they taught right and helped to fix misunderstandings. Similarly, Parent Participant 2 believed that the teachers were responsible for the student’s school success because of the methodology that the teachers used and added:

   … and the child too. They have to have an interest in learning. They are involved in education. They want to learn new things and aahm it takes their interest as well.

Parent Participant 3 shared:
Her teachers. They implement quality instruction … I give them that and teaching methods… my child teaches me. I don’t remember doing half of these things in school. The teachers really help her to understand what is being taught. They are the experts … I only encourage and support her.

Parent Participant 1 believed that both the child and the teacher were responsible for the child’s school success. Parent Participant 1 offered:

My child has to want it and the teachers have to help the students want it and they have to do a good job teaching so that the children learn.

Teacher Participant 1 shared that the parents and their families were responsible for school success and added:

I think that if parents don’t value education, then a child never would. If parents don’t check and make sure that there is study time, that there is homework time that their homework was done with an honest effort then it is never going to happen.

Teacher Participant 2 believed that parents played the largest role in a student’s school success, because “they set up the expectation before they arrive at school.” She added:

If a parent is not an active participant within a child’s life then the teacher takes on the role of teaching how important education and academic skills are to lead a successful productive life.

For Teacher Participant 3, she believed that a combination of teacher, student and parents were responsible for a student’s success and stated:
I believe teachers must use effective teaching practices, however without student engagement and motivation and parental support, student will not achieve full learning potential or hmm … and achieve mastery of concepts. Ambedkar (2012) argued that motivation can affect the performance of individuals and that achievement motivation is based on goals that are set. Parent Participant 3 stated that:

Education is very important to us, so emphasis is placed on learning and doing all that is required to be successful.

Teacher Participant 4 shared:

I used to believe maybe before I started teaching, maybe in my first couple of years of teaching that students were primarily responsible for their success. Now I have swung the pendulum a little bit and I put a lot of responsibility on the parents…

Saiffer et al. (2011) cited evidence that supported the link between high motivation and learning. They argued that students who were invested in learning were motivated to learn, because they desired to be competent and to demonstrate understanding, or they simply had a love of learning. An understanding of motivation is critical to learning (Darling-Hammonds, 1997), because students relied on different methods to acquire understanding. Some students relied on visual and oral cues. Saiffer et al (2011) found that teachers who were most successful in motivating and engaging students took into consideration their students’ “basic psychological and intellectual needs to develop connections with others, gives them some degree of autonomy, and provides for
originality, and self-expression” (p.211). Teacher Participant 4 stated that it took him 5 years to learn that interest is everything.

Teacher Participant 1 shared:

Very few kids, especially at the middle school age are not self-motivated. School is like the devil to them. That is not what they want to do. This isn’t where they wanna be. I can understand them. I like to have fun too. I don’t want to go home and grade papers, but I have the maturity to know that I have to … that I have to do that to do the next step, which is keep my job or whatever.

The student participants mainly shared that the teachers did not apply their interest to lessons. Student Participant 1 stated that she had never really mentioned what her interests were to the teachers and the teachers never really asked, so her interests were not included in the lessons. Similarly, Student Participant 4 stated that the teachers “just teach what they have to teach. They just teach the standards and they really don’t know what I wanna know.” Also, Student Participant 2 expressed that his interests were not included as a part of the lesson. On the other hand, Student Participant 3 expressed that her teachers used their (students) interests as a part of the lessons. Even though she could not give a direct example that was applicable to her, she stated that in math the teachers would change the subject to football.

**Teaching and Learning Supports**

Brown (2007) speculated that students should be active participants in their learning. Students learned best when they were able to make connections between what they already know and what they are learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Culturally
responsive teaching stressed the importance of teachers addressing the learning needs of students in order for them to experience school success. Barriers to learning should be eliminated and classroom environment should be student centered (Ford, 2010). Student Participant 3 shared that when she is taught new things, she would learn it best if teachers related the new topic to something that she already knew.

Darling-Hammonds (1997) posited that students’ learning would increase “when they can draw on their experiences and make greater meaning of them, when they can see how ideas relate to one another, and when they can use what they are learning in concrete ways” (p. 55). Student Participant 1 explained that she learns best when she does hands-on activities. She explained:

Like if we’re in math and we need to learn cross section or something, then if I can actually see it, but I can get like clay or something and cut… yeah!

Student Participant 2 shared that if he is learning about shapes and measurements in class when he goes home and thinks about it and he measures things and applies the length by width formula with his dad it helps him to learn. Student Participant 4 liked to use classroom charts (anchor charts), because she could see examples of how things looked or was done. She also learned through mnemonic devices and gave the example “Leave Candy Face” that helped her remember the steps for dividing fractions.

Teacher Participant 3 stated that she tutors, reteaches, shows students other ways to solve problems, and shares songs and mnemonic devices to help students remember. An example of mnemonic device that she mentioned was PEMDAS, which helped her students to remember the order of operations in math. As teaching and learning support, Teacher Participant 2 used charts, graphic organizers, group-work, projects, and students
as models. She added that she used whatever strategy worked for what she was doing on a given day.

Vygotsky’s constructivist theory stressed the importance of social interactions as being essential to the students’ learning. According to Leonard (2008), Vygotsky described what he termed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), “which is the difference between what children can accomplish on their own versus what they can accomplish with an adult or with peers” (p.22). Participants in this study explained how students are helped to overcome academic challenges which they might not have been able to do on their own. The participants mainly explained that tutoring, re-teaching, showing another way to solve a problem, use of mnemonic devices, providing a model, and giving individual attention are strategies applied in the teaching and learning process.

When students were not able to accomplish task on their own, Teacher Participant 1 shared:

I can pull them in for tutoring time. I can send them home with extra work if their parents have requested that or are willing to help with that… The biggest thing though is taking a kneel right beside their desk and just helping them out with something… making them feel like they (right for that moment) are the most important to you, that their struggle matters to you and that you are willing to help them overcome it…

Teacher Participant 2 explained:

When a parent shares that they are unable to work with their child at home due to not understanding how to help them I like to ask them if they can attend a tutoring
session. I find that one on one tutoring helps to build trust in a teacher-student relationship.

Darling-Hammonds (1997) postulated that teachers needed several kinds of knowledge about learning. The constructivist approach to learning emphasized that learners actively constructed their own knowledge “rather than passively receiving information transmitted to them from teachers and textbooks” (p.393). Teacher Participant 2 offered:

My students struggle with studying content for multiple choice exams, and using their content vocabulary when answering short questions and writing essays. A majority of my students have to complete tasks several times in order to show mastery of the standards.

She added that:

Explaining or modeling the activity through cause and effect, compare and contrast, and other graphic organizers help students to organize the information and catalog it in their minds.

**Summary**

The intention of this study was to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. This chapter has provided an overview of both the quantitative and qualitative data. The two data bases were kept separate and reported in two phases.

Phase 1 was the quantitative inquiry that looked at statistical relationship between culturally diverse students and the academic achievement of students from low socio-
economic group; cultural diverse students and the academic achievement of students from high socio-economic group; gender of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement; grade level of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement. Results of partial correlation tests and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) were reported in order to determine the nature of the differences among variables. The variables of teacher experience and qualification were controlled in order to eliminate their impact on the results.

Following the quantitative analysis, Phase 2 was the qualitative inquiry on factors that contributed to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic students; and factors that contributed to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students. Interviews with students, parents and teachers provided the data for the qualitative inquiry and helped to shed light on what were perceived as factors that contributed to high achievement of culturally diverse students. Four predominant themes were elicited from the interviews provided by the participants: communication, cultural awareness, motivation and teaching and learning supports. The discussion showed that the participants had a variety of opinions and retained different points of view which are essential for professional discussion.

