

EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS WHICH ENHANCE
THE LITERACY SKILLS OF FOURTH GRADE
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AS
IDENTIFIED BY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS

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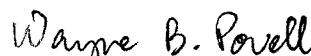
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Formal reading instruction began in the United States over 300 years ago (Aaron & Joshi, 1992). Cunningham and Allington (1994) explained that reading instruction began with an alphabetic approach in this country. Children learned the letters, how to spell, and how to sound out the letters of the words; this is called the phonics method.

One of the most commonly used methods to teach reading in the United States has been the basal reader approach. Basals include phonics instruction, sight words but more emphasis is placed on comprehension than phonics explained Cunningham and Allington (1994). Most basals have increasing levels of difficulty and there is emphasis on teacher - guided reading of short selections. Cunningham and Allington have identified phonics, the basal, literature, and language experience/writing as the four major methods of teaching reading throughout the years; each method has strengths and weaknesses.

The literature approach to literacy emphasizes students selecting real books that they want to read and teachers conference with the students providing them with assistance when needed. The language experience / writing approach is where students read their own writing and the writing of their classmates.

According to Cunningham and Allington (1994), the federal government in the 1960's spent hundred of thousands of dollars to identify the best method of teaching reading. They were unable to identify one single method because all of the methods should be utilized in the classrooms with the students; all

children do not learn, respond, and think in the same manner. Cunningham and Allington stressed that many children are at-risk for failure because their personalities are in conflict with the method of instruction utilized in the classroom. Students labeled as “at-risk” are described as not achieving reasonable literacy levels or who fall behind their peers in literacy development (Cunningham & Allington, 1994).

The children of the twenty - first century will face several challenges that will require them to use literacy in different forms. As the millennium approaches, teachers are learning new ways to teach reading and writing that will prepare their students for the future (Tompkins, 1997, p. 6). Joshi and Aaron (1992) explained changes that have occurred in this country in the teaching methods are related to cultural shifts. Reading instruction has changed in the past 25 years; four intertwined theories of learning, language, and literacy have caused the changes noted Tompkins (1997). According to Tompkins, constructivist, interactive, sociolinguistic, and reader response are the four learning theories.

As explained by Tompkins (1997), the constructivist theory describes teachers as engaging their students with experiences so that the students modify their schemata and construct their own knowledge. The interactive theory focuses on what readers do as they read. By using their schemata (prior knowledge) and the text, readers can construct meaning. The sociolinguists add a cultural dimension to how children learnt to read by noting that children use language for social purposes. Understanding the theories of learning, language, and literacy allow teachers to plan instructional activities that include a social component to enhance the students’ literacy development. Reader response considers how students create meaning that makes sense

based on the text and their own background knowledge. Teachers need this knowledge to do a better job of educating children.

Results of reports, studies, newspaper, and journal articles concerning serious problems in the educational system have prompted policy makers to become involved in the process of searching for ways to improve the American educational system (Dilworth, 1992). President Clinton, in his February 4, 1997, State of the Union Address, stressed that Americans must help all of our children learn to read. His speech indicated that he is concerned about the reading problems that exist and because of this concern he recently launched the America Reads Initiative. According to President Clinton, many students are not meeting the standards that will prepare them for the challenges of the present nor the future. President Clinton would like volunteers to form an army to serve as reading tutors throughout the United States.

There is a reading problem in the United States and President Clinton has a plan, a Call to Action for American Education; he has made education a priority. The Clinton Administration plans to support the development, by 1999, of a new national test in 4th grade reading. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1997), 40% of fourth graders can not read as they should to hold a job in tomorrow's job market. Educators have a great deal of work ahead of them, especially if they are to prepare all African American students for the national reading test.

According to Bryant and Jones (1993), the needs of African American students are not being met in America's public schools. Poor schooling has had negative effects on African American students, (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Comer and Poussaint (1992) stated that African American students have been consistently closed out of the educational mainstream of this country.

In January, 1996, Texas Governor George W. Bush announced his Reading Initiative for the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency). The Governor's goal is for all students to read on grade level by the end of grade three and continue to read on grade level throughout their schooling. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has also been working to assist teachers in their endeavors.

The federal and state governments are keenly aware of the necessity for all students to be successful in literacy. The President of the United States and the Governor of Texas realize how difficult it is to succeed in the work place and compete in a global economy if an adult does not have the proper literacy skills, reading on or above appropriate grade level. Today's society has very little room for those who cannot read or write. High-wage jobs for low-skilled workers are disappearing fast (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). A major task for today's educators is to educate all students, to become life-long readers; this will in turn assist all public school students in possessing the "American Dream". As America's population continues to change, America will have to examine and change with its diverse population.

The diversity of America's school age population is another factor that educators need to consider. Several states will have minority populations that are the majority (Banks, 1991; Bryant & Jones, 1993; Huber-Bowen, 1993; Jackson, 1994; Kuykendall, 1992). The African-American population of 1990 was more than 30 million and is increasing as noted by Billingsley (1992). The United States population will be 30% African American and Hispanic by the year 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). According to Villegas (1991), in all but 23 of the 25 largest urban school districts, minorities are already the

majority of the student enrollment. Schools must begin to develop solutions for the American Educational System, since the school population will be thoroughly multiethnic by the year 2000 and beyond (Dilworth, 1992).

Research on suspensions, expulsions, retention, and dropout rates indicate that many African American students are being excluded from mainstream America (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1991; Banks, 1994; Hill, 1989; and Kuykendall, 1992). There is a disproportionately high failure and dropout rate among African American students. In 1990, 13.2% of African American youths between the ages of 16 - 24 had dropped out of high school (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1992, p. 160). Many youth, who live in poverty are at a high risk of becoming school dropouts, experiencing academic failure, and engaging in antisocial behavior, such as joining a gang and becoming involved in criminal activities (Banks, 1994). Bryant and Jones described this problem as very serious, and they explained that if America continues on the course it is on now, by the year 2000 America we will be "facing a disabling societal crisis" (p. 7).

Kuykendall (1992) pointed out that many of our schools are not serving their African American students well compared to Caucasian students; standardized test scores reflect these disparities. Hill (1989) and Obiakor (1992) also indicated there is great disparity between minority and non-minority students' test scores. Mercer (1977) noted that standardized tests assume homogeneity often and the content of the test is specific to the Anglo culture.

Smitherman (1977) considered standardized tests to demonstrate cultural and linguistic biases and these tests completely disregard the experience and culture of minority and poor students. Smitherman believed

that these tests tend to place students in the lower track in the school and society because students don't experience success on the tests. Smitherman provided an example in her book. The word 'cobbler' is one of the test words on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test administered to elementary school children. Many minority and poor children do not know what a 'cobbler' is; a cobbler is a person who makes and repairs shoes. Since each item on the Peabody Test has an age weighting of approximately three months, biased items could result in a negative assessment of the vocabulary development of many African American students (Taylor & Lee, 1987).

Kuykendall (1992) believed that when African American students do not succeed academically, they seek the "low" road of life; many of these African Americans turn to criminal activities because they lack the skills and motivation for legitimate prosperity. Bryant and Jones (1993) believed that the number of these students who fail to achieve even minimal literacy will serve only to expand the underclass. If African American students aren't educated so that they can get "good jobs", they will continue to become members of the poor class of people. The expansion of the underclass by the minority population is already a serious problem. The economy, in the past, could absorb undereducated people, but since the 1960s the "good jobs" require a higher level of education (Comer and Poussaint, 1992).

Sirimarco (1991) explained the importance of literacy by noting that 50% of people on welfare are illiterate because it is difficult for them to find jobs to support themselves. Sirimarco also noted that nearly 45% of African American adults are functionally illiterate; this means they are unable to read above a third or fourth grade level. She believed that this problem of illiteracy among African Americans helps to build prejudice and negative stereotypes in

the United States.

Several problems are created when people are not functionally literate. Sirimarco (1991) cited low paying jobs, being unable to read the voting ballot, and being unable to voice opinions about government affairs. Bryant and Jones (1993) cautioned that African Americans killing other young African Americans is the major cause of death in this nation among young African Americans. According to Sirimarco, half of all inmates are illiterate; this suggests a definite connection between illiteracy and crime. The 1996 Bureau of the Census noted that there were 1,781,700 African American adults on probation, in jail, or prison, or on parole; this was based on the years 1980 - 1993.

Allington (1994) explained that schools are being challenged to develop advanced literacy proficiencies in all students. To develop these advanced literacy proficiencies in African American students, research should be conducted to identify the best enhancers (methods) of literacy. Sirimarco (1991) believed that to eliminate adult illiteracy, important steps must be taken in the elementary and high schools. Students must not leave school without knowing how to read.

Sirimarco also noted that corporations spend nearly \$10 billion each year on educational classes for the illiterate. This cost could be avoided if the students were properly educated in the elementary schools. Kozol (1991) has estimated that the cost of illiteracy is approximately 20 billion annually for prisons, welfare, and industrial and military accidents. The American Library Association claims that \$224 billion is spent annually in welfare payments, remedial education, crime, job incompetence, and lost taxes because of functionally illiterate adults.

Kozol (1991) also examined the funding for schools and found some discrepancies. Kozol described how the basic formula for education finance does not satisfy the needs of the poorest districts. He explained that districts collect the initial funds needed for the operations of the public schools by taxing the value of the homes and businesses within a given district. Kozol continued to explain that this tax is often enough in the wealthiest districts, but because of poverty in some districts the revenues derived are inadequate to operate a school district.

School finance specialists claimed that the various attempts to equally fund districts have almost all failed (Kozol, 1991). Kozol described a two - tiered educational system; one system serves the suburbs and one serves the urban and rural areas. The children, mostly minorities, in the urban areas with a large number of at-risk children receive 50% less funding per child. Ironically, the schools with fewer at - risk children will receive more funding than the schools with many (Cunningham & Allington, 1994).

Kozol (1991) noted a particular case in San Antonio, Texas where parents filed a class - action suit in 1968. This very poor district was 96% non - white. State assistance to educate each child was \$231. Meanwhile the richest section, a predominantly white district, was spending \$543 to educate each child. The minority parents believed this to be unconstitutional. These types of funding inequities are taking place all over the United States, in states such as California, New York, and Chicago. When these types of discrepancies exist among schools it confirms the reality of separate and unequal public schools (Kozol).

Kozol (1991) returned to Texas in 1989 and discovered that things had not changed much since 1968; the poor children continued to attend separate

and unequal schools. Texas legislators enacted a new equalizing formula but Kozol believed its implementation to be a slow process, while the poor children wait for an equal chance at a quality education.

Dorothy S. Strickland (1994) wrote an article titled "Educating African American Learners at Risk: Finding a Better Way". In her article she explained that many of the at risk students are African American and live in poverty. Poverty is one of the factors that determines if a child is at risk for academic failure (Cunningham & Allington, 1994). According to Kunjufu (1991), 33% of African Americans live below the poverty level.

Strickland (1994) continued to explain in her article that education cannot solve all the African American students' problems, but education is a weapon against poverty and crime. Strickland stressed the importance of effective strategies and methods in the teaching of at risk students such as initiating family programs, instruction in phonics, cooperative group activities, peer teaching methods to promote active learning, direct instruction, teacher modeling, and multicultural literature. Obiakor (1993) also explained that teaching methods need to be revisited and better methods identified to ameliorate the problems of African American students.

Jackson (1994) and Cummins (1986) noted that schools continue to inadequately educate a large number of the United States student population. In-service on teaching minority students has not focused on specific methods, explained Jackson. He believed teachers must enhance their professional competencies in order to meet the needs of the minority population.

A person may reach adulthood without becoming functionally literate for various reasons, such as special circumstances at home, learning problems, and an inadequate school system, but apparently the school systems aren't

working as well as they should. Routman (1988) explained that many minority students are failing to learn to read successfully with traditional methods such as a schedule that includes a dozen different subjects being allocated time during the day; therefore, instruction is in small, isolated segments, choppy and fragmented (Cunningham & Allington, 1994). This is contrary to our understanding of how children learn to read. Children learn, according to Cunningham and Allington, when they associate the material with other things and events. Children need to make connections; therefore, schedules must allow for integrated learning. Students need a larger block of uninterrupted time to concentrate on literacy. Integration across subject areas saves time, makes the skills more relevant, and provides opportunities for students to apply the skills being learned (Cunningham and Allington, 1994).

Another traditional method that must be changed is how teachers and students work with one another (Cunningham and Allington, 1994). Traditionally the teacher teaches the whole class all the time. Instruction should not treat all students as the same. A cooperative learning method is needed for students to grow more literate, especially those considered as at risk.

According to Sirimarco (1991), many politicians and citizens all over the country have questioned the effectiveness of education in America; Sirimarco also believed some teachers who teach African American students may be ineffective. For various reasons, many African American students are completing high school unable to read or they are dropping out before graduation because of their inability to read (Sirimarco, 1991). She noted that the entire educational system must be examined. Considering the past history of the poor academic performance of African American students, someone

might ask, where is the literature to address their specific educational needs (Ladson-Billings, 1994)? Research investigating effective literacy methods is needed to assist teachers in doing a better job of educating African American students.

Statement of the Problem

Many African American students do not have and are not receiving the basic literacy foundations for ongoing education and success in their adult lives.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to identify effective teaching methods, as identified by elementary school teachers which enhance the literacy of African American fourth grade students. Based on research conducted and or reported by Bryant & Jones, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Hill, 1989; Kuykendall, 1992; Wyman, 1993; and Strickland, 1994, the following research question will be investigated to guide this study: What are the effective teaching methods, as identified by elementary school teachers, which enhance the literacy of African American students in fourth grade? The term effective in this study is defined as the power or capacity to achieve the desired results.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed with those involved with the education of African American students in mind. There is a need for research to be conducted and special publications to be published for teachers who are unsure how best to meet the literacy needs of African American students.

Several books (Bryant & Jones, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Hill, 1989; Kuykendall, 1992; Wyman, 1993) and articles (Jackson, 1994; Strickland, 1994) have been written to address educating African American students, but none of these books or articles specifically address literacy methods for fourth grade African American students.

There is a gap between African American and Caucasian students tested in grades four, eight, and twelve based on the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), according to the Digest of Education Statistics 1995 (Snyder, Hoffman, Riley, Robinson & Griffith). Chall and Snow (1982) noted that the decline of growth in literacy across the country begins at the fourth grade, and this decline is more prominent among low socio-economic populations. The problem for the poor reader becomes even more significant after fourth grade when the focus of instruction is on teaching to gain information.