Chapter 5 will present the discoveries, further discussions and implications, conclusion and recommendations for educators and researchers in furthering the research. Both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis will be incorporated in the discussion.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, and CONCLUSION

The study investigated the relationship between socio-economic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. The findings were in general agreement with previous research in the areas of academic achievement, socio-economic status and ethnicity. However, there were some inconsistencies that were noteworthy for professional discussions.

Research Questions and Answers

Major Question

What is the relationship between the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students and their academic achievement? Results of the quantitative data indicated that no significant relationship existed between students’ socio-economic status and students’ achievement in the areas of English Language Arts, Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies and their total academic achievement.

Research Sub-Question 1

Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic group? In analyzing the quantitative data, the study revealed that Black students from the low socio-economic group were doing better in English Language Arts, Reading, Science, Social Studies and their overall academic
achievement than their Hispanic counterparts in the low socio-economic group, but the performance in these areas were not noticeable. However, the Black students of the low socio-economic group were doing significantly better in their Math achievement than their Hispanic counterparts of the low socioeconomic group (F (111, 31) = 9.454, p < .05).

**Research Sub-Question 2**

Does cultural diversity make any difference in the academic achievement of students from high socio-economic group? The MANCOVA model showed that Hispanic students of the high socio-economic group have generally outperformed Black students of the high economic group in all academic areas with the exception of Reading, but the differences in academic performance were not noticeable in any area.

**Research Sub-Question 3**

Does the gender of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement? The quantitative data also revealed that in the overall group of culturally diverse students, females were doing significantly better than males in the areas of English Language Arts (F (94, 113) = 15.969, p < .05), Math (F (94, 113) = 4.306, p < .05), Reading (F (94, 113) = 6.157, p < .05), and in their total achievement (F (94, 113) = 5.112, p < .05). While the females were doing better than the males in Science, the difference was insignificant. On the other hand, the males were doing better than the females in Social Studies, but the difference in this area of performance was not significant.
**Research Sub-Question 4**

Does the grade level of culturally diverse students make any difference in their academic achievement? As the results of the quantitative data pertain to the academic achievement of culturally diverse students in relation to their grade level, the data indicated that seventh grade students were performing better than the sixth graders. The seventh graders were performing significantly better in the areas of Math ($F(110, 97) = 0.531, p < .05$), Science ($F(110, 97) = 31.475, p < .05$), Social Studies ($F(110, 97) = 7.898, p < .05$) and in their total achievement ($F(110, 97) = 4.840, p < .05$). Even though the seventh graders were doing better than the sixth graders in English Language Arts, the difference in performance was not significant. The sixth graders on the other hand were significantly outperforming the seventh graders in Reading ($F(110, 97) = 10.913, p < .05$).

**Research Sub-Question 5**

What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socio-economic students? Students, parents and teachers shared several contributing factors that have led to culturally diverse students’ high achievement. Students attributed their high achievement to their ability to stay focused in class and also shared that when teachers give clear explanations and use good examples that they can relate to, they tend to do very well in school. They also stated that when teachers use games and pictures, they see and understand lessons better. Parents shared that they do their part to help their children’s high academic achievement by establishing that there are no excuses for doing school work and encourage their children to do whatever is asked of them by their
teachers. A parent shared also that the child has to have an interest in the work and the desire to do well in school in order to make himself and the parent feel good in general. Parents believed that other contributing factors to their children’s high achievement include facilitating students to do hands on activities and projects that appeal to their children’s interest. In addition, parents believed that sometimes when their children get to work with their friends it helps the children to have fun in learning.

**Research Sub-Question 6**

What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students? The culturally diverse students of the high socio-economic group shared that they achieve highly in school because they listen to their teachers, practice what they have learned outside of school, study, work hard, stay focused and try not to talk during teacher’s instructional time. These high achieving students also do better when the teachers are fun, relatable, uses examples (including silly examples), and when their teachers show a willingness to help them understand the material better. Parents of the students from the high socio-economic group believed that the child’s interest, and motivation to work along with parental involvement with school work and activities are contributing factors to the students’ high academic achievement. Parents also expressed that when teachers create the opportunities for students to do projects and presentations that they can share with their class also contribute to students’ high academic achievement.
For Research Sub-Questions 5 and 6, the teachers cited several contributing factors to students’ high academic achievement. They believed that getting to know their students individually, finding appropriate strategies to motivate them, and ways to build their self-esteem, the level of interaction and communication, presentation of content material and differentiated assessment measures, repeated practice, hands on activities, encouragement, personality and individual attention were some of the factors that have led to the students’ high achievement. Teachers believed that when they find time to work with students individually or in small groups and when they create a balance between lecturing and other methods in delivering instruction have contributed to students’ high academic achievement, because they appeal to different learning styles. Also, the use of graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, charts, presentations and other visual aids provide differentiation and support for students’ learning needs. In general, teachers have shared that they have high expectations of their students and that they provided prompt feedback so that their students can reflect on both their strengths and weaknesses. In addition they created opportunities for tutoring and grade recovery. The teachers utilized a range of assessment measures that allow students to demonstrate acquisition of content material. These include, multiple choice, short answer, essay, methods to show understanding of content vocabulary, among other measures.

Discussion

The findings of his study have generated some important points for professional discussion. Some of the points to be discussed include the following:
First, the statistical data revealed that no significant relationship existed between the socioeconomic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. This revelation contradicted previous studies that indicated that significant relationship existed between students’ socio-economic status and their academic achievement. Schmid (2001) shared that parents’ socio-economic status has strong positive effect on children’s academic achievement. This finding could possibly be explained by the quantity of data collected and by using only CRCT data of middle school students in a specific school setting. Previous studies as reported by Barton (2004) included results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is a nationally representative assessment in core subjects such as Reading and Mathematics overtime (www.nagb.org/naep/what-naep.html). Additionally, the main NAEP assessments are conducted in grades 4, 8 and 12 that has a different demographic representation from this current study. Also, studies conducted by Ogbu (1992a) examined the results of candidates who took the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) and the California Assessment Program of Basic Skills. Such study concluded that the socio-economic status of culturally diverse students impacted their academic achievement. However, after T-Test was conducted that examined that academic achievement of majority and minority students, the results of the analysis verified previous studies that found that White students achieved higher in their academics than their minority counterparts.

Vellymallay (2012) explained that students from higher income group experienced greater parent involvement in their education and provided a better knowledge, behavioral, and value base for their children which influenced higher educational gains. However, the findings of the current study indicated that both the
parent participants of both the high and low income groups utilized measures available in school to be involved in their children’s education. They engaged in communication and behavioral supports for their children, but have shown that they have entrusted their students’ academic performance to the teachers. One parent shared “I basically leave it up to them to teach the child. They have their standards that they have to teach. I just leave it up to them to educate the child.”

Second, the participating parents have indicated that they wanted to be involved in their children’s education, but the data revealed that the parents viewed their involvement in different ways. Ternstrom and Ternstrom (2003) suggested that families should help to support their children to the best of their abilities and also that children take responsibilities for their decisions. The researchers argued that “schools cannot do their jobs unless students get to school on time, attend classes faithfully, work hard, finish their homework, pay attention to their teachers…” (p. 271). While some parents offered input on their children’s learning styles and made themselves available for conferences, behavioral support, and other purposes, as previously discussed the parents generally left academic matters up to the teachers who they viewed as content experts. They also believed that once their students were doing well academically and if there were no behavioral concerns, their physical involvement in school was not necessary. However, they kept up with their children’s grades, supported and encouraged their children at home so that they can maintain high academic grades. The review of literature indicated that more researchers were paying attention to parent involvement. However, they were not addressing the extent or the nature of the involvement that would help to increase students’ learning. Brown (2007) argued that much of what teachers knew about their
students were from parents and that the information gathered was used to influence teaching practices. At the same time, Brown (2007) argued that teachers did not treat all forms of parent involvement equally.

Third, educators should be conscientious about not only the methods of communications they use between students’ home and school, but also about the messages that were being communicated. Data shared by participating teachers revealed that some communication methods could put students at a disadvantage of obtaining school information, because students and their families have the different levels of access to technology and resources as others. Therefore, when teachers communicated general information with parents that helped to increase the learning of culturally diverse students, the teachers should ensure that all of their students’ parents can access the information. As a result, written copies of messages and other information should accompany telephone calls, e-mails, and website postings. Additionally, messages should be clear so as to eliminate misunderstandings. As we recalled from the data, parents could misinterpret messages or jokes, which may result in discord between home and school. The findings revealed that both parents and teachers are willing to maintain communication between the culturally diverse student’s homes and school, and that teachers have used information learned through communication with parents to differentiate approaches that they employed when working with diverse students in an effort to ensure a more supportive classroom environment for the students and that would ultimately helped to increase their academic achievement. Allen (2007) have encouraged educators to engage in communication with students’ families throughout the school.
because she found that this helped to increase teachers’ cultural intelligence and made them more effective educators when teaching culturally diverse students.

Consistent with this study, previous literature indicated that teachers valued communication and that they wanted to use what they learned from their communications with parents to drive classroom practices (Brown, 2007). Although this study supported previous research that indicated the positive effect that home and school communication have on students’ learning, an important contradiction is worth noting: the participating parents in general felt that there was not too much for them to communicate with the teachers about, because the teachers had to focus on their standards, their students, plus administrative work. The participating teachers, on the other hand, believed that what parents communicated with them (personal or otherwise) were essential in helping them individualize instruction to meet the learning needs of the culturally diverse students in the classroom.

Fourth, even though the students and parents interviewed mainly accredited their high academic achievement to their teachers, the students’ main belief was that their interests and what they were interested in knowing were not generally incorporated in lessons, because their teachers never asked and, like their parents, shared that teachers were focused on teaching the standards. The literature reviewed shared that parents of low income and minority students have placed extreme trust in the hands of school officials with educating their children, and in making essential academic decisions for them (VanSciver, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to find methods to be knowledgeable about their students so that they can connect with them. Conversely, the teachers felt that through school documents and day to day communication, they had
garnered information to make them knowledgeable about their students and had applied these background knowledge either directly or indirectly in their teaching practices and to adjust their classroom environment so that they could help to increase the academic performance of their diverse learners.

Fifth, the teachers believed that their cultural competence and awareness have allowed them to apply strategies in their classrooms that helped to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. The teachers demonstrated their cultural competence by acknowledging student individuality, by making a conscious effort not to single or isolate any student, by ensuring that students were addressed by their names, through strategic grouping dynamics, differentiated teaching strategies, differentiated academic supports, and by using appropriate cultural references in their classrooms. Consistent with the literature reviewed, teachers indicated that they adjusted their learning environment to make it more conducive for effective teaching of culturally diverse students. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) suggested that teachers should create classroom environments that would lessen the effects of cultural discontinuities. For Howard (2007) when educators were culturally competent they demonstrated the abilities to form authentic, caring and effective relationship with students who were culturally different.

Sixth, the findings of this study indicated that students, parents and teachers agreed that a variety of teaching and learning strategies have been used in the classroom to improve culturally diverse students’ learning. Graphic organizers, charts, hands on activities (such as cutting clay to show cross sections), text messaging to summarize their learning, pretend tattooing of lesson summary on images of popular entertainers,
mnemonic devices, PowerPoint presentations by students, projects, student supporting each other during group assignments were measures utilized in class to individualize and to drive instruction that were engaging to diverse learners. As indicated in the review of literature, Cammarota and Romero (2006) shared that educators should avoid teaching strategies that drill students in academic skills and teaching to the test, but instead should engage in educational content that is more significant and that would allow students to make meaningful connections. At the same time, rigor and relevance must be stressed so as to ensure that students were meeting academic success (Saifer et al, 2011).

Seventh, the findings revealed that teachers believed that parents were primarily responsible for culturally diverse students’ school success. The teachers stated that if parents did not value education, then consequently the students would not place any value in their education. The teachers shared that if school matters were not followed up on at home, and were not encouraged and supported by their parents then there would be little impact on the students’ academic learning. Similarly, previous research found that students who were successful academically were usually supported by their families (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Teachers added that parents had to ensure that students had the time and a place to do homework and that an honest effort was made in attempting homework assignments. Additionally, the teachers expressed that parents set the expectation for school success even before a child entered school. Conversely, parents and students mostly believed that teachers were primarily responsible for their culturally diverse students’ academic success, because the teachers taught what the students had to know, used good examples, helped to clarify misunderstandings, engaged in methods that supported the students’ learning. Previous studies indicated that if teachers taught their
content areas well in an orderly classroom environment then students should achieve academic success. (Rothstein, 2004). Nieto (2010) also found that when teachers were engaged in quality instruction and demonstrated caring attitudes towards their students, then such efforts would be translated in culturally diverse students’ academic success.

Eighth, unlike previous research that attributed high achieving minority students’ academic performance to their resilience, this study found that efforts of teachers, modeling expectation by teachers and peers, differentiated modes of instruction and assessment, student engagement, extra time and additional opportunities to demonstrate understanding of content, parental encouragement and teachers taking time to offer individualized help were the major contributing factors to culturally diverse students high academic achievement. Griffen and Allen (2006) reported that high achieving minority students had used their difficult environments as a source of motivation to achieve academic success. At the same time Jamar and Pitts (2005) concluded that the efficacy of teachers was central in promoting high academic achievement. Saifer et. al. (2011) asserted that rigor and relevance to curriculum were key to ensuring that students gained academic success.

Ninth, the parent participants tended to indicate that knowledge about their backgrounds were not vital to students’ academic gains. Parents shared that teachers did not have the time to investigate or to be detailed about cultural backgrounds of students, because the teachers had to be focused on teaching the standards. Similarly, the culturally diverse students believed that their backgrounds were not components of lessons, but that they gained academically when the teachers demonstrated for them what is expected; used games and pictures; provided extra work, explanation, or additional help for them.
The findings in this study indicated that while the teachers understood the uniqueness and similarities among students in their classroom, they did not believe that their instructions changed to incorporate elements of individual’s culture. These findings stood in contrast to previous research which concluded that when the identities of culturally diverse students were incorporated in lessons and in the learning environment teachers created not only the opportunity for students to learn important content but also to appreciate their rich cultural heritage (Leonard, 2008).

In literature reviewed, Cammarota and Romero (2006) established that school curriculum had no significance or meaning to the lives of students therefore educators should pay attention to students’ culture and create opportunities where the cultures are incorporated in lessons so that students can make meaningful connections to their lives. Teachers also acknowledged that aspects of the curriculum/standards that they are mandated to be taught may reach certain students who are connected to that component of the instruction through their prior knowledge or experiences while others may be unaffected. More importantly, the teachers shared that through building rapport, demonstrating respect, explaining the purpose of discipline and consequences, maintaining a well-managed classroom environment, communicating expectations and creating opportunities for greater academic success were contributing factors that helped to increase culturally diverse student achievement. Previous studies have indicated that when teachers hold consistent and high expectations for students and communicate respect for each student’s intelligence, the students were more academically successful (Howard, 2007).
Additional Findings

Parents’ communication and involvement were influential factors on culturally diverse student academic achievement. Even though willing and available to communicate with teachers, parents of minority children have relinquished academic control to their children’s teachers, so they rarely offered input unless solicited by teachers or if teachers wanted them to support or respond to behavioral or academic concerns. Teachers believed that through input and communication from parents they were more knowledgeable about their students which helped them to differentiate their overall instructional practices. Regardless of culture, parents wanted to ensure that their students succeeded academically.