Fourth grade has been chosen by the government as a point to nationally assess students in reading. A state's educational progress in reading will be measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). The significance and importance of this study is to identify effective methods or best practices that will enhance the literacy of African American students. It is hoped that educators will put into practice what will be gleaned from this research to assist African American students into becoming successful life-long readers.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity and consistency, the following terms and definitions are provided:

*African American - People who have ancestors from sub-Saharan Africa; black Americans (Webster New World College Dictionary, 1997).

*American Educational System - The process of training and developing the knowledge, skill, and mind through formal schooling at an institution of learning in the United States (Webster).

*Effective - Producing or designed to produce the desired results (Webster)
Methods are identified as effective when the African Americans students experience success as a result of the teachers utilizing these methods.

*Literacy - Literacy for this study is a meaning making and meaning - using process. The ability to read (Webster).

*Methods - The system of principles, practices, process, and procedures utilized by teachers when applied to literacy. A way of doing anything (Webster).

Assumption

There are effective teaching methods which when utilized by educators will enhance the literacy of African American fourth grade students. Teachers can identify methods for addressing the educational needs of culturally diverse students.

Limitations

There are two basic limitations involved in this study. First, the educators interviewed in this study were from one area of one particular state. Secondly, the effectiveness of the methods will be based upon the educators' beliefs about their own effectiveness.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify effective teaching methods, as identified by elementary school teachers, which enhance the literacy of African American fourth grade students.

African Americans acquisition of basic literacy skills will serve as the foundation for ongoing education and success in their adult lives; therefore, they should be taught to read well. Literacy will serve as a cornerstone throughout their life. Through education, African American students should gain knowledge and strategies to enable them to function productively within their culture, the dominate culture, and across other ethnic cultures. These methods need to be identified to assist teachers in their endeavors to successfully educate their African American students.

Through successful acquisition of literacy, many African American students will be able to overcome the economic and educational barriers that limited their parents' and grandparents' success in school (Hill, 1989). It is necessary for educators to develop and implement methods to assist African American students in enhancing their literacy acquisition. It is incumbent upon teachers to develop and implement methods in working with these students

(Dilworth, 1992). Educators must assess means for providing delivery systems or student - specific pedagogy (Dilworth) that will best improve the learning of African American students.

Chapter Two discusses research and other literature relevant to the literacy enhancement of African American fourth grade students. Chapter Three will continue to explain the research method that was used in this study. Also included in this chapter is a description of the research site, participants, research design and procedure, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results of the study, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the analysis, implications for educators, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise

Maya Angelou

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the literature will first address the fact that African Americans value education, how many African American students are having difficulty experiencing success in the American Educational System, and African American dialect. This chapter will examine various authors' suggestions (best practices) on educating African American students such as effective teachers - culturally relevant pedagogy; teacher attitude; and parent and community involvement. Chapter Two will also include an explanation of the methods researchers have identified as effective with the enhancement of literacy for African American students such as cooperative learning, phonics, multicultural education, and daily independent reading. Researchers believe that these methods will assist African American students in attaining literacy success. Naturalistic inquiry as qualitative research method and focus group interviews will be discussed in this chapter.

African American Parents Value Education

African American children were considered one of the most mistreated and neglected groups of people in American society, as noted by Comer and

Poussaint (1992). During slavery, these students were released from school to pick cotton and other crops during harvest season; education was not that important to the labor needs of the plantation bosses (Comer and Poussaint). Enslaved African Americans were forbidden to learn to read, but despite severe punishment, they valued literacy and many learned to read. Despite the difficulties of slavery, 5 % of the 400,000 newly freed African Americans could read and write explained Billingsley, (1992).

The Supreme Court's Brown versus Board of Education (1954) decision made equal access to public education the law of the land. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s improved the educational opportunities of African American students, but the political climate of the 1980s caused conditions to worsen (Comer and Poussaint, 1992). Comer and Poussaint believed that parents and students, through persistent determination, have managed to survive the battle of education even though schools have deliberately educated minority students to assume menial roles in society.

Billingsley (1992) noted that education is the opportunity through which African American families find their position in life. These families endured hardship and danger to ensure that the Supreme Court decision to outlaw school segregation remained in tact. Billingsley and Foster (1997) explained that African Americans have always had a deep-rooted commitment to attaining an education. Education has been a major focus for these families and has helped to shape their lives. Many studies have revealed that low-income African American parents value education more than parents from any other low-income group (Comer and Poussiant, 1992).

Billingsley (1992) stressed that education has played a preeminent part among all sources of survival for the African American family. He continued to

note that they have always placed extraordinary value on education.

Education, for African Americans, is necessary in order to have an equitable and achieving American society (Billingsley). Comer and Poussaint (1992) acknowledged that the basic problem that parents face is to assist their children in developing in a way that will prepare them to function well as individuals, family members, and citizens.

Parents and community leaders have always demanded that the educational needs of the students be met. The love of learning has been a deeply ingrained cultural value among African Americans. Parents desire an education for their children that would help their children maintain a positive identification with their own culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Billingsley (1992) explained that early literacy is one of the keys to success. Sirimarco (1991) noted that many view literacy as a way of empowering independence and self-reliance in the individual. If students are to take advantage of the opportunities available in the modern world they must be well educated, explains Comer and Poussaint, (1992). Banks (1991) stressed that African American adults are deeply troubled about the erosion of their children's educational status because they believe that education is a primary means to support upward mobility. The public has become informed that students are not learning as much as they should and they have become concerned, noted Dilworth, (1992).

Many African American Students are not Experiencing Success in Schools

Hill (1989) emphasized that a large percentage of African American students experience serious difficulty in mastering the traditional reading curriculum that is offered to them. This problem has been identified as a national problem (Bryant and Jones, 1993) because the students continue to

fall behind in their reading ability. Kozol (1991), in his book, documented the under education of these students with depressing clarity. The risk of educational failure for these students remains high. According to Obiakor (1992), this is evident when only 15% of urban high school graduates read at less than the sixth grade level.

Allington and McGill-Franzen (1991) pointed out that many students are repeating grades because they are "behind" in reading. In many situations ability tracking, grouping students according to their ability, often separates students according to their race and African Americans are often placed in the lowest track (Comer and Poussaint, 1992).

According to Brozo (1995), Rockford, Illinois schools were recently found guilty in federal court of systematically providing inferior education to minority students by placing them in lower track classrooms. Brozo noted that the problem of tracking minority students continues to create barriers that restrict the academic and life options of African American students. Brozo also explained that it has been proven that labeling a student, which ability tracking does, can affect the quality and levels of a student's work. Students view this as negative when they see African American students tracked into the lowest-level classes, explained Ladson-Billings (1994).

According to Dilworth (1992), African American students are often disproportionately represented in the lower-track programs. Obiakor (1992) also noted that African American students are over-represented in special education programs. The preponderance of these students in low-ability groups and Caucasian students in high-ability groups reinforces beliefs and stereotypes among adults and children that African Americans are intellectually inferior to whites (Irvine, 1989). The enrollment rate in 1972 for

Caucasians in academic high school programs was 49% compared to 26.8% for African Americans (Baratz, 1986). Baratz noted some improvement in 1980 when 41.8 % of Caucasians were taking academic track courses compared to 32.3% for African American students.

Kuykendall (1992) and Villegas (1991) expressed their concern against tracking and the negative effect it has on students. A problem, as identified by Obiakor (1993), is that poverty and the culture of African American students are seen as deficits and because of this students are misidentified, miss assessed, misplaced and misinstructed.

Irvine (1989) explained that resegregation is when African American students are intentionally or inadvertently assigned to lower tracks. He also noted that there is overwhelming research that tracking students has no educational benefit because instruction tends to be inferior and ineffective; the lower track teachers are often inexperienced, incompetent, or both. Furthermore, students who do not resemble or act like the majority race teacher are in danger of being placed in the lowest track.

Hill (1989) claimed that when African American students are not successful in school, this jeopardizes the chances of the United States to remain a powerful and competitive country. Allen and Mason (1989) believed that there is anxiety in today's information age that the nation does not possess the literacy capacity to meet the demands of a highly competitive post industrial economy. Failure to educate all students means the acceptance of second-tier status in the world economically, politically, and morally explained Dilworth, (1992). Students who know how to utilize important methods to participate in the construction of knowledge will help the nation to actualize its democratic ideals (Anderson et al., 1995; Banks, 1995; Chideya, 1995; Jackson, 1994;

and Huber-Bowen, 1993).

Kuykendall (1992) described some educators as exemplary because they are successfully educating African American students and these educators are committed, but many are frustrated and overwhelmed because they do not feel their African American students are reaching their full academic potential. These educators are seeking to add to their repertoire of methods; this will assist in enhancing the students' literacy; therefore, helping to shape America's future. Nieto (1992) explained that educators are concerned as to why so many of their African American students are failing. Educators are genuinely interested in exploring ways to meet the educational needs of all their students.

Traditionally, Bryant and Jones (1993) explained that the same organizational structure continues to be used in all schools, with the goal of educating all students. Even though research into learning indicates that not all students learn best in the same ways (Bryant & Jones; and Dilworth, 1992). Collins (1992) believed educators have knowingly become mired in a system that fails more students than it helps. Au (1995) claimed that some researchers, who share the radical view, believed that diverse students are neglected in school in order to keep them in their inferior status. Irvine (1989) believed that racism is a major contributing factor to African American students underachievement. He also noted that some people believe that these students fail because of their inferior intelligence. It is this belief by some teachers that creates a problem for these students in the classroom.

Educators are successful in helping their students develop their literacy when they mold literacy instruction to the needs of their students (Turner and Paris, 1995). According to Allington (1994) and Villegas (1991), literacy

instruction should be adapted and improved to fit the needs of the students in the classroom. Strickland (1994) acknowledged that educators and administrators are reexamining their literacy programs as the definition of what it means to be literate in society becomes more demanding and more complex

African American Dialect

In 1619, slavery in Colonial America began when a Dutch vessel landed in Jamestown loaded with a cargo of twenty Africans or “new Negroes” as they are sometimes called (Smitherman, 1977). As Smitherman explained, African slaves, in their attempt to communicate with their white masters, developed their own language with substitutions of English for West African words. She also acknowledged that African American dialect is a form of English reflecting the linguistic - culture of African heritage. Scales and Brown (1981) noted that there is not a large difference between Black dialect spoken by African Americans and Standard English.

When utilizing African American English (Black Semantics), according to Smitherman (1977), African Americans are succinctly stating the same thing that in Standard English would have taken ten times as many words. She continued to explain that African American English is a language mixture that has been adapted to the conditions of slavery and discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with African American culture. Cullinan (1974) considered African American English to be systematic and not a series of random deviations from standard English. A speaker who is fluent in more than one dialect is considered to be bidialectal (Cullinan, 1974). Eighty to 90% of African Americans utilized African American idiom, according to Smitherman.

Smitherman (1977) suggested that because of the language spoken by

the African American students in public schools, they are considered as inferior to the students who speak standard English. Teachers' attitudes tend to be negative toward the African American communicative style such as the example she provided in her book of a teacher who constantly interrupted an excited student who was attempting to explain the exhibit she and her mother attended. Because the teacher constantly interrupted the student with the "correct words", the student became very confused and walked away. The teacher understood the dialect of the student but believed she had to translate for the student. Delpit (1995) found during classroom observations that many teachers are more likely to correct dialect related mistakes than non dialect mistakes.

Smitherman (1977) pointed out that in some classrooms many African American students are being drilled on speech that conforms to Caucasians and these students are not receiving instruction in the acquisition of real knowledge which gives people power. She considered this as linguistic miseducation. She continued to note that speaking Caucasian English is not a guarantee to economic advancement. The language of African Americans, the poor, and other powerless groups is used to deny these people access to full participation in the society because Caucasian America insists upon standard English as the price of admission into its economic and social mainstream, while the public schools continue to perpetuate myths and inaccuracies about language (Smitherman).

Because Black students' spoken language does not match Standard English, successful black students must often translate to Standard English before they write or speak. Teachers of these students must be, in a sense, bilingual. They should understand Black English so that they can understand and communicate with their students. In addition, teachers must help black students translate Black English into

Standard English, and they must discover how to salvage otherwise talented Black students who fail because they cannot master Standard English (Dilworth, 1992, p. 85).

Scales and Brown (1981) recommended that teachers - in - training develop a better understanding of varieties within the English language. Scales and Brown believed that this type of training will also assist teachers to stop stigmatizing particular English dialect. Smitherman (1977) provided some recommendations for the classroom teacher in taking advantage of African American dialect. She suggested that students be allowed to work together and by using their own language, they learn from each other. She also suggested that teachers use rhymes and rhyming patterns (coordinating sound and learning activities) which are an integral part of the African American communicative style. She encouraged teachers to put certain concepts or principles that they want students to remember in rhyme. Cullinan (1974) supported Smitherman that modifications in literacy instruction for African American English speakers are needed. As a basis for instructional methods, Cullinan recommended a greater degree of correspondence between familiar oral language and written language; she believed this may facilitate literacy achievement. Standards of performance and criteria of excellence for the English language must be set for all students (Scales and Brown, 1981, p. 257). African American students should be able to maintain their dialect, but also be taught to read and speak standard English (Cullinan).

Best Methods to Educate African American Students

Several researchers (Hill, 1989; Kuykendall, 1992; Dilworth, 1992; Bryant and Jones, 1993; Wyman, 1993, Ladson-Billings, 1994, and several

others) have identified best practices that can assist in educating African American students. A discussion of each suggestion will follow.

Effective Teachers - Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

According to Hill (1989), teachers increasingly find themselves in multicultural/diverse classrooms yet they have not been trained to be effective multicultural ethnically diverse teachers. Educators in this country are overwhelmingly white females from the middle class (Kuykendall, 1992).

According to the 1990 Census, only 8% of all teachers were African American.

Obiakor (1993) indicated that 16.2% of the students in public schools are African Americans, but only 6.2% of the teachers are African Americans; this indicates a decrease of African American teachers from 1990 to 1993. Foster (1997) explained that many programs are being developed to recruit more African American teachers into the profession, but the predictions for increasing the number were not very promising.

Underqualified teachers are disproportionately found in predominantly African American, Hispanic, and Native American schools and classrooms (Dilworth, 1992). Many times the blame is placed on the student when it is really the teacher's inability to teach the student and not the student's inability to learn. Darling - Hammond (1996, p. 7) shared that teacher education in the United States has been thin and uneven in quality:

In addition to the tradition of emergency certification that continues in more than 40 states, some newly launched alternative certification programs provide only a few weeks of training for entering teachers, skilled in such fundamentals as learning theory, child development development, and subject matter pedagogy and placing recruits in classrooms without previous supervised experience. Each year about 20,000 individuals enter teaching without a license, while another 30,000 enter with substandard credentials.