An unexpected finding of this study was that parents were not overly concerned about the integration of their backgrounds and cultural elements in lessons, but instead wanted to ensure that their children were making gains academically. This may be explained by the fact that their children were doing well and confirmed the old adage: “If it is not broken, do not fix it.” Teachers, parents and students agreed that different modes of presentation, teaching and learning supports, classroom groupings and the use of visuals aids were effective in enhancing culturally diverse student achievement. A major conclusion that could be drawn from the insight gained from the perspective of the teachers and students was that when students felt respected and supported by their teachers and enjoyed their learning environment they made greater gains in their academic achievement. Parents and students in general primarily attributed the culturally diverse student’ high academic success to instructional practices of the teachers. On the other hand, the teachers attributed the students’ school success to their students’ parents.
Information gleaned from these data revealed some similarities and differences that helped to shed light on what are perceived to be contributing factors that led to high academic achievement among culturally diverse students. Some similarities included: (1) different modes of communication were used between students’ home and school environments, however the different modes were used for different purposes by parents and teachers; (2) parents were involved in their students education even though different levels and types of involvement were highlighted; (3) teachers believed that their knowledge of students and their background helped them to differentiate instruction and also helped them to engage their students on an individual level so as to increase their students’ academic gains; (4) students, parents and teachers believed that the use of graphic organizers, charts, hands on activities, text messaging summary points, presentations among other techniques were useful methods that have helped to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

Some differences included: (1) communication between home and school did not always serve its intended purpose and therefore might not have led to increased academic achievement among culturally diverse students; (2) parents, students, and teachers shared contradicting views on who students’ school success should be attributed; (3) parents did not feel that it was necessary that their children’s backgrounds be incorporated in lessons, because they believed that teachers needed to focus on their standards and that teachers do not have the time to investigate cultural backgrounds of students.
Implications

The focus of this study was to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic statuses on the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. The quantitative data explored whether or not cultural diversity made any difference on the academic achievement of students from both low and high socioeconomic backgrounds. From the quantitative data high achieving Black and Hispanic students and their parents, as well as teachers were selected to be interviewed in order to gain a glimpse of factors that contributed to the high achievement of culturally diverse high and low socioeconomic students.

From the findings, it could be stated that partnerships between schools and students’ home communities should be created so that students connect their school experiences to their home environments. Allen (2007) supported this view and stated that such partnership would help students’ academic achievement. Additionally, the study found that teachers believed that when they incorporated the interests and learning styles of their culturally diverse students, the result is high academic achievement. While the students, parents, and teachers shared various views on factors that contributed to the high achievement of culturally diverse students from both high and low socioeconomic backgrounds, it was found that support and encouragement from peers, parents and teachers along with the ability of teachers to understand the students, plan and implement effective differentiated instruction were major contributing factors that impacted culturally diverse students high academic achievement.

From the thoughtful and thorough data gathered from the students, parents and teachers some common beliefs were expressed. The participants all generally agreed that
culturally diverse students learned best when different modes of presentations were used in instruction, when the students were engaged in hands-on activities, and when teachers used visual aids among other strategies. Tomlinson (1999) posited that while there was no one “right way” to create an effectively differentiated classroom, teachers should develop teaching practices in ways that created a good match for their teaching styles, and their students’ learning needs. Teachers should implement ways that helped their individual students to learn as quickly and as deeply as possible. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) stated that teachers had the responsibility to ensure that all students master important content.

Even though different methods of communication were utilized between home and school and for different reasons, the participants all agreed that some forms of two-way communication existed between home and school. The parents and students shared that they were able to communicate with their teachers about lessons from home. Through communication between parents and teacher, different types of information were exchanged that led to teachers’ differentiating instruction and the learning environment that helped to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

Parents implied that even though the curriculum content might be unfamiliar to them, they offered support to their children at home. Teachers implied that when parents ensured that students had the time and a place to do homework and that when the students put an honest effort in to their homework, then the culturally diverse students’ academic success should increase. Through the openness to communicate (whether through e-mails, conferences, notes, website postings) teachers had demonstrated that they were
welcoming to parents in support of the culturally diverse students’ academic needs. The implication from this openness between culturally diverse students’ homes and schools demonstrated that a clear message was sent to diverse students and their families that the school and their homes were working together and failing to do homework and to work hard in general were unacceptable excuses.

Though the teachers generally agreed that students’ cultures were important to them, they had also acknowledged that their instruction did not necessarily change to facilitate individual cultural elements, and they also stated that the mandates of the curriculum limited their flexibility to make lessons more culturally responsive. However, the teachers believed that through best practices the academic achievement of their culturally diverse students had increased.

**Recommendation for Practitioners**

For decades, educational reform and educational policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 which resulted in educational programs Title 1 and Head Start; Goals 2000 of 1994 which encouraged states to establish opportunity to learn standards; No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 which reauthorized ESEA were some of the initiatives that had focused on academic achievement of low income culturally diverse students. These initiatives prompted educational policy makers, school district personnel, school administrators and educators in general to seek and/or develop strategies that would increase the learning of culturally diverse students. Cultural diversity is reflected in many classrooms and it should be expected that teachers should create classrooms that will successfully respond to the
needs of culturally diverse learners. The teachers have indicated that they are willing to implement strategies that they believe are most effective for their diverse groups of students to learn and to engage in lessons. In response, it is recommended that educators be equipped with knowledge of effective strategies and best practices in addition to the support of policy makers, district level and school administrators along with family and community support they should help diverse learners achieve academic success. The findings from this study have propelled the following recommendations for educational policy makers, teacher preparation program, coordinators, district personnel, school administrators and other educators:

**Educational Policy Makers**

Rothstein (2004) suggested that social and economic policies are to be in place that will enable all children to attend school more equally ready to learn. That is, students from low income homes should be able to attend preschool programs that set the foundation for learning readiness and that will help them to connect with the curriculum that they are expected to learn. Darling-Hammond (1997) found that administratively mandated systems of instruction hinders teachers’ responsiveness to students and also discourages teachers from learning to be culturally responsive.

Educational policy makers should resist the temptation to use standardized achievement test scores for justifying and promoting students and evaluating schools but instead use these results to inform teachers and parents about student achievement relative to their peers. As one teacher participant shared that sometimes her students do not connect with certain aspects of the curriculum, therefore placing too much emphasis on standardized test data could negatively impact the learning of culturally diverse
students. Instead, educational policy makers, in general, should understand how culturally diverse students are helped to learn from a variety of angles and allow some level of flexibility in policy and curriculum implementation so that school leaders and educators can adjust and respond proficiently to their culturally diverse learners while responding to changing or newly introduced policies.

District Level Personnel and School Administrators

A recommendation for district level personnel and school administrators is that they use their decision making authorities in a manner that help to empower their staff members to utilize their combined expertise to find and implement effective strategies that are geared at enhancing increased school achievement for culturally diverse students from both high and low socioeconomic groups. Also, it is recommended that school administrators create the opportunities for professional development so that teachers understand and apply best practices that will help to increase the learning of culturally diverse students. Additionally, administrators should have dedicated time for teachers to collaborate on effective strategies that have been proven to enhance the engagement and learning of culturally diverse students regardless of income status. School principals should foster and protect time for collaboration and communication among staff members. This will help teachers to influence their peers by providing instructional advice that improve the learning outcome of diverse learners (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). The participating teachers have shared strategies that they believed were effective in enhancing the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Other teachers and staff, in general, could benefit from these strategies through collaboration and communication.
Another recommendation for district level personnel and school administrators is that when new standards and curriculum are being implemented, they need to investigate the alignment of standards to teacher expectation in order to ensure that the time and resources available will allow teachers to realistically implement the curriculum and also have the time to avail themselves to communicate and facilitate parent involvement. It is also recommended that when methods of instruction are considered teachers should be given the opportunity to be flexible as they monitor the effectiveness of strategies on teaching and learning practices that impact the high academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

Teachers, parents and students have indicated that individual help in the form of tutoring or on-to-one support have influenced the high academic achievements of culturally diverse students from both high and low socio-economic groups. Therefore, it is recommended that district level personnel and school administrators expend resources that will be easily accessible to students so that they can gain and benefit from extra and individual support as needed.

**Teacher Preparation Programs**

Colleges and universities should make it a necessary component of their teacher preparation program to educate aspiring educators to understand strategies that engage all learners. Since studies have verified that parent involvement served to increase the learning of culturally diverse students, the teacher preparation programs should have as a methodology component strategies that aspiring educators can readily use to involve parents who can physically be present at school and for those who want to be involved but cannot be present. In addition, it is recommended that colleges and universities
educate aspiring teachers concerning the culture and diversity in the classroom and how their actions and instructions can impact the daily lives and the academic achievement of the culturally diverse students in their classrooms.

It is also recommended that colleges and universities help local school districts develop effective programs that can strengthen professional learning workshops that will not only enthuse teachers, but will also provide them with ready to go activities that can be implemented in the classroom and will help to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Additionally, it is recommended that teacher educator programs work closely with school districts and school leaders so that they can have two way communication about culturally diverse student achievement and work together to prepare and equip future teachers with the tools that will improve classroom instruction for the diverse community of students.

**Inclusive Education**

As Harry and Klinger (2007) have found that African American students are represented at twice the rate as their White peers in special education programs such as the education of students with Mental Retardation, and Hispanics have been overrepresented in the education of students with Learning Disability. It is therefore recommended that pre-service teachers engage in programs that help and support their in-depth understanding of cultural differences, learning differences, and disabilities. This understanding may help teachers to reflect and engage in differentiated practices that may support students’ individual learning styles and needs. The high achieving culturally diverse students, parents and their teachers who have participated in this study have
shared that the students learn best when lessons are presented in various ways and when teachers respond to their individual learning needs.

**Educators**

While maintaining fidelity to the curriculum and standards, educators, who are the content experts, should reshape the curriculum in order to meet the standards in a manner that is meaningful and relevant. Based on the data shared by participating students, it is recommended that teachers deliver the curriculum in interesting and non-traditional ways so as to help culturally diverse students to create the connection between what is taught and their backgrounds (consistent with Leonard, 2008, Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Overall, it is necessary that educators create an environment where every student feels valued, encouraged, and that will help to promote student involvement in classroom discussions and decisions as they engage in the learning process. It is recommended that teachers create a classroom environment that demonstrate respect for culturally diverse students, their beliefs, and their capabilities.

One teacher participant pointed out that her students do not do well with certain types of assessments, such as multiple choice. As a result, it is recommended that educators find and use dynamic ways to assess students learning. That is, rethink teaching, learning and assessment strategies so that lessons can reach a wider variety of students and give culturally diverse students the opportunity to demonstrate content understanding in creative and unique ways.

Professional training opportunities will help to build teachers’ confidence as they engage in non-traditional teaching and learning strategies that are believed to enhance culturally diverse students’ learning. Espstein and Jansorn (2004) found that students who
are successful academically are usually supported by their families therefore educators should engage families in activities that contribute to students’ academic success. Educators need to help all students regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status show substantial academic growth (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, disability, language, socioeconomic status, should be taken into consideration when implementing individual, group and other classroom learning tasks. It is therefore recommended that as teachers engage in the delivery of instruction, they ensure that best practices that help to increase the learning of diverse students are in place and they should be prepared to provide intervention for individual students who may not be readily receiving the intended goal of the lessons. Teachers should create opportunities for students to work in group or alone if needed or preferred and provide appropriate interventions to support the learning and engagement of their culturally diverse students. Ding, Piccolo, Kulm, and Xiaobao, (2007) found that when teachers intervene with individual students the teacher is better able to assess whether or not a student comprehends the lesson. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) posited that teachers are required to understand the nature of each of their students and that all students master the lesson content.

Educational policy makers, teacher preparation program coordinators, district personnel, school administrators and educators in general need to understand the relationships among policy implementation, administrative practice, leadership practice and instructional practice that will influence high academic achievement among minority students from both high and low socio-economic status.
Recommendation for Future Researchers

Education of our youth is paramount especially in the pursuit of increasing the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. This research is not complete. Additional research is needed to extend this area of investigation. An in depth study on the recommended practices is necessary to determine their influence on culturally diverse students’ academic growth. This current study should be replicated using Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools with a wider range of participants to ascertain whether or not the current findings would be verified.

This study focused on middle school students, however further research is needed at different school levels such as the elementary and high school levels in order to provide better empirical evidence of the relationship between socio-economic status and the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Such recommended study will help educators to know, understand and respond to changes that lead to high academic gains at different grade levels. These unknowns at the different levels should establish broad and exciting research agenda and the results of such proposed studies could be used to guide professional practice as systems of education continue to seek effective and engaging strategies that will result in high academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

In an effort to understand and to respond to the learning needs of both economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students, further investigation should be continued so as to understand the underlying factors that contribute to increased academic performance for one group above the other. Also, specific strategies that address specific students learning profiles among and within cultures should be explored.
As teachers engage in professional learning/workshops on educating culturally diverse students and as the strategies learned are implemented with fidelity, future studies should be conducted to determine if teachers are seeing growth in students’ performance as a result of their professional learning activity. Additionally, longitudinal study could be conducted to see if there is marked improvement in the academic performance of culturally diverse students’ academic from both high and low socio-economic groups in order to understand teachers’ perception of implementation of strategies overtime and to ascertain their effectiveness on culturally diverse students’ academic performance.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study include limits that naturally affect the study (Mertler & Charles, 2008). In the face of these results, discoveries, discussions, and recommendations it is important to point out the limitations of this study. Although the research was carefully prepared, some limitations existed. First, the research was conducted using data and participants from Title 1 Middle School. The study should have involved data and participants from different levels of the school system and also participants from non-Title 1 School. Second, in addition to the interviews conducted with the students, parents and teacher participants, it would be imperative that observations of teachers and students in the classroom setting be conducted as a means of bridging the gap between the perspectives shared by the students and those shared by the teachers.
Conclusion

This study is purposeful and timely as it sought to shed light on an age old dilemma in the school system – socio-economic factors and minority students’ academic achievement. As stated in Chapter One of this study, “we cannot change the past” but we can address issues for a more successful academic future for our culturally diverse students. The academic achievement of Hispanic and Black students were explored and factors that led to the high academic performance of these students were explored in order to unpack the components of the underlying assumptions of students’ academic achievement. Examination of student data and interviews with high performing diverse students, their parents and teachers have shed light on providing a necessary glimpse on the underlying factors that are believed to influence high academic achievement. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made for educational policymakers, district personnel and school administrators, teacher preparation programs (including inclusive education), and educators in general who will help to guide professional practice that will support the learning of culturally diverse students.

The findings of this study should add new dimensions to this series of educational research in multicultural education. It should serve as an impetus for school practitioners to retreat from practices that are not enhancing academic achievement for all students and for them to move forward with recommended practices that are perceived by participating students, parents and their teachers as contributing factors that have led to high academic achievement of culturally diverse students.