Dilworth (1992) explained that there are specialized skills that teachers

need to be most effective with African American students. Those skills will be identified and explained throughout this chapter. It should be expected that teachers of these students will attend education courses to strengthen their knowledge of the culture and history of African Americans (Obiakor, 1993 & Wyman, 1993). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) adopted a standard in 1977 requiring teacher education programs to provide training in multicultural education (Banks, 1991) because, according to Obiakor (1993), many teachers are unaware of the values, culture and history of African American students.

Johnson and Simons (1972) provided examples of some of the cultural differences between African Americans and Caucasians. African American children are not expected to carry on a conversation with adults as their equal. A teacher from the dominant culture would expect that conversational skill from the African American student, but it is outside of their life - style. The teacher then judges the student as dull because the teacher does not understand the student's culture.

Many African American students experience a matriarchal cultural pattern where the family consists of the mother, grandmother, and children. A child from this family would have difficulty identifying with the nuclear Caucasian family of the basal reader. Irvine (1989) stressed that when teachers and African American students are culturally compatible, communication will be enhanced and instruction is more effective.

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) acknowledged that no one teaching method will engage all learners at all times, but that it is important to relate the lesson content to the students' own backgrounds (prior knowledge). These two researchers offer an intrinsic motivational framework for culturally

responsive teaching based on theories of intrinsic motivation. The framework identifies four conditions that the teacher and students must develop and enhance continuously. They are: (1) Establishing inclusion; (2) developing attitude; (3) enhancing meaning; and (4) engendering competence (p.19). These conditions are considered critical when developing motivation because they are considered sensitive to the differences in cultures (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg).

Establishing inclusion involves creating a learning atmosphere where students and teachers feel respected by and connected to each other. Developing attitude involves creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience. Enhancing meaning involves the creation of challenging and thoughtful learning experiences. This includes the student's perspectives and values. Engendering competence involves the creation of understanding that students are effective in learning something they value.

There must be a major effort to develop a knowledge base for education in general and teacher education in particular in regards to diversity. This must be done immediately (Dilworth, 1992). She explained that attention must be paid to "culturally relevant pedagogy". Culturally relevant pedagogy involves students in the knowledge - construction process; they must have a sense of ownership of their knowledge, empowering and liberating (Ladson - Billings, 1994). Ladson - Billings explained that this pedagogy uses the students' culture to transcend the negative effects of the dominate culture. She also noted that culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes a variety of teaching methods, such as phonics, cooperative learning, and independent reading to assist all students in developing their literacy abilities without being ridiculed or embarrassed and it provides a link between classroom experiences and the

students' everyday lives.

Ladson - Billings (1994) conducted a study of successful teachers of African American students. She conducted ethnographic interviews with eight teachers. First, parents and principals identified the eight teachers they believed demonstrated effectiveness with these students. Then, Ladson - Billings conducted her study with five African Americans and three white teachers to examine effective teaching methods through teacher interviews and classroom observations. She used their comments and classroom observations to explain their culturally relevant practices. She identified some of the best practices of culturally relevant pedagogy such as cooperative learning, multicultural materials, phonics, and teachers who care about their students and their culture. She described these practices in detail in her book; her findings will be shared throughout this paper.

Person, Amos, and Jenkins (1995) conducted a study assessing a series of four institutes at Mississippi State University on instructional methods for culturally diverse students. The institute was developed because of concerns about the quality of education available to African American students. The study surveyed the 73 educators who had participated in the Strategies for Instructing Culturally Diverse Students (SICDS) Institute over the summers of 1989 through 1992. Thirty nine or 54% returned surveys were determined to be usable.

This study found that teachers are important and play a vital role in improving the quality of life for African American students. They also noted that teachers must implement behaviors that are appropriate for positive learning opportunities to occur. Person et. al. believed that intensive staff development programs are needed for teachers during the summer months. Staff

development is needed on diversity concerning the contributions of minorities and multicultural education. Staff development is needed on various literacy strategies such as metacognitive and reciprocal teaching.

Many of the surveyed educators made an effort to involve the parents; the parents are included on various committees and contacted on a regular basis. They also found during the study that the participants appreciated, valued the diverse students in their classrooms. The teachers were aware of cultural differences that exist in their classrooms. The participants also used multicultural education principles in their instructional activities.

Researchers should begin and continue to document effective methods that will enhance the literacy of African American students; this documentation will be useful in identifying responsive pedagogy (Dilworth, 1992).

Instructional methods will allow students to focus on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Villegas (1991) stressed that research indicates that unless teachers learn to integrate the cultural patterns of minority communities into their teaching, these students will continue to fail. It is noted that good teachers are the most important element in successful learning (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Darling - Hammond (1996) argued that major changes in the productivity of American schools depend on the ability to develop and sustain a highly prepared teaching force for all, not just some of our children.

Teacher Attitude

Hopson and Hopson (1990) noted, teachers of African American students should examine their own attitudes about race. Collins (1992) and Ladson - Billings (1994) believed teachers' attitude toward a certain race of people alters the way the teachers treat those students. Teachers should

assess their own feelings concerning students of various races, acknowledged Kuykendall (1992). If a teacher believes a student will fail, that student will most likely fail. Wyman (1993) and Kuykendall (1992) noted that a student's attitude toward school, confidence and behavior are influenced by the teacher's attitude and expectation. The teacher's expectations are essential in encouraging a student's pursuit of knowledge. Positive expectations should be shared with the student on a daily basis. According to Hill (1989) and Bryant and Jones (1993), research offered that positive praise from the teacher will result in the student's positive self-concept, therefore; the student will learn more efficiently. The students should feel a sense of caring and acceptance from the teacher and not the feeling the teacher is just going through the motions or pretending (Kuykendall, 1992). Kuykendall explained that a student's self-image will not be enhanced if a teacher provides an academic experience that is defeating and discouraging. Teachers must abandon the negative beliefs about African American students that permeates educational thinking (Villegas, 1991). Teachers can enhance the student's self-image by building on the positive strengths of the students.

Parent and Community Involvement

Hopson and Hopson (1990) and Kuykendall (1992) stressed that parental involvement is very important to the achievement of students. When parents were not involved, according to a recent study by the United States Department of Education (1986), fourth grade average reading scores were 46 points below the national average, when parents were involved scores were 28 points above the national average (U.S. Department of Education, 1986). When parents are involved in their children's education, they will read with their children and attend various school functions. There is a great need for a

higher level of parental involvement (Collins, 1992). Hopson and Hopson believed parents are the most influential people for their children to be successful in school. Comer and Poussaint (1992) explained that when parents are involved in their children's education, this lets the children know that the parents value education. Strickland (1994) explained that educators should view parents as contributors to their child's total education. Educators must realize that they need the parents to successfully educate the children.

The bond between parents and teachers should be strengthened (Kuykendall, 1992). Kuykendall also stressed that schools can assist parents, through parent education classes, to become advocates for school success. It is the school's responsibility to positively encourage parents by showing that they are needed. Educators need to develop strategies to get and keep parents involved. Kuykendall (pp. 98 - 108) provided several suggestions of what educators can do to encourage the involvement of African American parents. Kuykendall shared a list (p. 97) of areas educators must involve these parents; this type of extensive involvement would enhance student achievement.

- * classroom tutors, helpers and field trip volunteers.
- * members of a local school decision making team.
- * members of the school district's salary committee.
- * members of the school district's curriculum development committee.
- * members of the district's disciplinary committee.
- * members of the principal selection committee.
- * members of the school or district budget committee.
- * members of a school design committee.
- * participants in teacher contact negotiations.

Schools could also provide a telephone homework hot line to assist parents with their children's homework (Bryant & Jones, 1993). A team of five students could be available weekly to help others over the phone do their

homework. This hot line would indicate to the parents that the educators want to help their children as much as possible. Poor families can not afford to hire tutors and many parents are unable to help their children with their homework explained Bryant and Jones.

A partnership between schools and the community can improve school effectiveness (Kuykendall, 1992). Kuykendall offered the suggestion of encouraging private businesses to adopt a school. She also suggested that schools form a partnership with the powerful African American churches; this relationship would assist in the development of the student's mind. These churches adopt a school and provide school supplies. The members also serve as mentors to the students.

Effective Literacy Methods as Identified by Researchers

To reach African American students, educators must expand their repertoire of instructional methods to encompass the various approaches these students use to learn (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Delpit, 1995; and Kuykendall, 1992). Many of the methods needed by these students are derived from their African heritage, explains Kuykendall (1992). These flexible methods should value, respect the beliefs, reflect, and accommodate African American students. This is the reason Delpit (1995) stressed that educators must move from some of their monocultural instructional methodologies, if they are to successfully educate all the students.

Delpit (1987) cautioned that some African American students who do not grow up within the dominant culture are disadvantaged because certain knowledge, strategies, and methods that are expected by teachers are not

made explicit in their classrooms. Explicit instruction is a necessity for students of different cultures. Explicit instruction such as modeling where the teacher demonstrates to the students how to perform an unfamiliar literacy strategy. This helps students to build their own understanding of a particular literacy strategy.

There is a growing body of research that suggest better, meaningful, and more comprehensive methods to enhance the literacy of African American students (Strickland, 1994). According to Huber-Bowen (1993), as educators become more culturally responsible, they possess a multitude of methods and whether students make rapid or slow progress in becoming skilled readers depends upon the methods the educators utilize. Some authors and researchers (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Delpit, 1995; Hill, 1989; Jackson, 1994; Kuykendall, 1992; Strickland, 1994; and Wyman, 1993) have identified the cooperative learning method, phonics, Multicultural education, and independent reading methods as enhancers of literacy for African American students. The authors and researchers findings will be shared throughout the paper.

Cooperative Learning

During cooperative learning, groups of students work together to achieve a learning goal (Hopson & Hopson, 1990). Wyman (1993) explained that cooperative learning is when students work together toward educational objectives in academically and racially heterogeneous groups. Formal cooperative learning groups, informal cooperative learning groups, and cooperative base groups are the three types of cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1988). Formal cooperative groups may last for several minutes to several class sessions to complete a specific task or assignment

such as reading and comprehending a story, chapter, or a book (Johnson et al.).

Informal cooperative learning groups are temporary that last for only one discussion or one class period. These types of groups are especially useful during a lecture or direct teaching. The groups are effective in getting students actively involved in processing what they are learning. Base groups are long term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups. The main responsibility of members is to provide each other with the support, encouragement, and assistance they need to make academic progress. Cooperative learning should be used when there is a need for students to learn more, like school, like each other better, and learn more effective social skills (Johnson et al., 1988).

Research on cooperative learning practices reveals that students achieve more when working in groups rather than working individually or in competitive situations explained Dilworth (1992) and Kuykendall (1992). Each of the teachers who participated in Ladson - Billings (1994) study used some type of cooperative learning technique in their classrooms. The teachers participating in the study encouraged their students to work within a collective study. According to Irvine (1989), there is significant evidence in the literature that African American students achieve better when they work together, (cooperative learning method) rather than alone.

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), a form of cooperative learning, involves a series of activities for grades 2 - 8; these activities were derived from research on reading comprehension and writing strategies (Slavin & Fashola, 1998). Four students are grouped heterogeneously in learning teams. The teacher introduces a story and the

students work together on a prescribed series of activities relating to the story such as partner reading and writing activities.

Students Teams - Achievement Divisions (STAD) and Teams - Games - Tournament (TGT) are two related cooperative learning programs developed at John Hopkins University. The teacher, through direct instruction, provides the lesson content. The four students, heterogeneously grouped, work together to help each other master the content. The students take brief quizzes without each others help. When utilizing Teams - Games - Tournament, students play academic games to gain points for their team. Group goals are emphasized where each team member must independently perform well for the team to be successful; because of this, team members are motivated to do a good job of teaching and assessing each other. Both programs, STAD and TGT, have been evaluated in comparison to control groups mostly in schools serving African American and / or Latino students. There was a median effect size of +.32 for STAD across 26 studies of at least four weeks duration; the median effect size was +.38 in seven studies of TGT (Slavin, 1995).

As the competitive global economy increases in complexity the skills of cooperative learning and group problem solving may well become increasingly important for individual, corporate, and national success. Research on effective instructional methods utilized with this student population, such as cooperative learning and collaborative teaching, should be encouraged noted Dilworth (1992).

Phonics

Phonics is a method of teaching reading where students utilize the letter-sound relationships to assist them in making sense of words (Routman, 1991). Phonics, as described by Weaver (1994), is the teaching of letter -

sound relationship and patterns. Strickland (1994) stressed that sound / symbol relationships (phonics) should be taught during the reading of interesting, predictable texts and during writing. Adams (1990) described phonics instruction as a teacher working with a group of students to initiate them directly into written language by revealing its code.

Learning phonics helps students to understand the relationship between letters and sounds and to “break the code” that links the words they hear with the words they see in print (U.S. Department of Education, 1986). Marva Collins (1992) who has experienced great success with African American students places great emphasis on phonics as part of her teaching approach. McCormick (1995) explained that research demonstrates that one of the differences between good and poor readers is that poor readers lack phonemic awareness.

Strickland confirmed that phonics is one of several enablers to success in literacy. A basic skills pedagogical approach emphasizes phonics as a literacy enhancement method noted Ladson - Billings (1994). One of the teachers participating in Ladson - Billings’ study has experienced success with fourth grade African American students, utilizing the phonics method. This teacher stresses that the students utilize phonics throughout their literacy endeavors.

Delpit (1988) described an example of explicit instruction equated with direct instruction. Distar is a phonics reading program that is taught through the direct instruction of phonics generalizations and blending. The teacher utilizes continuous questioning, hand claps, and other gestures, and by eliciting choral responses and including an award system. Distar taught new information to students who had not already acquired it at home, according to

Delpit. Delpit believed that all children can learn through this type of explicit instruction. Researchers continue to debate on the phonics issues.

The best approaches to teach reading continue to be argued throughout the United States. For decades there have been discussions on the teaching of phonics. How to teach phonics, how much phonics to teach and when and to whom to teach phonics continues to be debated today.

Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, and Duffy-Hester (1998) surveyed administrators and teachers about elementary reading and language arts instruction. Surveys were distributed to 3,199 pre - kindergarten through grade 5 United States public school teachers. Teachers were randomly selected from a national listing of 907, 744 teachers and 1, 207 of the returned surveys were usable. The survey consisted of 55 items. The surveys were disseminated and collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia.