The most significant finding of this study has shown by the participating parents that whether or not they are physically present at school they have invested in their
children’s education and are willing to support their children by helping them to meet their educational needs as they see fit. The efforts shared by the parent participants have indicated that their contributions may have influenced their children’s high academic achievement. Also, parents represented in this study have shared that they do not believe that their cultural backgrounds have necessarily contributed to their children’s success, but the instructional content and methods of delivery were essential factors that have led to their culturally diverse students’ high academic achievement. Another significant finding is that students generally indicated that they did not believe that their interests were represented in classroom instruction, because the teachers did not ask about their interests. They said that they did well because their teachers supported them when they needed extra help and found different ways to engage them in lessons. The teachers on the other hand believed that by accessing student information and by engaging in conversations with their parents, they became more knowledgeable about their students and tailored instruction to meet their individual needs.

This study should serve as a contribution to educational research that will help to enrich the teaching and learning practices that may increase the academic performance of culturally diverse students from both high and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, with concerns among educational practitioners in general about the gaps in achievement among cultural groups, this study has shed light on different perspectives, views, and options from participating students, parents and teachers that can be utilized readily in an effort to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students from both high and low socioeconomic groups and ultimately contribute to teaching practices that should help to blur the gaps in academic achievement among and within
culturally diverse groups of students. In sum, the results of this study should provide a framework for educators to implement best practices that will lead to increasing academic achievement of culturally diverse students and help to close the education gap that persists.
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Webber, J., & Wilson, M. (2012). Do grades tell parents what they want and need to know?. *Phi Delta Kappan, 94*(1), 30-35.


**Websites**


The governor’s Office of student achievement: Report card Overview. [http://www.gaosa.org/reportinfo.aspx#C1a](http://www.gaosa.org/reportinfo.aspx#C1a)

## APPENDIX A – Summary of the Research Process

### Quantitative

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Culturaly Diverse Students</th>
<th>Title 1 - Middle School (400)</th>
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## Appendix B

### Matrix Aligning Theoretical Frameworks with Research and Interview Questions

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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Elements of Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Students' Interview Questions</th>
<th>Parents' Interview Questions</th>
<th>Teachers' Interview Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BACKGROUND</strong></td>
<td>The <strong>constructivist theory</strong> emphasizes the importance of interpersonal (social), cultural-historical, and individual factors as the key to human development (Schunk, 2004, p. 294). The theory of <strong>culturally responsive teaching</strong> argues that when teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they eliminate barriers to learning and achievement and, thereby, open doors for culturally different students to reach their potential (Ford, 2010, p. 50).</td>
<td>What grade are you in?</td>
<td>In what grade(s) do you have children?</td>
<td>What grade(s) do you teach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse low socioeconomic students?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constructivism</strong> – social interactions between experts and novices – essential to learning. <strong>Constructivism</strong> – construction of meaning both externally and interpersonally through interaction. <strong>Constructivism</strong> – meanings are influenced by socio-historical experiences. <strong>Constructivism/Culturally Responsive Teaching</strong> – cultural factors influence learning.</td>
<td>Think about the best teachers you have had, what are the qualities that made them good teachers for you?</td>
<td>Think about classroom experiences that your child has shared with you, what experiences have made it good for your child’s learning?</td>
<td>Think about your classroom interactions with your students, what aspects are most effective for your students’ learning?</td>
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<td>Have your teachers used anything from your background (how you and family live) or any of experiences to help you to learn? <strong>Probe</strong>: Tell me how do you know? *probe… if yes, … How does this help you to learn?</td>
<td>Do you believe that your cultural background and/or the way your child learns are used when teachers teach to help your child to learn? <strong>Probe</strong>: Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Do you believe that your instructional practices address the learning needs/incorporates the cultural backgrounds of your students? <strong>Probe</strong>: Why do you think so?</td>
</tr>
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<td>If you should thank anyone for your school success, who</td>
<td>Who do you believe is primarily responsible for your child school success?</td>
<td>Who do you believe is primarily responsible for your students’ school success? <strong>Probe</strong>: Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – school and home cultures impact achievement</td>
<td>If you would like to talk to your teachers about schoolwork when you are not in school, how do you get them?</td>
<td>How do you communicate with your child’s teacher?</td>
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<td>Probe: Why?</td>
<td>Probe: emails, phones, notes, in person</td>
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<td>What is/are the best way(s) to teach you to learn something new?</td>
<td>What information do you offer to your child’s teacher that will help your child’s learning?</td>
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<td>Probe: Tell me about a time when you have offered information to your child’s teacher and it was used.</td>
<td>What kinds of information do your students or parents share with you that you have used to increase your students’ learning?</td>
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<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – incorporate personal abilities and background into teaching academic skills for increased learning</td>
<td>Does your teacher use what you know or what you are interested in knowing as part of the lesson?</td>
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<td>Probe: If so … Please give me an example. If not … Please explain.</td>
<td>How does your child’s teacher implement lesson that is focused on your child’s knowledge, needs and interest?</td>
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<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – student centered</td>
<td>When things are hard for you to learn, how does your teacher help you learn?</td>
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<td>Probe: can you give me an example?</td>
<td>How does your child’s teacher help him or her to learn concepts that are hard for him to learn?</td>
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<td>Probe: Can you give me an example?</td>
<td>When your students are having difficulty learning, what do you do to help them learn?</td>
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<td>Probe: Can you give me an example?</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – proactive in addressing learning needs</td>
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<td>Do you believe that your teachers understand and respect you?</td>
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<td>Probe: Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Do you believe that your child’s teachers understand and respect him/her?</td>
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<td>Probe: Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Do your classroom practices reflect knowledge and respect of your students’ backgrounds?</td>
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<td>Probe: racial/ethnic, cultural, economic</td>
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<td>Probe: would your students and their...</td>
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<td>What factors contribute to the high achievement of culturally diverse high socioeconomic students?</td>
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<td><strong>Constructivism</strong> – social interactions between experts and novices – essential to learning</td>
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<td><strong>Constructivism – ZPD</strong> – individuals can help others to master concepts and ideas that they cannot understand on their own</td>
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<td><strong>BACKGROUND</strong></td>
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<td>The <strong>constructivist theory</strong> emphasizes the importance of interpersonal (social), cultural-historical, and individual factors as the key to human development (Schunk, 2004, p. 294).</td>
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<td>The theory of <strong>culturally responsive teaching</strong> argues that when teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they eliminate barriers to learning and achievement and, thereby, open doors for culturally different students to reach their potential (Ford, 2010, p. 50).</td>
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<tr>
<th>What grade are you in?</th>
<th>In what grade(s) do you have children?</th>
<th>What grade(s) do you teach?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why are you making good grades in school?</td>
<td>Why is your child making such good grades in school?</td>
<td>Why are your students making such good grades in school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Think about the best teachers you have had, what are the qualities that made them good teachers for you?** |
| **Think about classroom experiences that your child has shared with you, what experiences have made it good for your child’s learning?** |
| **Think about your classroom interactions with your students, what aspects are most effective for your students’ learning?** |

| Have your teachers used anything from your background (how you and family live)/any of experiences to help you to learn? *Probe: Tell me how do you know?* |
| Do you believe that your cultural background and/or the way your child learns are used when teachers teach to help your child to learn? *Probe: Why do you think so?* |
| Do you believe that your instructional practices address the learning needs/incorporates the cultural backgrounds of your students? *Probe: Why do you think so?* |