The results were based on teachers' self - reports of their beliefs and practices. One of the major findings from their surveys was that a majority, 89%, of the teachers surveyed preferred a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction. Which means the teachers prefer a program that involves both reading skill instruction and immersion in enriched literacy experiences. As indicated by the usable surveys the teachers valued and taught phonics, decoding, and word identification skills and strategies (Baumann et al).

We found that teachers design reading and language arts programs that provide a multifaceted, balanced instructional diet that includes an artful blend of direct instruction in phonics and other reading and writing strategies along with a rich assortment of literature, oral language, and written language experiences and activities. (Baumann et al, 1998, p. 646).

Baumann et al (1998, p. 645) also reported that two thirds or more of the grade 3 - 5 teachers identified materials, strategies, and activities utilized most frequently: comprehension strategy instruction (89%); vocabulary activities (80%); literature response activities (79%); literary elements instruction (73%); instruction in comprehension monitoring (71%); and using trade books for instruction (67%).

Multicultural Education

During the 1960s and 1970s, America gave birth to Multicultural Education. Multicultural Education, as defined by Banks (1994), is an educational reform movement to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that the diverse student population will experience equal educational opportunities. Banks (p. 81), also described the purpose of multicultural education:

The goal of multicultural education in the broader sense is an education for freedom. First, I mean that multicultural education should help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in a democratic and free society. Secondly, multicultural education promotes the freedom, abilities, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries to participate in other cultures and groups.

As explained by Banks (1994), the multicultural curriculum should involve the integration of strategies that are involved, oriented, interactive, personalized and cooperative.

Slavin and Fashola (1998) described the Multi - Cultural Reading and Thinking (Mc RAT) program, a writing program that trains teachers to add multicultural themes to all areas of the curriculum of grades 3 - 8. The program was developed by the Arkansas Department of Education to enhance the reading and writing skills of students. The program works with a school's existing program.

A study was conducted with an experimental and control group of minority, gifted and talented, and Title 1 students. Both groups utilized the same curriculum; the experimental group had McRAT trained teachers. The students were in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. The students were pre and post tested. The McRAT students outperformed the control group in areas of analysis, inference, comparison and evaluation. This indicates that utilizing multicultural themes (materials) will enhance the literacy skills of students. McRAT is a part of the National Diffusion Networks in 1993 and is used in 44 Arkansas schools. The program is also being nationally disseminated.

Comer and Poussaint (1992) and Kuykendall (1992) noted that a multicultural curriculum will enhance African American students' understanding of their own culture, abating institutional racism. A multicultural curriculum emphasizes the unique strengths and positive contributions of previously ignored cultures while enhancing the quality of education in schools, explained Bryant and Jones (1993). One of the teachers participating in Foster's (1997) study, explained how she included the African American culture within the context of everything she teaches. This teacher also attempted to present the perspectives of people of color and the role each group has played in America. Efforts are emerging to bring people together and not apart. Multicultural education is bridging the gap between all people; this education offers a better understanding of the people who live in this world. Without multicultural education included in the curriculum, African Americans are forced to believe that their culture and history were irrelevant and inferior (Wyman, 1993).

Bieger (1996) explained, that multicultural education is a process, a way of doing something, and a philosophy. Students can accomplish a goal

through this concept. The United States is so culturally diverse that all people must be respected and their cultures recognized and appreciated. According to Bieger, children's literature can be used to create a multicultural classroom. The literature utilized in the classrooms must reflect all cultures and not focus on just one culture. Literature such as folk tales and biographies can assist students in learning an appreciation and enhance their understanding of the different cultures. Students need to read about their own life experiences; this type of literature is confirmation for the student and their own culture (Bieger).

Daily Independent Reading

Clay (p. 6, 1991) defines reading as a "message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised". Tompkins (1997) described the literacy process as having five stages: (1) preparing to read, (2) reading, (3) responding, (4) exploring and (5) extending. She described the key features of each stage on pages 251 - 275 of her book. For a student to experience the literacy process they must spend time reading independently.

It is very important that students practice daily reading; students improve their reading ability by reading a lot. Reading achievement is positively enhanced by the amount of time spent reading a book (Howard, 1993; Paul, 1996; Routman, 1996; Allington, 1996; and Gillet & Temple, 1994).

Paul, VanderZee, Rue, and Swanson (1996) conducted a study with 2,500 schools utilizing the Accelerated Reader (AR) program and 3,500 schools who did not use the program. They found that the program was most influential in urban schools and in low socioeconomic environments. The program was found to stimulate increased independent reading; therefore, students experienced greater academic success.

The Accelerated Reader program is a computerized literature base reading program. AR was created by Judith and Terrance Paul in 1993. The students select a fiction or nonfiction book that interest them and that is on their reading level. There are more than 11,000 book titles. The students read the books at their own pace during time set aside by the teacher during the school day and at home. After the books are completed the students answer 5, 10, 20 objective multiple - choice, literal comprehension questions on the computer. When the tests are completed, the computer instantly scores the tests; the students receive points based on the book length and reading level. The students must score at least 60% to pass the tests on their individual book and receive the points. The program provides the teacher records on how the students are doing in the program. These reports can be printed for the individual student or by class, allowing the teacher to examine performances and monitor students' progress. The computer manages all scoring and record keeping automatically.

The AR program motivates students to increase the amount of time they read. According to studies conducted by Paul (1996) and Paul, VanderZee, Rue, Swanson (1996), AR has a positive effect on students' academic performance because the students are motivated to read more. Paul et. al explained that AR motivates students to spend more time reading. Researchers have confirmed anytime students increase their independent reading time they become better readers.

O'Masta and Wolf (1991), found that scores on standard test of reading competence were improved when students increased their amount of free / actual reading time. Independent reading may have other names such as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), self - selected

reading and Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.).

Allington (1994) noted that schools continue to organize their school day where most children have little opportunity to read. According to Allington, active reading and writing only occupies 10% of the school day. Half of all fifth graders spend only 4 minutes a day reading, but the same children watch television for approximately 130 minutes a day (U.S. Department of Education, 1986). Based on findings by Paul (1996), students in the top 5 percent read 144 times more than students in the bottom 5 percent.

One of the common features of a successful reading program is to emphasize reading, allocating more time to actual reading in the classroom, as explained by Allington (1996). According to Tompkins (1997), researchers have estimated that students need to read a word 4 to 14 times to make it their own, this happens when students read independently. She also noted that older students should read independently for 45 minutes daily to enhance their literacy. Allington believed at least 30 to 60 minutes should be allowed for sustained silent reading, students self select reading materials on their level and read for a certain amount of time daily. Daily independent reading is a component, an indispensable part of a balanced reading program.

Krashen (1993) claimed that in 38 out of 41 research studies, the students performed better on reading comprehension test than students given traditional skill - based reading instruction. Also the longer free voluntary reading, independent reading is practiced the more consistent the results. Research also indicates that free voluntary reading is effective for improving vocabulary development, grammar test performance, writing, and oral/aural language ability. It has been determined that 20 minutes of reading daily could lead to a gain of 1,000 words per year or more (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman,

1987).

Independent reading has also lead to a variety of cognitive benefits (Echols, West, Stanovich, & Zehr, 1996). Free voluntary reading provides a foundation so that higher levels of proficiency may be reached. Foertsch (1992) found that fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders performed better on reading comprehension test when they read independently daily. Krashen also stated that traditional language arts instruction, in other words, is merely a test, a test that privileged children, who grow up with books, pass and that less fortunate children fail (p. 23).

While determining priorities for reading research, the National Reading Research Center (NRRRC) conducted a poll in the United States. A random sample of International Reading Association members who were mostly reading and classroom teachers participated in the poll (Koskinen, 1993). How to enhance students' interest and motivation for reading was considered a top priority (Koskinen, 1993).

The NRRRC suggested that reading instruction needs to develop readers who are: (1) motivated to reader, (2) strategic users of literacy skills, (3) able to use prior knowledge to gain information from new material, then transfer and apply it to new context, and (4) able to engage the help of others to gain competency (1993).

A literature - based reading program was designed which included literacy centers, guided reading, modeling, and independent reading and writing time (Koskinen, 1993). During the independent reading and writing time, students were able to make choices such as what to read and write and with whom.

Research is needed to identify other methods that will enhance the

literacy of African American fourth grade students. Educational researchers are lacking in their knowledge of effective instruction for these students and more research needs to be evaluated, planned, and implemented (Dilworth, 1992). Dilworth also explained that “part of the problem of teachers’ inability to effectively teach these students is the lack of well - documented research on effective pedagogy” (p. 81). As educators attempt to deal with the crisis of educating all students, it is necessary for them to utilize various instructional methods (Bryant and Jones, 1993). Dilworth acknowledged that educators can not utilize methods found to be effective with African American students if they are unaware such methods exist.

Naturalistic Inquiry as Qualitative Research Method

Naturalistic inquiry encourages the researcher to search for a variety of views of reality and the ways these views are constructed (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This paradigm works on the assumption that there is an objective that can be obtained through the five senses as noted by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, (1993). As noted by Erlandson et. al., naturalistic inquiry involves the process of observing, recording, analyzing, reflecting, dialoguing, and rethinking; these are necessary parts of the research process. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), qualitative research methods are becoming important methods of inquiry for certain fields of study such as the field of education. Better understanding of complex human interactions is gained through this alternate research process as explained by Marshall and Rossman. Alternate paradigms are sets of beliefs that lead to different methods of approaching inquiry; they are different from the historically correct

paradigm, as explained by Erlandson et. al.

Qualitative Interviewing

Rubin and Rubin (1995) described qualitative interviewing as the art of hearing data; providing a better understanding of other peoples' lives and experiences (answering unanswered questions). Qualitative interviewing is an approach, a mode to learn by (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Gorden (1992) defines interviewing as "conversation between two people in which one person tries to direct conversation to obtain information for some specific purpose" (p. 2). Knowledgeable interviewees describe their world in elaborate detail. Patton (1990) explained that the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings; he also acknowledged that qualitative naturalistic inquiry, permits the researcher to enter the field with little advance conceptualization.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) explained that "qualitative interviewing is flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone" (p. 43). In explaining their definition of iterative, Rubin and Rubin contend that in the early interviews, the researcher "actively solicits a wide variety of ideas, themes, and explanations, often called grand tour questions, and from there narrows the topic being studied. The iterative design stops only when the researcher reaches the saturation point" (p. 46).

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews of teachers are open-ended interviews with groups of five to eight people on specifically targeted or focused issues (Patton, 1990). The focus group technique was derived from marketing research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Focus groups bring together people of similar experiences to participate in a group interview about a major issue that affects them. Patton acknowledged that group interviews provide a way to

accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They provide insights into the individual and personal experience of each educator participating in the study. Probes provided the elaborate depth needed, facts, interest and clarification as noted by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Evidence probes provided the source of the interviewee's knowledge and steering probes assisted in keeping the interview on the right track (Rubin & Rubin).

Delpit (1995) explained that researchers seldom seek teachers as a source of guidance; their voices have been ignored.. Educators, according to Delpit, believe that their voices are not heard concerning the education of African American students. Many researchers (experts) are consulted when articles are written concerning education but missing are the voices of the other experts; the hundreds of thousands of teachers who provide daily literacy instruction (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, and Duffy - Hester, 1998). This researcher decided to provide a voice for a few educators concerning the enhancement of Literacy for African American students.

Foster's (1997) book provided a way of allowing educators' voices to be heard, according to Delpit who wrote the forward for the book. Foster allowed the educators to explain their pedagogical insights in her book. Foster (1997) noted that, despite the long years of service by African American teachers, there has never been a book devoted entirely to sharing their experiences. She is puzzled and disturbed as to why a book has not been written devoted to these knowledgeable teachers.

Her entire book is a narrative as told by twenty African American teachers. In her book, Foster (1997), shared the voices of 20 African American teachers born between 1905 and 1973. She utilized a life history approach to gain understanding on how teaching has been experienced and understood

by these teachers. Only five of the twenty participants were men. The teaching experience of all the participants ranged from 3 to 68 years. Half of the teachers were employed primarily in elementary schools.

Foster's (1997) topics included the teachers' philosophies of teaching; their perceptions of students; their understanding of teachers' roles; and many others. She found that some African American teachers believe that teachers have low expectations for and prejudice against African American students. Foster noted that the history of Chicago Public Schools indicated that too often Caucasians teachers made few academic demands of African American students. She also found in her study that the relationship between parents and teachers aren't as strong as they were in the past. There is a lack of communication between parents and teachers.

Foster acknowledged that the African American teachers who taught her were the most influential teachers in her education; those teachers were her role models. Educators can learn a great deal from the voices of other educators as expressed by Delpit. The researcher can listen to the educators' voices and share their expert advice with others.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter explains the method used in this study. The statement of the problem and research question are explained. Also included in this chapter is a description of the proposed research site, participants, research design and procedure, data collection, and data analysis.

Statement of the Problem

Many African American students do not have and are not receiving the basic literacy foundations for ongoing education and success in their adult lives.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to identify effective teaching methods, as identified by elementary school teachers which enhance the literacy of African American fourth grade students. Based on research conducted and or reported by Bryant & Jones, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Hill, 1989; Kuykendall, 1992; Wyman, 1993; and Strickland, 1994, the following research question was investigated to guide the study: What are the effective teaching methods which enhance the literacy of African American students in fourth grade as perceived by fourth grade elementary teachers?

Site Selection

The researcher identified a site located in northeast Texas through informal phone calls and visits with teachers and principals in this district. This district was eagerly willing to accommodate my research efforts. The researcher also attempted to identify a site with a significant number of African American students. Based on the state test, Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and the district's Benchmarks, there is an indication that the African American students in this district are experiencing success in literacy.

Participants

The Fourth grade educators from the five elementary schools were invited to participate in this study. This district has five elementary schools; one of the five elementary schools chose not to participate in this study. The researcher identified twenty-one fourth grade teachers from four schools, from diverse backgrounds, to participate in this study. All of the fourth grade educators in the district were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. These teachers, identified by their principals, were chosen because of their valuable experience and success with educating fourth grade African American students. The teachers had an average of nine years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers had Master's Degrees and 19 of the teachers had Bachelor's Degrees. Seven of the teachers were 40 years or older and 14 of the teachers were younger than 40.

As noted by Erlandson et al. (1993) the participants were protected in all areas and permission from the participants was ascertained. All persons being interviewed were made aware that they may discontinue at any point of the

interview. The participants of the study were allowed to review the results of the study before they are viewed by outsiders.

TABLE 1
SUBJECTS

Females	19
Males	2
African Americans	4
Caucasians	16
Hispanic	1
Total Number	21

Research Design

A qualitative, naturalistic research design best served this study as the researcher sought to identify effective methods of classroom teachers that will enhance the literacy of fourth grade African American students. The participants, of this study met on their campuses and focus group interviews took place on the four elementary campuses. The participants in the focus groups, in a permissive environment, listened to each other's responses and made comments. This allowed for flexibility, the exploration of issues, and shared impressions during discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Ascertaining high-quality data in a social context was the object of the focus group interviews. The researcher completed the taped focus group interviews within a two month period.

Procedure

Step 1

The researcher identified a site in northeast Texas. The researcher attempted to identify a site with a significant number of African American students. Pseudonyms are used in place of the schools' names. A. Walker has 70% African American students; M. Angelou has 35.25% African American students; P. Wheatly has 38.57% African American students; and T. Morrison has 32.16% African American students. These numbers were provided by the district's Administrative Technology Coordinator. The administrators were also willing to participate in this study.

Step 2

Permission to conduct qualitative research in the site located in northeast Texas was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oklahoma State University.

Step 3

A letter was sent to the superintendent requesting permission to conduct research in this district (Appendix A). The researcher met with the administrators to explain the study and request permission to invite teachers to participate in the study.

Step 4

A hand delivered letter (Appendix B) explaining the purpose and description of this study was delivered to each possible participant of the study. This hand delivered letter requested that each fourth grade teacher at the site chosen participate in this study. The letter also solicited effective methods. The letter, with the prepared question, provided the opportunity for the participants to begin processing, in preparation for the focus group interviews.

Step 5

After the letters were returned, the researcher conducted focus group interviews with the participants after school, in their natural environment, on the four campuses. There were four to seven teachers in each focus group interview. The interviews were scheduled on each of the four elementary campuses. The researcher met with each group one time on each campus. The researcher began the taped focus group interviews by asking the teachers to identify the teaching methods that they believed worked best with their African American students. The researcher guided the discussions to keep all participants focused on the topic. The discussions that took place were guided to identify the methods and the reasons the teachers believe these particular methods are effective. The term effective in this study is defined as the power or capacity to achieve the desired results. The desired results for fourth grade African American student is to be literate, functioning on grade level.

Step 6

A tape player was used as teachers explained and discussed the methods and reasons they identified them as being the most effective with African American elementary fourth graders. There were four taped sessions on four different elementary campuses. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommended using a tape recorder because the researcher should not rely on recall. The researcher also took jotted and mental notes to assist her in remembering important information.

Data Analysis

The teacher interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes and concepts; these perceptions were categorized by similarities. The researcher began the process of bringing meaning to the collected raw data by categorizing the teachers' perceptions into themes and categories.

Analysis during data collection also employed the coding of data according to emerging categories of behaviors. All data was kept intact and organized. The data was explored and examined in an effort to identify certain typical patterns. Overarching themes were developed to link individual parts together. Following each focus group interview, the interviews were transcribed. Patterns emerged from the analysis of previous data. Recurring methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion.

The researcher identified two literacy experts to examine and confirm the underlying commonalities. Dr. Robert Cooter, Superintendent of Reading, with Dallas Public Schools and Dr. Connie Briggs, Reading Professor, at Emporia State University in Kansas served as experts to analyze the data. These two literacy experts agreed with the identity of the seven methods from the transcriptions.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This study was designed to identify the effective teaching methods (best practices) which enhance the literacy skills of fourth grade African American students as identified by elementary school teachers. Method is defined for use in this study as a system of principles, practices, processes, and procedures utilized by teachers when applied to literacy. A method is a way of doing anything (Webster Dictionary). The term effective in this study is defined as the power or capacity to achieve the desired results, African American fourth grade students reading on grade level.

Twenty-one fourth grade teachers were interviewed during focus group interviews on four elementary campuses at a site located in Northeast Texas. A. Walker focus group interview took place on January 16, 1998 for approximately 90 minutes with seven participants. M. Angelou and P. Wheatley focus group interviews took place on February 4, 1998. Each interview session lasted for approximately 50 minutes. There were five participants in each of those interviews. T. Morrison focus group interview took place on February 9, 1998 for approximately 50 minutes with four participants. During each focus group interview fourth grade teachers identified several methods and the reasons they perceived them to be effective with fourth grade African American students to enhance their literacy skills. Each interview was taped and transcribed.

After the focus group interviews were completed, the researcher began the task of analyzing the interviews; several recurring themes (methods) emerged. The researcher read over the interview transcripts five times. It was

suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) that the researcher read over the data at least twice during long undisturbed periods. The goal of analysis is to find themes that explain the research arena and fit together in a way that a reader can understand (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 254). While reading the transcripts a preliminary list of coding categories was developed as suggested by Bogdan and Bilkin.

Strategy code was the category chosen. Bogdan and Bilken (1992, p. 171) defined strategy codes as tactics, methods, ways, techniques, maneuvers, ploys, and other conscious ways that people accomplish various things. "Techniques to control a class" is a quotation that may be coded under the strategy code. Since methods of enhancing the literacy behaviors of African American students is the topic of this study, strategy codes was the appropriate category code.

During the analytical process coding categories were tested and modified until they became fixed for this research project. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested that the researcher revisit the transcriptions to check categories and to eliminate categories that only occur in one or two interviews. Once the coding categories were developed, a list was made of codes and each one was assigned an abbreviation. The researcher read through the interview transcripts and marked each unit (paragraph and sentence) with the appropriate coding category. This involves scrutinizing sentences carefully and deciding what codes the material pertains to (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Then each coded unit was cut - up and put in single coded labeled manila folders.

Recurring effective methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion during the focus group interviews by the twenty-one participants

(Table 1). This chapter will include excerpts from the interviews to illustrate and substantiate the assertions made. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) noted that quoting the participants in a good qualitative paper helps to convince the reader and helps the reader get closer to the people involved in the study. Quotations from the interviews provide the evidence for the themes and at the same time enable the researcher to evoke the interviewees' words accurately and vividly (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 271).

Ziegler (1980) in a paper on how Italian immigrants experience schooling in Canada mixed quotes from the participants with her own descriptions and analysis. Briggs (1994) utilized interviews of students and the teacher in her dissertation to examine the use of nonfiction / informational trade books in an elementary classroom. Excerpts from the interviews were included in the dissertation.

Williams, Dunlap, Johnson, and Hamid (1992) conducted observations and interviews in their examination of "Personal Safety in Dangerous Places". They conducted interviews with drug dealers and users. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. At the conclusion of this study, the authors provided a variety of strategies on how ethnographic research can be safely conducted in dangerous settings. Excerpts of the interviews were included in their report. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested that a way to present data in a dissertation is to make a statement and illustrate the statement with several examples (quotation from interviews). This method of presenting data was chosen for this paper because it best served this researcher's purpose.

A coding system was developed by the researcher to detect words, phrases, and patterns of thinking during the course of the study. Recurring effective methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion during

the focus group interviews by the twenty-one participants (Table 2). A method had to be discussed at least six times to be discussed in this study. If a method was not discussed six times or more, it was not included in this study. This chapter will include excerpts from the interviews as well an analysis of the similarities between the teachers' perceptions and the findings of other researchers. The transcriptions from the four groups were combined for the purpose of discussion. Please refer to Appendix E for complete transcriptions of the interviews.

Table 2
EFFECTIVE LITERACY METHODS

Method	Frequency of Discussion by Participants
Independent reading & writing	39
Phonics & Vocabulary	20
Modeling	11
Multicultural Education	9
Parental Involvement	8
Prior Knowledge - Schema	7
Cooperative Learning	6

Independent reading and writing, phonics, multicultural, the engagement of parental involvement, and cooperative learning methods have been described in detail in Chapter 2. The teacher modeling and

incorporating prior knowledge methods will be explained in this chapter.

Independent Reading & Writing

Independent Reading and Writing were the most frequently discussed methods during the interviews. The participants (teachers) in the study perceived that these two methods are very important to enhance the literacy of African American fourth graders. The independent reader and writer has developed control over the whole reading and writing process explained Reutzel and Cooter (1999). The teachers strongly support these methods and this is confirmed by numerous researchers, that allowing time during the school day for students to practice their reading and writing is very important. Reading and Writing should be taught in a meaningful way that integrates the two. Routman (1996) has suggested that most of the daily language arts time be spent on reading and writing. The teachers shared their views:

I think that if they have a lot of opportunities to put their hands on books, will really allow them to learn a lot.

We do have 30 minutes of silent reading every day.

They've read about six to eight books since school started.

We have DEAR time which is drop everything and read. This is a silent reading time when they are. . . have all distractions eliminated and everybody is expected to read.

The teachers recommended that the students be allowed to self-select their own text.

They'll go to that book shelf when they only have a minute. They'll go over there to get a book to read.

They each have the opportunity to choose. In my classroom, my own personal library, whatever it is they want to read and their interest is quite varied.

They get to pick whichever books they want.

In the afternoon right after recess, they pick their own book, library book effectively.

Writing activities can be effective with at risk students because they involve the encoding and decoding of language (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). The more students write, the more they engage the elements of successful reading such as context clues and sounds in words.

The last thing I have is Writer's Workshop which gives the students the opportunity to express themselves where they're allowed to choose what they want to write about.

One assignment we had in our journals in my classroom, we write down idioms and figures of speech that helps to make a story look more colorful.

The teachers used a variety of motivational programs to encourage their students to read and write independently:

We did Emmitt Smith Reading Program. Twenty minutes. . . we give prizes. A little boy on our campus won a football. You could have won a visit from Emmitt Smith (Dallas Cowboy Football Player).

Another motivational thing that we use is the 600 Minute Club and they get a free ticket to Six Flags. They work really hard to get their free ticket.

We have a reading buddy program where we're paired up with first graders to help them read...but the humorous part of this is the fourth graders learn a lot about reading.

One of the new strategies we started using last year with our classes is Readers Workshop in which children read books of their choosing at their own level.

A. Walker is very involved with the Accelerated Reading Program (AR).

The AR Program is described in detail in Chapter Two. They believe this

program has really enhanced the Literacy of their African American students because the program motivates their students to read independently.

Research corroborates their beliefs.

We have the Accelerated Reading Program which is a library program where they can be independent and do test.

The other thing that I think especially with boys. The program kind of has this competition that they see, which may not even be there but they read into it some competitive level in there. They're collecting points...this kind of hooks some.

I think the program provides first something they can choose, their choice. They get to use a computer.

One of the participants explained that the daycare lady who picks up the students after school became upset because the students were missing their daycare bus to go to the computer lab to take their Accelerated Reading test.

The daycare now picks the students up an hour later to allow the students time to complete their test. The teachers explained:

They just keep coming back for more and more to the point that the daycare people and the parents are upset with me.

The kid is getting into trouble because he wants to read. And the key to that is that they are independently reading. And we know that if they are independently reading, they're going to get better and better and better.

The teachers noted that the Accelerated Reading Program improved their DEAR time.

The students no longer sit at their desk talking and looking around. The students will now actually sit and read for 20 minutes during their DEAR time.

Phonics - Vocabulary

Reutzel and Cooter (1996) identified phonics analysis approaches and

the teaching of whole words and concepts as the two aspects of word learning. To become skilled readers, students must be able to identify words quickly and accurately. Students must be proficient at decoding words; decoding words involves converting the printed word into spoken language. Phonics involves the relationship between sounds and their spelling (Blevins, 1998, p. 7). Blevins also explained that when students learn to decode words, that will enhance their development of and improvement in word recognition. Phonics knowledge is a tool in the reading process that is necessary to be a competent reader and writer / speller (Routman, 1996). The teachers in this study perceived Phonics - Vocabulary to be important methods for the literacy enhancement of fourth grade African American students.

We mentioned phonics and I thought of one student that I have who is African American that really had trouble reading, he is now going to content mastery and I thought he really need basic phonetics until he learns how to read.

What are the similarities in those words, what are some of the rules that you could apply those words and we really do make boxes on our notebook paper and put them together and come up with a rule of why they're together.

Phonics knowledge can assist students in recognizing and pronouncing words that are new to them in print. Concept and vocabulary knowledge assist students in completing the reading process by attaching meaning (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996).

If I spend that time during the week talking about the rules and I don't think it's because they studied more. I really do think it's because they see the relationship of the word.

We can't assume that they have the process (phonics), you have to give them a process by which to figure things out and then pretty much they do okay.

I think that these students really need a phonics program.

If they don't have phonics, they need it. I have been doing quite a bit with phonics, particularly suffixes, prefixes, and syllables.

We have them make their own words like automobile - cut the letters - and tell them to make words that have 'au' in them.

The teachers also work on enhancing the vocabulary of the students to assist them with their literacy development. Teachers need to consider methods of modifying the curriculum so that all students can learn to recognize and use appropriate vocabulary. Au (1993) explained that students in multicultural settings learn vocabulary more effectively when the new words are related to a broader topic. Enhancing vocabulary development through content area topics such as Social Studies and Science is a natural and connected way to learn new words and explore their various meanings (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996).

Defining words and getting them used to the language of context clues and that means the same thing as sometimes we say in the neighborhood looking at the words that are in the same neighborhood. That getting the terminology all the time, context clues or we're looking for the main idea of what this is mostly about so that they'll know the language and types of terminologies that have a much larger vocabulary and understand about synonyms.

And with understanding the passages on the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills), it is very crucial to understand synonyms. The synonyms that are there (TAAS) may not be in their vocabulary so they have difficulty understanding the passage so if they have difficulty understanding the passage they can't answer the questions.

Teacher Modeling

Cunningham and Allington (1994) explained that fourth grade teachers should model reading by reading to their children. If a teacher multiplied the

five or six times she models reading for her students by 180 school days, she has modeled that reading is a source of information, pleasure, and humor over 1000 times for that school year (Cunningham and Allington).

Teacher modeling, a form of scaffolding, is a way of showing students how to approach a task such as finding the main idea of a story (Sweet, 1993). During teacher modeling, the teacher thinks aloud while talking and revealing her mental strategies in solving literacy problems. This modeling process allows students to witness the logical processes and verification strategies the teacher uses to successfully complete the task (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996, p. 143). Teachers should model how to analyze, to think in a logical manner, and to process ideas (Hill, 1989).