<p>| If you should thank anyone for your school success, who do you believe is primarily responsible for your students’ school success? |
| Who do you believe is primarily responsible for your students’ school success? |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Culturally Responsive Teaching – school and home cultures impact achievement</th>
<th>If you would like to talk to your teachers about schoolwork when you are not in school, how do you get them?</th>
<th>How do you communicate with your child’s teacher? <em>Probe:</em> emails, phones, notes, in person <em>Probe:</em> Tell me how and why you use each method of communication.</th>
<th>What are ways in which you communicate with parents? <em>Probe:</em> emails, phone, notes, in person? <em>Probe:</em> Tell me how and why you use each method of communication.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – incorporate personal abilities and background into teaching academic skills for increased learning</td>
<td>What is/are the best way(s) to teach you to learn something new?</td>
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<td>How does your child’s teacher help him or her to learn concepts that are hard for him to learn? <em>Probe:</em> Can you give me an example?</td>
<td>When your students are having difficulty learning, what do you do to help them learn? <em>Probe:</em> Can you give me an example?</td>
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<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching – respect for all Constructivism – social interactions between experts and novices – essential to learning</td>
<td>Do you believe that your teachers understand and respect you? <em>Probe:</em> Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Do you believe that your child’s teachers understand and respect him/her? <em>Probe:</em> Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Do your classroom practices reflect knowledge and respect of your students’ backgrounds? <em>Probe:</em> racial/ethnic, cultural, economic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Probe: would your students and their parents agree... Why do you think so?
Appendix C – IRB Forms

Signed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research study that will focus on the Academic Achievement of Culturally Diverse Students, which is being conducted by Yvette Ford, a student at Kennesaw State University (KSU). I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to investigate the academic achievement of students within and among diverse cultural groups. Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, your participation will help the researcher to learn more about parent’s perception on student achievement. Your participation will be a contribution to research that will help to guide professional practice in education.

2. The procedures are as follows:
   a) You will be interviewed in 1 session. The interview session will take approximately 20 - 30 minutes to complete
   b) The interview will be tape recorded.
   c) During the interview you will not be addressed by name or any other identifiable descriptors.
   d) You will be assigned a code for record keeping purposes only.

3. Taking part in this study should not cause any discomfort or stresses.

4. There are no known risks associated with the participation of this study.

5. The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of the participants unless required by law. The interview will be recorded on a password protected device (Dell Streak 7 tablet) and will then be analyzed. The interviews will later be transcribed. The transcribed interviews and other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home study while the study is underway. The data will be erased and/destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation (approximately by the end of December, 2013).

6. No individual information will be shared.

7. Inclusion criteria for participation: Participants must be 18+ years of age and must be a parent or guardian of a student who is identified in a culturally diverse group (Black or Hispanic).

______________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Legally Authorized Representative, Date

________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, # 0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.
Formulario de Consentimiento Firmado

Estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio de investigación que se centrará en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes culturalmente diversos, que se están llevando a cabo por Yvette Ford de Kennesaw State University. Entiendo que esta participación es voluntaria y que puedo retirar mi consentimiento en cualquier momento sin penalización.

Los siguientes puntos han sido explicados a mí:

1. El motivo de la investigación es analizar el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes dentro y entre los diversos grupos culturales. Aunque habrá ningún beneficio directo para usted por participar en este estudio, su participación ayudará a los investigadores a aprender más acerca de la percepción de los padres sobre el rendimiento estudiantil. Su participación será una contribución a la investigación que ayudará a guiar la práctica profesional en la educación.

2. Los procedimientos son como sigue:
   a) Usted será entrevistado en una sesión. La sesión de entrevista tomará aproximadamente 20 - 30 minutos para completar
   b) La entrevista será grabada.
   c) Durante la entrevista no va a por su nombre o cualquier otro descriptor identificable.
   d) Se le asignará un código para mantener un registro único.

3. La participación en este estudio no debería causar ningún malestar o estrés.
4. No existen riesgos conocidos asociados con la participación de este estudio.
5. Los resultados de esta participación será confidencial y no se dará a conocer en cualquier forma individualmente identificable sin el consentimiento previo de los participantes menos que sea requerido por la ley. La entrevista será grabada en un dispositivo protegido por contraseña (Dell Streak 7 Tablet PC) y luego se analizarán. Las entrevistas más tarde se transcribirán. Las entrevistas transcritas y otros documentos se guardarán en un armario cerrado con llave en mi estudio en el hogar, mientras que el estudio está en marcha. Los datos serán borrados y / destruidas al término de la disertación (aproximadamente a finales de diciembre de 2013).
7. Los criterios de inclusión para la participación: Los participantes deben tener 18 años o más de edad y debe ser un padre o tutor de un estudiante que es identificado en un grupo culturalmente diverso (Negro o hispano).

__________________________________________________________
Firma del paciente o representante legalmente autorizado Fecha,

__________________________________________________________
Firma del Investigador, Fecha

FAVOR DE FIRMAR LOS DOS COPIAS, MANTENGA UNA Y OTRA EL RETORNO AL INVESTIGADOR

La investigación en la Universidad Estatal de Kennesaw que involucra participantes humanos se lleva a cabo bajo la supervisión de una Junta de Revisión Institucional de la Universidad Estatal de Kennesaw, 1000 Chastain Road, # 0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.
Signed Consent Form

The research study will focus on the Academic Achievement of Culturally Diverse Students, which is being conducted by Yvette Ford, a student at Kennesaw State University (KSU). I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to investigate the academic achievement of students within and among diverse cultural groups. Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, your participation will help with the triangulation of data and will help the researcher to learn more about teacher’s perception on the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Your participation will be a contribution to research that will help to guide professional practice in education.

2. The procedures are as follows:
   e) You will be interviewed in 1 or 2 sessions. Each interview session will take approximately 15 minutes to complete
   f) The interviews will be tape recorded.
   g) During the interview you will not be addressed by name or any other identifiable descriptors.
   h) You will be assigned a code for record keeping purposes only.

3. Taking part in this study should not cause any discomfort or stresses.

4. There are no known risks associated with the participation of this study.

5. The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of the participants unless required by law. The interview will be recorded on a password protected device (Dell Streak 7 tablet) and will then be analyzed. The interviews will later be transcribed. The transcribed interviews and other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home study while the study is underway. The data will be erased and/destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation (approximately by the end of December, 2013).

6. No individual information will be shared.

7. Inclusion criteria for participation: Participants must be 18+ years of age and must have experience teaching Black or Hispanic students.

______________________________
Signature of Participant or Legally Authorized Representative, Date

______________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, # 0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.
**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

**Focus of Research:** The research study will focus on the *Academic Achievement of Culturally Diverse Students*

**Researcher’s Contact Information:** Yvette Ford (*vford@students.kennesaw.edu*)

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Yvette Ford of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions if you do not understand.

**Description of Project**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the academic achievement of students within similar and among different diverse cultural groups. This study will add new dimension to this series of educational research and will be beneficial to researchers in the field of multicultural education, educational policy makers and educators in general. The results will help to guide professional practice that will help to improve the learning of culturally diverse students.

**Explanation of Procedure**

- Your child will be interviewed in 1 session. The interview will take approximately 20 -30 minutes to complete.
- The interview will be tape recorded.
- During the interview your child will not be addressed by name or any other identifiable descriptors.
- A code will be assigned for record keeping purposes only.

Taking part in this study should not cause your child any discomfort or stress.

There are no direct benefits for your child taking part in this study, but your child’s participation will help the researcher learn more about students’ perception of their academic achievement.

The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of the participants unless required by law. The interview will be recorded on a password protected device (Dell Streak 7 tablet) and will then be analyzed. The interview will later be transcribed. The transcribed interviews and other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home study while the research is underway. The data will be erased/destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation (approximately by the end of December, 2013).

No individual information will be shared.

Inclusion criteria for participation: Participants must be 11 – 14 years of age and must be identified under the Federal Guidelines as Black or Hispanic.
Consent to Participate

I give my consent for my child, ________________________________, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

_____________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date   Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, # 0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (678) 797-2268.
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Focus of Research: The research study will focus on the Academic Achievement of Culturally Diverse Students

Researcher’s Contact Information: My name is Yvette Ford. I am a student at Kennesaw State University (KSU). Here is my contact information: (yford@students.kennesaw.edu)
I am inviting you to be in a research study about how students from different cultural groups learn in school.