Implicit and explicit are the two types of modeling. Explicit modeling is when the teacher demonstrates to students how to approach a task such as how to use a table of contents. Talk alouds and think alouds are the two types of explicit modeling. During think alouds, the teacher talks to the students sharing the thinking process one must go through to accomplish a literacy task such as inferring a main idea. In the talk aloud method, the teacher demonstrates procedural steps used to complete a task like finding the main idea.

During implicit modeling, the teacher may read a story aloud to her students engaging them in the meaning of the story and demonstrating a purpose for reading (Sweet, 1993). Implicit and explicit modeling have a place in the well - balanced literacy program. The teachers in this study agreed with the researchers concerning modeling as a method to enhance the literacy of African American fourth grade students.

This is how I approach something that I'm having a difficult time with so yeah, modeling how I learn, how I practice, learning how to do that.

I showed them how I would go through and get rid of those words that were not important.

And probably they've heard the teacher use it a lot like she was saying that if you model and say the word over and over again eventually some will get it. There is no doubt that some will get it and retain it.

Oral daily reading by the teacher to give life experiences and present examples and this helps build vocabulary in students since they don't have these experiences when you're talking about things they have no idea what you're talking about.

We model as we've discussed before the voice and tonation in reading.

When you started reading it you started modeling to her what you were gaining from it and then she started getting what she needed to get from it because she saw what you were doing.

Multicultural Education

Harris (1992) was convinced that the literacy achievement of African American students would improve if they could see themselves and other people of color and their experiences, history, and culture reflected in the books they read. Harris continued to describe a movement to expand subjects like history and literature to include the experiences of previously neglected and oppressed groups. Involving students on a regular basis with books that reflect the perspectives of different members of our American culture will help students to value different voices (Sierra - Perry, 1996, p. 90).

And so - so when I do buy these books, you know, I have become more and more aware of trying to make sure that I have something that is for my African American, my Hispanic, and my Asian. You know and that talks about the different cultures and how we're alike and how we're different and some of those books bring those in and try to use some of those.

This month in particular we are focusing on African Folk Tales, but I feel it is important that they get a variety of literature.

Plus one of the books we read has a lot of different countries in it so we

do a major research on all different countries and its just . . . they're always so interested in all of it anyway.

There's is one African American girl in my class who is very culturally aware and she likes to read about other cultures also. She's probably read this one particularly Jewish book ten times.

They have a whole variety of books.

Teachers in this study have chosen to integrate their Multicultural literature throughout their curriculum.

Our Social Studies and Science is primarily based on literature with Trade books. We use a lot of the multicultural literature in those subjects. As we study the history of Texas, we include the literature that discusses the different Ethnic groups in Texas and how they came to be.

Multicultural materials covering all different points of view are needed so that students gain insight into other perspectives on a deep level so that they can grow into responsible, caring adults in a very complicated society (Sierra - Perry, 1996, p. 91).

Parental Involvement

Parents and families are the first and most important teachers. If families teach a love of learning, it can make all the difference in the world in our children (Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education).

We try to get Moms and Dads involved too. The parents have to sign if they've read. This helps the parents to be more aware.

And this (Accelerated Reading Program) also gets parents involved where the children take home the printout sheet the parents can see what did they make on the test and then they look over here and say, 'Oh you read a second grade book and you're in fourth grade and you made 50?' And then the parents . . . you know, inspire them to move up and do better and they'll say, 'Oh you read a fourth grade book over here and you made 100%. Well that's better.' Then the kids are able to boost themselves too and move on.

And of course we all know that's the biggie. If we can just get those parents to read to them at home when they're little and then sit down with them and read that will help a lot.

That's what I tell my parents when they come in. You will have to read for 15 to 20 minutes a day and I don't care what they read, just as long as they're reading something that they are interested in. You are going to see a difference in these kids.

Parents can assist in the development of their children's vocabulary by exposing them to new experiences and helping them to read about and discuss new ideas at home.

Cooperative Learning

Social interaction has a significant role in developing a student's cognitive growth. This is extremely relevant to current trends in Literacy instruction (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). According to Johnson et al. (1988), the basic elements of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, individual accountability, face - to - face interaction, cooperative skills, and group processing.

We do peer reading in classrooms. Sometimes, some days we just read with a partner and they'll sit down all over the room on the floor with just their partner and read to each other. We do a lot of that.

Partners have these two chapters today and they sit side by side and read them where the other person can hear you.

Reading is done together, partners reading; buddy reading, especially if someone has trouble with their reading.

It was because they have that one on one with someone that was their peer. They weren't threatened, they felt very comfortable in the situation.

Cooperative learning groups are heterogeneous groups ranging in size from

two to five children working together to accomplish a team task (Reutzel & Cooper, 1996, p. 349). It is important that students work collaboratively in small groups, making sure all members master the assigned material (Johnson et al., 1988). The teachers also allow their students to work cooperatively during their writing enhancement.

They have the opportunity to share their writing with a whole group or a small group. They can also share with a partner. We also use peer editing which helps them to learn to edit their own work and somebody else's.

I even let them do their questions together and discuss them for a few minutes because there is only going to be like two or maybe three questions on the board.

Prior Knowledge - Schema

Reutzel and Cooter (1996, p. 38) defined schema (prior knowledge) as packages of related concepts, events, or experiences such as reading the word furniture, readers activate their knowledge related to furniture. A schema can be considered as an abstract, flexible, and growing cognitive framework with slots that can be filled in by the personal and vicarious experiences of a reader. The size and content of schema, a student's storehouse of prior knowledge and experience, are influenced by past opportunities to learn (Reutzel & Cooter). Reutzel and Cooter found that the more students experience both directly and vicariously, the more their schemas are refined and elaborated, allowing them greater ability and flexibility in interpreting what they read.

The amount of prior knowledge students have about a topic is the best determinant of how much they will comprehend, when they read material on that topic (Cunningham & Allington, 1994). Matching names in one column to events in another column is a traditional enhancer of prior knowledge but

Cunningham and Allington (1994) noted that it would be more appropriate to focus more on developing depth of knowledge and to eliminate the shallow approach.

Their background knowledge is so varied and limited in some cases. The teachers utilized literature to assist their students in the enhancement of their background knowledge. If a student lacks schemas, it can affect the construction of meaning from a text in many ways.

They build background from the literature.

Connectors is what they need.

Because one of our class objections is to bring . . . for the child to realize the feelings that the character is having in the story and to rely on their (student's) background knowledge and say well that's how I would feel. I find that to be very useful.

We think prior knowledge is lower than it has ever been.

In the direct teach method, I know discovery and all those kinds of things are fun and I'm not saying that you don't do that but the best way or what works best is if you do the direct teach, to give them the background. Then do the other things. Add the other layers on or do some discovery type things because they do need the preview of what's going on. You know the kids do.

Children who live in poverty are less likely to visit historical sites, museums, and scientific exhibits; therefore, their prior knowledge (world knowledge) is very limited (Cunningham & Allington, 1994). The teachers in this study agreed with Cunningham and Allington.

One thing I would like to comment is the fact that - that I've noticed that it doesn't matter which child it is, African American, White, or whatever, those who come from families who give them lots of experiences, lots of work, everything is an educational experience, they have it easier than everybody else. It doesn't matter who they are. Those are the easiest ones to teach.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the data presented in this study to identify effective teaching methods which enhance the literacy of fourth grade African American students. The elementary teachers in this study identified Independent Reading and Writing; Phonics - Vocabulary; Modeling by the Teacher; Multicultural Education; Incorporating Prior Knowledge; the Engagement of Parental Involvement; and Cooperative Learning as effective methods for African American students.

Independent reading and writing is allowing time during the school day for students to practice their reading and writing skills. The Phonics method assist students in identifying words quickly because the students become proficient at decoding words. Improving a student's vocabulary will assist that student in becoming a better reader. Teacher modeling is a way of showing students how to solve literacy problems. Multicultural Education consist of the literature that reflects all cultures and not focus on just one culture. Engaging parents in the education of their students is important to the enhancement of literacy. During cooperative learning, groups of students work together to achieve a learning goal (Hopson & Hopson, 1990). An elaborated schema allows students greater ability in interpreting what they read (Reutzel and Cooter, 1996).

Chapter V summarizes the study, offers implications for further research, offers recommendations, and its impact on African American students.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The ability and will of the African American students of our country to read has long been a concern of educators. It seems that even though much has been learned about the best methods to enhance literacy, we have most often failed to make these methods available to African American students especially those in the inner cities (Dougherty, 1997). Whether they lack the interest, the opportunity, the parental support, the materials, or the appropriate instruction, many of these students have failed to master the skills needed for success in literacy. This problem is compounded at the beginning of fourth grade, because this is when students across the country experience a slump in achievement (Chall & Snow, 1982). No longer are the students expected to learn how to read, they are expected to read in order to learn. The problems of these African American students is compounded.

At this point, the Matthew affect is established (Stanovich, 1986), and the students who can read, read more, build fluency, improve their ability to comprehend, and consequently, learn more; those students who lack the needed literacy skills, read less, learn less, and may even lose the ability to perform any of the skills they had previously acquired. In addition, as students enter the intermediate grades, more emphasis is placed on passing tests of basic skills such as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) Test in the state of Texas.

For this reason, the present study was conducted, not only to offer validation for utilizing the methods identified in this study and to encourage their use by teachers who teach African American fourth grade students, but

also to confirm their effectiveness.

Interest in this present study also developed as a result in the public knowledge that many African American students are failing to succeed in literacy acquisition in the American Educational System. Collins (1992) described this as the miseducation of Black children. There has been discussion in both the educational and political areas about the literacy problems in the United States. Improving the quality of classroom instruction is the best and most cost - effective means of improving overall student achievement and preventing at - risk students from falling behind (Slavin & Fashola, 1998, p. 33). There is an urgent need to validate the voices of those who teach African American students.

Being aware, observations, and concern prompted this researcher/writer to search the literature and to interview educators for more efficient and effective methods to enhance the literacy of fourth grade African American students. The problem, purposes and theoretical background of this study have been presented in detail in the preceding chapters. This chapter will present the major conclusions of this study, as well as implications for practices and further research including recommendations based on the conclusions. In summarizing the conclusions of this study, Chapter V is divided into the following six sections:

1. Restatement of the problem
2. Summary of the procedure
3. Research Findings
4. Implications for Educators
5. Recommendations for Future Research
6. Concluding Remarks.

Restatement of the Problem

Many African American students do not have and are not receiving the basic literacy foundations for ongoing education and success in their adult lives. When African American students are denied basic reading skills, these students become functional illiterates. They become adults unable to pass employment or college entrance tests, and thus are forced into the ranks of the unemployed where members of minority groups make up a disproportionate percentage (Hoover, Politzer, & Taylor, 1987).

Summary of the Procedure

A site was identified in northeast Texas. Each school has over 30% African American students. Twenty one fourth grade teachers from four elementary schools participated in focused group interviews during the months of January and February of 1998. A qualitative, naturalistic research design best served this study as the researcher sought to identify effective methods of classroom teachers that would enhance the literacy skills of fourth grade African American students.

These teachers, identified by their principals, were chosen because of their valuable experience with educating African American students. The interviews took place on the four elementary school campuses after school. There were four to seven participants at each focus group interview. The taped interviews were transcribed.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed for emerging themes and concepts. Recurring methods were tallied according to their frequency of discussion. The researcher identified two literacy experts to examine and

confirm the underlying commonalities. For many years teachers have known intuitively what creates successful classroom experiences; now there is a wealth of research to support that intuitive knowledge, and teachers who know about the research are able to articulate why they do what they do (Sierra - Perry, 1996, p. xii).

Research Findings

Schools can do a better job of educating all of their students especially low income and minority students, using methods and resources that are available. There are methods that are effective and appropriate for a wide variety of objectives. The existence of these methods demonstrates that the low achievement of so many students placed at-risk is not inevitable. The methods that emerged from this data were:

1. Independent Reading and Writing - Students can enhance their reading and writing by being provided time to practice reading and writing. Teachers should include independent reading and writing time in their daily lesson plans and provide the books and writing materials. Students should understand that becoming a reader and writer is like becoming a piano player or basketball player, there must be daily time to practice reading and writing just a student would practice playing the piano or basketball.

2. Phonics - Vocabulary - Students may use phonics to figure out how to pronounce some words in text. Readers have a listening vocabulary, a speaking vocabulary, a reading vocabulary, and a writing vocabulary (Cooter & Flynt, 1996). Listening vocabulary is when the reader can hear and understand words. Speaking vocabulary refers to words that may be used correctly in speech by the reader. A student's reading vocabulary is comprised

of words that are read and understood. Writing vocabulary refers to the vocabulary a student utilizes when writing. An effective teacher will skillfully guide students through the development of the four vocabularies because vocabulary development is the foundation for understanding and communication.

3. Teacher Modeling - Modeling has to do with showing students how to do something. Teachers show students how they read a certain text or how they write. Teachers talk aloud while they are processing so students not only see how the teacher reads and writes, but hear what the teacher is thinking. Teachers use modeling to teach skills by demonstrating and talking about what they are doing as the learner watches and listens to the explanation. In fourth grade, teachers should read a variety of genres aloud to the students.

4. Multicultural Education - All students' knowledge should be broadened concerning the contributions, cultural traditions and information about the many religious, ethnic, and national groups that comprise this most unique nation (Cunningham and Allington, 1994). The literacy achievement of African American students would be enhanced if the students could see themselves and their experiences, history, and culture reflected in the books they read. This African American literature and the literature of other ethnic groups should become an integral systematic component of the school system (Harris, 1992). If students are only taught a Eurocentric perspective, this will not properly prepare students for a successful future in a Multicultural world. A literacy curriculum is needed that teaches the history and culture of all ethnic groups throughout the school year (Vann and Kunjufu, 1993).

5. Prior Knowledge (Schema) - Students rely on prior knowledge

(schemata) so that new knowledge can be formed. Teachers are relying on the students' prior knowledge as they present new knowledge to their students. A student's prior knowledge helps to make sense out of things read by receiving, sorting, classifying, and organizing the information (Cooter and Flynt, 1996). The depth of a student's prior knowledge can have an impact on what will be learned.

6. Parental Involvement - It important for parents to form a partnership with the schools. The parents and community can assist the school in establishing equitable and respectful learning environments especially for the minority population. Parents should be available to help their children with their homework and volunteer as tutors at school.

7. Cooperative Learning - Cooperative learning groups help students synthesize information in a collaborative way (Cooter and Flynt, 1996). Students work in groups to accomplish task that are assigned by the teacher. A proficient reader can assist a less proficient reader by reading difficult text together, this is called paired reading or dyads. Teachers have experienced success with the various types of cooperative learning groups.

Each one of the methods listed above were identified by the participants in this study and numerous researchers as effective methods to enhance the literacy of fourth grade African American students; these methods are believed to work well with all students, but particularly with African American students. These were the most notable methods that emerged quite clearly from the participants' responses throughout this study. While a variety of teaching methods may have value in enhancing the literacy of fourth grade African American students, it is widely believed by experts that reading instruction for African American students should include the methods described in this study.

Implications for Educators

Educators' focus should be on dismantling educational barriers that restrict the academic and life options of students (Brozo, 1995). For educators to dismantle the educational barriers that restrict academic and life options of students, teachers should have a reasonable acquaintance with research, research skills, and modes for incorporating research findings into instruction and instructional perspectives (Dilworth, 1992). This study was somewhat geographically and demographically limited. Generalizations to all African American students may be tenable.

Preparing teachers to teach African American students needs to be revisited. How do universities prepare student teachers to teach in a culturally diverse environment? Courses should be designed to encourage teachers to look more carefully at the communication and behaviors of African American students. Student teachers should also be given the opportunity to acquire experience with students from backgrounds different from their own. During this type of course, teachers should also examine their own behaviors and beliefs concerning African American students. Teachers should read and study such books as From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students by Crystal Kuykendall and The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children by Gloria Ladson-Billings. This type of course for teachers will assist teachers in doing a better job of teaching African American students. Teacher education programs should consider cultural diversity and multicultural education concepts as components of their programs.

Kozol (1991) believed that if educators could learn what works in the classrooms that are effective, it could be repeated in classrooms in every

school system. This study has identified several methods that are effective in the classroom and if utilized by teachers will enhance the literacy of African American students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Brozo (1995) argued that a student's at-risk status can be reinforced through inadequate literacy instruction. That is why it is very important that educators seek the best practices to enhance literacy and apply those methods in their classrooms with their students. The following recommendations have been concluded from this study:

1. Research should be conducted to examine classrooms that utilize the methods identified in this study because they seem to be important. Pre and post test should be administered to note how effective these methods are with African American students. Future studies should be conducted with classrooms that utilize the methods identified in this study and classrooms who do not utilize these methods. There should be an experimental group that utilizes the literacy methods and a control group that does not utilize the literacy methods, but other methods of teaching literacy.

2. This researcher was very disappointed at the limited amount of information available in print on the pedagogical wisdom of educators. A knowledge base of effective pedagogical practice for African American students needs to be built. For educators to understand the multiple and complex ways in which teachers contribute to the achievement of African American students, it is important to continue to investigate the best practices for African American students' literacy enhancement. There needs to be

studies of the effective teachers and their pedagogy. Teaching is explained by those who teach well (Ladson - Billings, 1994).

3. Since this study has identified the Accelerated Reading Program as significant with African American students, it is recommended that further research be conducted with this program. A comparison study between schools that use the program and those that do not have the program. Of course, these schools would need to have a significant number of African American students.

Summary

Students need to be literate if they are to cope in our highly technological society and to participate meaningfully in the democratic process (Hoover, Politzer, and Taylor, 1987). The methods that are proposed throughout this study are not here as definite cures to the educational problems African American students experience in today's schools, but these are merely suggestions supported by research. Educators are encouraged to approach their students in an innovative manner and to be willing to try a variety of methods in the fight against illiteracy. This study has attempted to continue the quest for improved educational practices and instructional methods that will provide high quality education for African American fourth grade students by examining the research and listening to the voices of the teachers who work with these students daily. Hopefully conclusions derived from this investigation may be used to provide a better education for African American students.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

January 6, 1998

Dear Dr. Hawkins:

I am in the process of writing my dissertation, "Effective Teaching Strategies and Methods that Enhance the Literacy of Fourth Grade African American Students as Identified by Elementary School Teachers". As you see by the title, I will need the assistance of the DeSoto Principals and Teachers to conduct this research. Please allow me to ask them to participate in this important study. I would like for these teachers to participate because of their valuable experience with educating fourth grade African American students.

With your permission, I would like to invite fourth grade teachers to participate in Focus group interviews. We will meet and discuss the Literacy strategies and methods that the teachers identify as being effective. The interviews will be taped, but the teachers will not be identified and the tapes will be destroyed when this study is completed. The interviews will take place on each of the five elementary campuses in the library immediately after school.

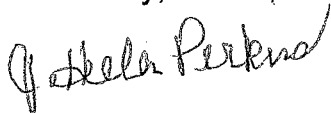
I am including Chapters 1 and 3 for your information. Chapter 1 will provide some background information and Chapter 3 will explain the method that will be used in this study. Also included in this chapter is a description of the research site, participants, research design and procedure, data collection, and data analysis.

I will be available to answer any questions that you may have; please don't hesitate to call. Please note my phone number listed below:

214.989.8878 ext. 9612

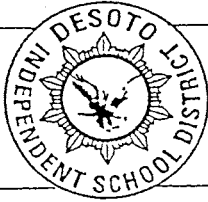
Thank you for DeSoto Independent School Districts continued support of my endeavors.

Sincerely,



J. Helen Perkins

APPENDIX B
SUPERINTENDENT LETTER



*DeSoto Independent
School District*

Jim Hawkins, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

200 East Belt Line Road
DeSoto, Texas 75115
(972) 223-6666
Fax (972) 274-8011

January 14, 1998

Ms. J. Helen Perkins
940 Aspen Drive
DeSoto, TX 75115

Dear Ms. Perkins:

I am pleased to grant permission for your proposal to invite DeSoto ISD teachers to participate in Focus group interviews for assistance with your dissertation. Mr. Ron Cagle, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum/Instruction has also approved this participation. However, we request that it be on a volunteer basis for our teachers and that it not take away from their teaching duties. We suggest it be after school or during common conference time. We also request that the campus principal must first approve any such effort.

If we can be of further assistance please contact my office. We would be interested in the results of this document when completed since it contains input from our own teachers. Good luck on your dissertation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Hawkins", written over a horizontal line.

Jim Hawkins, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Beth Rutledge, Belt Line Elementary
Price Minter, Cockrell Hill Elementary
Fern Ferguson, Frank D. Moates Elementary
JoAnn Bowman, Ruby Young Elementary
Sissy Lowe, Northside Elementary

APPENDIX C
TEACHER LETTER

January 12, 1998

Dear Elementary Teacher,

I am in the process of writing my dissertation, "Effective Teaching Strategies and Methods that Enhance the Literacy of Fourth Grade African American Students as Identified by Elementary School Teachers". As you can see in the title, I need your help to identify these effective strategies and methods. Your superintendent and principal have given me permission to invite your participation in this very important study. You have been chosen because of your valuable experience with educating fourth grade African American students.

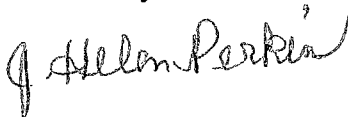
Focus group interviews will be utilized during this study. We will meet and discuss the strategies and methods you identify. The interviews will be taped, but you will not be identified and the tapes will be destroyed when this study is completed. The interviews will take place on your campus in the library immediately after school.

Please list (on the next page) the names of the strategies and methods you believe, through your experience as an educator, enhances the literacy of African American fourth grade students. The strategies and methods that you identify will allow me, the researcher, to keep us focused and guide us during our focus group interviews.

I am looking forward to your participation in this study; your contributions will be very valuable. I will be available to answer any questions that you may have. Please note the phone number listed below:

214.989.8878 ext. 9612

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Helen Perkins".

J. Helen Perkins

APPENDIX D
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR
HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

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Proposal Title: EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES AND METHODS THAT ENHANCE THE LITERACY OF FOURTH GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AS IDENTIFIED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Principal Investigator(s): David Yellin, J. Helen Perkins

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

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Cc: J. Helen Perkins

Date: December 22, 1997

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Interviews - Taped Transcriptions

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

P = Participant

R = Researcher

A. WALKER

7 Participants

January 16, 1998

Time - 90 Minutes

R: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please discuss with me the methods you believe are effective with African American students.

P1: I think a lot of assumption that we make when we work with children is that they understand the learning process and for children that have difficulty sometime they think they are the only ones that are having those difficulties so one thing that I did quite a bit last year with the group was verbalize. This is how I approach something that I'm having a difficult time with so yeah, modeling how I learn, how I practice, learning how to do that. Also letting them understand that I had difficulty too. Letting them see that just because she's standing in the front of the room it did not come easy so I try a lot of times to put myself in their place and talk through when I got to this problem this is how I worked it out. We talked a lot about test taking and we talked about going through and being frustrated, quitting, giving up and we took a poll - how many of us just color in an answer because we don't know it and we're tired and when they saw how many other children were doing exactly the same things that they were doing then they realized they weren't the only person in the room doing it - that there were other children struggling just like they were so we talked about how we could slow down, kind of get rid of what we don't need and not be too bothered by the time factor not kind of looking at someone that was finishing early and just concentrating on what was going on in front of me because if I really look around, I see that there is someone else in the room that's probably very similar to me and having those very same problems, and if they're not having a problem with that one then there's probably something similar to that a little bit further down the road. So looking for similarities and understanding we're not the only one doing it - that kind of helped a lot of my students last year.

R: Could you talk a little bit more about the modeling? What you said about the modeling. When do you do your modeling?

P2: Well when we. . . there are so many different skills and there are so many different opportunities to do that. We did a really nice activity for summarizing and what it was is the technique that I taught and it was going through and taking all of the words from a paragraph and going through and I showed them how I would go through and get rid of those words that were not important. Get them out of there. Only deal with what was important and I do it now. I do it with things that I'm reading and show them it works and books that

I'm interested in - not just text, not just test but anything that you're reading that and ah so I guess using overheads and working on the board and crossing out things like that we were able to see what words were really important in a passage that might help us with the main ideas or summaries, something like that. When I came to a word I didn't know then instead of just getting up and getting a dictionary or drilling over it we would stop and I would say - you know I really don't know what that word is or that spelling is really different and we would discuss it and it wouldn't be something that you'd just hop over it would be something that you would physically get up, walk to the dictionary and they would see me thumb through and look for the definition and try and find words that mean something similar to that word. I guess that's kind of a lot of the modeling and it happens for a lot of the skills and objectives that we teach. If they see me going through the same motions that I expect them to go through then every time I do it I say it. Now look at what I'm doing because I constantly say I'm 42 years old and I still have to do this. You cannot assume that you know this and at nine years old you're a pro and you don't have to do this anymore. If at 42 I'm doing this you can bet at nine you better be doing this so that's something that I do quite frequently.

P2: Also modeling language you know. In a language rich environment when incorrect verb tenses - endings are left off a word, slang is used - like I got to use or got to - whatever those - I can't exactly remember but you model what you want them to say rather than making a really big deal out of what they're saying or saying that's wrong or that's incorrect. May I go to the restroom - I've go to use, may I go to the restroom and then the child catches on and they starts saying may I go use the restroom and they know that is they want that response or that yes from you then they'll use it correctly so I see a lot of that going on as well as touch - doing types of activities where you can manipulate things with your hands or being able to get to move around you know there are some kids and specifically African American kids that have to do a lot of moving. Well I know Mrs. - use a technique when they were writing where they actually cut their paper and manipulated the paper where the introduction, body and those kinds of things which helped - like some of those kids may of caught onto that only because they had to touch it you know so something through that touch transferred it to the brain and therefore they got it.

P3: Talking about vocabulary - about our modeling language - language we've also talked about using synonyms. We were talking to the kids about maybe they might not know coin and change really kind of mean the same thing and Mrs. - talked about that. Defining words and getting them used to the language of context clues and that means the same thing as sometimes we say in the neighborhood looking at the words that are in the same neighborhood that getting the terminology all the time, context clues or we're looking for the main idea of what this is mostly about so that they'll know the language and types of terminologies that have a much larger vocabulary and

understand about synonyms.

P1: Yeah most definitely the synonyms and antonyms because when we start speaking about vocabulary you know a lot of people think of it as just a list, a totally different list of words all the time but what. When I say vocabulary, I'm talking about you take the word utensil and you can use pot and you can use pan and you could. . . everything that goes into that the synonym issue is talking about because we find that the limited vocabularies are having problems with writing. So vocabulary is different than vocabulary in like just a spelling list of different words.

P4: And with understanding the passages on the TAAS that is very crucial to the synonyms when they are taking the TAAS test - the synonyms that are there may not be in their vocabulary so they have difficulty understanding the passage so if they have difficulty understanding the passage they can't answer the questions.

P5: A teacher is going to read a story to the children. A lot of the children don't really have a wide field of reference. We used to call it and it also helps to build vocabulary to have - read aloud with the children of things that are maybe a little higher than what they can read themselves and expand their horizons.

R: You're talking about building background knowledge, building prior knowledge.

P5: Connectors is what they need.

R: Right. Our children don't have that background or prior knowledge that they need sometimes to read a story so all reading is great to them.

P6: We really experiencing that this year. There were I think almost - every classroom is devoting 15 to 20 minutes a day and it is above their reading level are reading *Julia the Wall, and Island of the Blue Dolphins*, things that they normally - and I've even been told - use it as a teaching story because they do it in sixth and seventh grade however it can certainly be something read to them.

P7: Along the lines of the background knowledge I depend on that a lot are bringing realism t the stories like we just got finished with a short story. It's about these little mice. The country mouse going into the city for the very first time and he got lost in the city and you know and was very scared and they - how many of you have ever been lost in a grocery store or a mall or maybe even in the city yourself? Almost every hand went up and I said we how did you feel and I prodded around for all the responses and they kind of - because one of our class objections is to bring - for the child to realize the feelings that

the character is having in the story and to rely on their background knowledge and say well that's how I would feel. I find that to be very useful.

P2: In order for them to be able to score the threes and the fours on TAAS and be able to elaborate, you have to know vocabulary, it's so, so important, whether they spell the word correctly or not, they still at least should be in the neighborhood of it. You know the sounds of words and so often that is what is happening. We understand what the child is saying so we just kind of go with what we know they are saying rather than modeling what they should be saying.

P3: Along the line of feelings and emotions a lot of us were either glad or not glad. We're happy or we're not happy and it's very difficult for them to see in a testing format. How did the character feel and then you're dealing with emotions, frustration and they're not really sure. Some of them still don't know because it's not a part of their language but if you do that and do that on a pretty regular basis the hope is that some of those will become their words.