- Your parent knows we are going to be in this research study, but you get to make the final choice. If you decide to be in the study, I will ask you questions for about 20 -30 minutes about what helps you to be successful in school.
- With your permission, I will record our conversation so that I can type and review the information you share at a later time.
- During our conversation, I will not address you by your name or in any ways that make other people know who you are.
- If you take part in this study there are no direct benefits for you, but your participation will help me to understand what helps you to learn and will also help teachers plan and teach so that other students can improve their learning.
- Taking part in this study should not cause you any discomfort or stress.
- If you participate in this study, I do not believe that you will become stressed or uncomfortable. If you get tired or bored, you can take a break.
- If anything in this study worries you or make you uncomfortable, let me know and I can stop. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t want to answer.
- Everything you say will be private. When I share with others what I have learned in the study, I will not share your name or the name of anyone else who took part in the research study.
- You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now or you can change your mind later. No one will be upset if you change your mind.
- You can ask me questions at any time and you can talk to your parents about the study if you want to. I will give you a copy of this form that you can keep. Here is my name and phone number and that of my supervisor if you want to talk to or ask questions about the study:

  Researcher’s Name: Yvette Ford
  Telephone: (678)229-1417
  Supervisor’s Name: Tak Cheung Chan
  Telephone: (770)423-6889

- Do you have any questions now that I can answer for you?

IF YOU WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY, SIGN OR PRINT YOUR NAME ON THE LINE BELOW:
Put an X on this line if it is okay for me to record you ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child name and/or signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.</td>
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Name of parent who gave consent for child to participate

Signature of person obtaining assent Date
Appendix D – Interview Protocols

**Interview Protocol – Students**

1. What grade are you in?

2. Why are you making good grades in school?

3. Think about the best teachers you have had, what are the qualities that made them good teachers for you?

4. Have your teachers used anything from your background (how you and family live)/any of experiences to help you to learn?

   *Probe:* Tell me how do you know?

   *probe*… if yes … How does this help you to learn?

5. If you should thank anyone for your school success, who would you want to thank?

   *Probe:* Why?

6. If you would like to talk to your teachers about schoolwork when you are not in school, how do you get them?

7. What is/are the best way(s) to teach you to learn something new?

8. Does your teacher use what you know or what you are interested in knowing as part of the lesson?

   *Probe:* If so … Please give me an example. If not … Please explain.

9. When things are hard for you to learn, how does your teacher help you learn?

   *Probe:* can you give me an example?

10. Do you believe that your teachers understand and respect you?

   *Probe:* Why do you think so?
Interview Protocol – Parents

1. In what grade(s) do you have children?

2. Why is your child making such good grades in school?

3. Think about classroom experiences that your child has shared with you, what experiences have made it good for your child’s learning?

4. Do you believe that your cultural background and/or the way your child learns are used when teachers teach to help your child to learn?

   *Probe:* Why do you think so?

5. Who do you believe is primarily responsible for your child school success?

   *Probe:* Why?

6. How do you communicate with your child’s teacher?

   *Probe:* emails, phones, notes, in person

   *Probe:* Tell me how and why you use each method of communication.

7. What information do you offer to your child’s teacher that will help your child’s learning?

   *Probe:* Tell me about a time when you have offered information to your child’s teacher and it was used.

8. How does your child’s teacher implement lesson that is focused on your child’s knowledge, needs and interest?

9. How does your child’s teacher help him or her to learn concepts that are hard for him to learn? *Probe:* Can you give me an example?

10. Do you believe that your child’s teachers understand and respect him/her?

    *Probe:* Why do you think so?
Protocolo de entrevista – Padres

1. ¿En qué grado (s), ¿tienes hijos?

2. ¿Por qué su niño que hace tan buenas notas en la escuela?

3. Piense acerca de las experiencias de aula que su hijo ha compartido con usted, ¿qué experiencias han hecho que sea bueno para el aprendizaje de su hijo?

4. ¿Cree usted que sus antecedentes culturales y / o la forma en que el niño aprende se utilizan cuando los profesores enseñan para ayudar a su niño a aprender?

Sonda: ¿Por qué piensas eso?

5. ¿Quién cree usted que es el principal responsable de su éxito en la escuela infantil?

Sonda: ¿Por qué?

6. ¿Cómo se comunica con el maestro de su hijo?

Sonda: correos electrónicos, teléfonos, notas, en persona

Sonda: Dime cómo y por qué se utiliza cada método de comunicación.

7. ¿Qué información ofrece a la maestra de su hijo que va a ayudar en el aprendizaje de su hijo?

Sonda: Hábleme de un momento en el que han ofrecido información a la maestra de su hijo y lo utilizó.

8. ¿Cómo es el maestro de su hijo implementar lección que se centra en el conocimiento de su niño, sus necesidades e intereses?

9. ¿Cómo es el maestro de su hijo que le asista para aprender los conceptos que son difíciles para él para aprender?

Sonda: ¿Me puede dar un ejemplo?

10. ¿Cree usted que los profesores de su hijo comprender y respetar a él / ella?

Sonda: ¿Por qué piensas eso?
Interview Protocol – Teachers

1. What grade(s) do you teach?

2. Why are your students making such good grades in school?

3. Think about your classroom interactions with your students, what aspects are most effective for your students’ learning?

4. Do you believe that your instructional practices address the learning needs/incorporates the cultural backgrounds of your students?
   Probe: Why do you think so?

5. Who do you believe is primarily responsible for your students’ school success?
   Probe: Why?

6. What are ways in which you communicate with parents?
   Probe: emails, phone, notes, in person?
   Probe: Tell me how and why you use each method of communication.

7. What kinds of information do your students or parents share with you that you have used to increase your students’ learning?

8. How do you plan and implement your teaching based on the knowledge, needs and interest of your students?

9. When your students are having difficulty learning, what do you do to help them learn?
   Probe: Can you give me an example?

10. Do your classroom practices reflect knowledge and respect of your students’ backgrounds? Probe: racial/ethnic, cultural, economic
   Probe: Would your students and their parents agree… Why do you think so?
## ATLAS.ti Co-occurring Codes

### access to teacher [8-0] [12]
- background knowledge [9-0] [1]
- belonging {4-0} [1]
- classroom interaction to promote learning {6-0} [2]
- communication {29-0} [2]
- efforts to increase learning {17-0} [2]
- individualizing {17-0} [6]
- interest {19-0} [1]
- making connections {5-0} [1]
- motivation {22-0} [2]
- ownership for learning {17-0} [1]
- parental level of support {17-0} [1]
- respect {19-0} [3]

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### activities that support learning [4-0] [5]
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- expectation {9-0} [1]
- individualizing {17-0} [1]
- satisfying curriculum expectations {7-0} [1]
- teaching/learning aids and supports {20-0} [2]

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- belonging {4-0} [1]
- building relationship {6-0} [2]
- communication {29-0} [4]
- cultural sensitivity/awareness {9-0} [3]
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- personality {6-0} [1]
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- teaching/learning aids and supports {20-0} [2]

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- background knowledge [9-0] [1]
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- respect {19-0} [2]

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- cultural sensitivity/awareness {9-0} [2]
- expectation {9-0} [2]
- individualizing {17-0} [2]
- interest {19-0} [1]
- modeling {2-0} [2]
- motivation {22-0} [1]
- respect {19-0} [1]
- school success {7-0} [1]
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- individualizing {17-0} [2]
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Appendix F

Spreadsheet of Codes as applied to Participants Responses

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