P2: Just like in Saxon. One of the reasons it works particularly well with these particular children is because of vocabulary and they hear it over and over and over again. I remember going to a classroom last year where they were actually writing a paper and it was a how to and one child used a great example and he used the term symmetrical. They were trying to make a valentine or something like that and so the kid was trying to say the how to and then the different steps and they were trying to say how to fold the valentine so that someone would know how they're supposed to do it. If they just read the directions and the child came up with the word symmetrically and I thought wow, you know that transferred over from math and at any other point in time would they have used that word. I thought that was really neat that - you know the vocabulary is there, the math has really improved.

P1: And probably they've heard the teacher use it a lot like she was saying that is you model and say the word over and over again and eventually some will get it. There is no doubt that some will get it and retain it.

P3: I was just making a list of things since I can't remember too well. Some things I wrote down. Oral daily reading by the teacher to give life experiences and present examples and this helps build vocabulary in students since they don't have these experiences when you're talking about things they have no idea what you're talking about. Verbally relating expectations of the teacher, giving praise to the kids, rewards, stickers, they like that. Even if it's just having a parent sign a paper they just like to be praised and rewarded and patted on the back for everything they get. Peer tutoring, reading partners. This kind of increases a comfort zone for them when they don't know how to read well so they seem to enjoy that. We have DEAR time which is drop everything and

read. This is drop everything and read. This is a silent reading time when they are - have all distractions eliminated and everybody is expected to read. This might be something they're not having at home. We have Accelerated Reading which is a program where they can be independent and do test - take and read a story, take a test and their independent to walk around the school and go to the library. They come in the mornings to this reading program and take tests or they can take tests after school so they like that independence. Sometimes they take the tests on computer in the classroom during their free time. Journal writing is something that they like to do. They summarize what things they've read about or sometimes they just write about a topic that the teacher gives so this just helps with sentence building and it just builds and builds and plus it's not graded so they can feel free to make spelling mistakes and sometimes they read. Some times orally, sometimes it's just to write their feelings for that day that they don't want the teacher to read. Ah, the main thing, I think they need is organization of a work space because they don't. This might not be a routine that they have at home. You might tell them some tips of things they could do at home to organize the work space, you have to teach them to organize their desk at school and clean it out periodically and take some things home. How to put certain things in folders a certain way. This kind of gives them a consistent routine. We model as we've discussed before the voice and tonation of reading. We try to get them to stop at periods so they can comprehend what they've read once they've called the words correctly. We do step by step demonstrations such as how to phrase and answer when you're answering a question by using the question in the sentence. They really need to be told that and taught how to do it and practice. We teach them how to do a look back in a text and find important heavy bold print information when they're answering in Science and Social Studies and figure out what that paragraph is about. We'd like to have them read biographies, stories about real people instead of just always fantasy stories. I think this is one big problem. We always talk about what our children don't know but if all they read is fantasy and fictional books then you know it's a lot out there for them to learn so we do bring in some real materials for them to study.

P1: In the direct teach method. I know discovery and all those kinds of things are fun. I'm not saying that you don't do that but the best way or what works best is if you do the direct teach to give them the background and then do the other things. Add the other layers on or do some discovery type things because they do need the preview of what's going on. You know the kids do.

R: Can you all talk a little bit more about the Accelerated Reader Program?

P5: Well basically what the Accelerated Reader program is - there is a selection of books that are in the library and they are organized by reading level. The children are told the color code. They are told what each reading

level color means on the book. The color dot on the book gives them an idea of what books they need to go to get to challenge them. There's a wide variety of books in this program so it touches upon their interest. It's not a book - okay we're all going to read such and such. Ah, it's go get what you want, what interests you and read. That's it. Her basic philosophy on reading is read, read, and read. And basically just getting the kids to realize how important and fun at the same time reading is and this AR program. This Accelerated Reader Program really gives a kid sometime academically and fun to do and if learning was nothing but a computer game we'd have geniuses.

P4: The other thing that I think especially with boys, I see a lot boys not buying into reading because of the language thing. The AR reading program kind of has this competition that they see, which it may not even be there, but they read into it some competitive level in there. Sometimes you can get them to buy into a program because they see that they're getting points and for whatever that does for them, that they're collecting points and they've got more points than somebody else. That seems to be something that anyone that doesn't enjoy it just for the enjoyment of reading it - this kind of hooks some by getting them to compete with someone or just tally them a point. As we said the stickers and the rewards that the concept that I need to know that I did well, I need to see that I am making gains. I think graphs and letting them keep a graph of their achievements and the first time I did that I could only get four of them correct but I'm doing something similar to that and look I'm doing six. A lot of the children in our building in particular seem to be very, very visual and they've got to see those visual indicators that I am achieving. I am doing well and if they see the incline on the graphs - I'm gathering more points with AR or I've collected so many stickers or for behavior we give them. We're on a card system and so if they look at their little grid on the board and they can count how many greens they have opposed to someone else's - all of it is a very visual check in point for and everybody else sees it too and they're at this level they keep everybody to see what they're doing. I think that's an incentive for them to do well. Some children reports are - I know it bothers them but it's not enough to make them change. But more than not I think it's working to get our children to want to improve and increase what was there before.

P1: Yeah I think it has a lot of elements. I think the AR Program provides first something they can choose. Their choice. You know you feel like you're the big man because you get to choose. No one is telling you what you have to read. You, secondly, they get to use a computer. All kids love - I've not met one that will turn down a computer. They get to use it and you know, you're not telling them that they can't. They have to go to the computer and take a test. It gives them immediate feedback of right and wrong or comprehension things and so it's a lot of different little things that go into that. The AR Program, I think, is an intrinsic kind of thing because we try to think of a lot of incentives. We were thinking okay what are we going to do to keep them reading, keep

them reading? Yes, competition is a part of it but we've not really had to use those rewards because once they've gotten into it and they've gotten hooked. We've really not had to use the rewards. They just keep coming back for more and more to the point that the daycare people and the parents are upset with us, but I told them I didn't mind them being upset with us because kids are sneaking to the lab. They are supposed to be going to recess instead of them going to recess they think that they can go down there fast enough to take a test. When the class comes back in, they go down fast enough to take a test and may get back without being noticed. I've had several of them that I've had to get on to because of that and you know, I can get onto them but at the same in the back of my mind I'm going, Wow! You know, this kid is getting in trouble because he wants to read!

P2: Another thing about the program is that - as we've said they pick and choose what they want, it offers a variety of books, sports figures, sites, information and then fictional things. After they take a test they can do a printout. It gives them all the book they have read, it gives them the scores, the possible points they get and could get. The possible score they could have made, the score they make. The best thing of all is that it shows the reading level so if they're reading at second grade level and they fail a test, they don't like it. Then, some of them if they're reading on a fifth grade level or a sixth grade book and make 100%, they're really proud and they know this was a hard book. I really did well on it and if they're reading on a low level it also lets them know you need to move up and try to get something more challenging so we've seen a lot of kids move up a step. They know which ones are certain levels.

P4: Yeah it may start off being the points but it would wind up being something else now that they're into it.

P3: And they might read ten books for points and get hooked on that series and they just want to keep going.

P5: And it includes a lot of the classics that you would love for kids to read. Sometimes you might start off like Oprah and advertise this book and you know get them really interested and read about situations and then after that many of them will want to go read some more about it in the same series.

P6: And now fourth graders will come to you and say now is this a fourth grade book because if it's not they really don't want it.

P3: And they brag.

P1: Yeah they are. It's really kind of an intrinsic kind of motivator.

P2: And the key to that is that they are independently reading.

P5: And we know that if they are independently reading they're going to get better and better and better.

P3: There was a marked improvement between DEAR time and AR time because DEAR time, even if they were sitting at their desks they were talking or looking around or daydreaming. Now it seems that they, I mean they are reading and it may be the test or the competition or whatever but it's not let's sit here for 20 minutes and read, it's can I sit here for 20 minutes and read.

P2: Well, this is like at daycare the lady says can you please tell me what's going on. I have had to come back here several times this week because kids have missed their daycare bus and she says what is this AR, that's all I hear. AR, AR and I said well, it's an Accelerated Reader thing. She says why don't they tell us beforehand to just come pick them up later. I said well, if they get a book that morning and they sneak and read it during the day and they finish it they don't know that they're going to do that. You know they really don't know when they're going to finish it. I said but now if you want to set limits and say okay on this day, I'll come get you late so you can stay and take the test you know maybe y'all can come to some common ground but other than that they're trying to sneak in there and they go out there and look at points. They are reading.

R: I know, so you're saying that you're not having any trouble getting them to get into DEAR now and they're wanting to extend DEAR. How wonderful!

P7: And they're sharing. Once they've read something great, the friend is always looking over their shoulder.

P6: They do. They pass it. He finished it, can I have it now?

P2: And yes they pass it. And this also gets parents involved where the children take home the printout sheet the parents can see what did they make on the test and then they look over here and say oh you read a second grade book and you're in fourth grade and you made 50? And then the parents come, you know, inspire them to move up and do better and then they'll say oh you read a fourth grade book over here and you made 100%. Well that's better, then the kids are able to boost themselves too and move on.

P3: Well not only that, when you have a parent that says my child can read and then you take that piece of paper home and he's a fourth grader and its like 2.0 down there and then that kind of hits you in the face like he's in fourth grade and he's only on a second grade level. Well yeah if he can read or he can call words but can he really read you know for a fourth grader to

comprehend.

P1: It takes that teacher off the hook with that. This is a test prepared by somebody else that's expecting you to read on this level and the parents get to see that their child checking out books that are a little bit too easy or things spending time on picture books and they need to move up to some better titles.

P3: That third six weeks what we do is we drop the actual reading instruction and then only AR and so we did oral reading and then we did choral reading and then we did AR and that was what their grade was based on their AR and so - because when Benchmark scores come in it was scary. It was a wakeup call and I think the consensus was you know you look at the first story it was great, the second story was semi okay and then once they get further into the test the stamina is gone and they're just marking answers like she said, who marks answers because they're tired and so now if they're saying can I read instead of 20 minutes can we do 30 minutes then they can sit there for two hours and read those stories.

P4: Yes and they don't get tired so quickly because they've been practicing reading.

P6: And then when they have to struggle through something where the readability is at a higher level like what it is on TAAS, then readability is from level four through six for the fourth grade students. They need to be able to sit you know, the attention span to do that.

P7: I don't really and I think its because in my reading class I read a whole lot on my own so a lot of the times DEAR is the best time of day because I read what I want to read. I don't read what they're reading and so I look forward to coming in and saying okay let's pick up our book and I know I can get some reading in so that modeling is that is very important to me and its also don't come up here and talk to me because I don't want to be bothered when I'm reading. So I've never had a problem with my students doing DEAR time for them to be reading because it is modeled in the room. Its a very nice thing to have but what we see more and more now is when I set my timer to say DEAR is over now I hear more awh, can we read for a few more minutes. I'm really getting to a good part or and I mean, I know that we don't want them to do this but as a teacher of reading its wonderful to see me standing up there teaching and someone has got his head hiding under the desk because they've got their book open or that they're sneaking when they're supposed to be listening but they're reading.

P1: It's carrying over into other subjects as far as like the writing you said that little CW was talking about doing characters, comparing I don't know who, you or themselves to Mr. Henshaw and what did she say about, yeah we were

comparing and it was taking our attributes and comparing it to the main character which we just brought from the story and Lee Boss is a child very similar to our children and he's _____ to divorce and he's having a very difficult time with it. He's looking for some kind of way to deal with this, all of the emotions that he's dealing with so he starts writing and in his writing he really comes to realize that it's not his fault. It's just something that's very, very close to home for so many of our own children because their parents are going through divorce but what we did was we made a T-chart and had our children come up with things that were similar to Lee and of course different and this one child that does have a difficult time expressing herself, said that the one thing she had in common with this character is that they both liked to read books. Well, that is a celebration in itself that we've got a fourth grader saying and this is not a fourth grader that was a very successful reader. She says she likes to read and then from that we're talking about elaborating as we talked about stating your points in your paper. Her elaboration was that she loves reading books because books take you to different places which is exactly what we say to our children. She said it and it comes out of a nine year old little girl. That was an unsuccessful student saying now I'm getting to go to different places because I can read.

P5: What you share though, she had asked her because she was very proud at how she had put her feelings down on paper. We always say, so and so come here, you've got to share this with our teacher and it makes the child feel very proud of their work. I remember . . . and she said it makes you feel like you're there. Reading books make you feel like you're there.

P5: I was really taken back by that.

P4: One assignment we had in our journals in my classroom, we write down idioms and figures of speech that help to make a story look more colorful. One of the lowest readers in the class one day was reading and he said you know teacher this book has some idioms in it. You see this right here has an idiom in it. I thought that was pretty good, especially for that child.

P7: Right, right.

P1: Yeah, it is amazing once you can get them into reading the things that you can get them to do. It's amazing.

P2: Just getting them motivated to read and once you get them motivated then that's when all the learning takes place.

P4: I had one child that was having reading difficulties, very passive learner. She wanted to take the test and said yes, I read this book. I did read this book. Okay and she'd made two point, you know 20 points and she had so many

tests that she had taken that she didn't pass. I said all right we need to talk. We're going to go pick a book that you really like, not just an easy book or a high number of points or whatever. You're going to pick something that interests you so I went and helped her and I advertised a few books and we chose them and I said you read that book and I'm going to read it too. We'll talk about it and so I did pull her in just a few minutes every day, now that was this chapter about? Now that's not what I read you know. Now who was the main character in the book? I think you need to read that again and you come back and tell me and just gave her a purpose for each chapter and we did this for several days until she finished it but toward the middle. I didn't even have to motivate her any more. She wanted to know if that ghost was really going to show up or whatever and from then on we've had, just talks here and there but she just certainly did much better. The comprehension actually developed. It's not just I have to call these words but now she's really thinking about what she's doing.

P4: Because she ran to me to show me those tests. I saw that.

R: You see that goes back to the modeling that you were talking about. When you started reading it you started modeling to her what you were gaining from it and then she started getting what she needed to get from it because she saw and understood what you were doing.

P4: Yeah, because I think she thought if she just called the words that she would automatically be able to take those tests and there's more than just calling words. She has to be able to pay attention to what she's saying to comprehend it.

P1: So you know, we really are thinking about doing more individual conferences with the children.

P3: Just like with the writing.

P4: With summaries, once a month, listen to them read a little bit, talk to them about their book, get them to talk about it because a lot of times they can't really write it down but they can sure tell you.

P2: Also the test taken might be giving them a consistency as to what kinds of question might be asked. I mean they might learn to start looking for little things or a little light bulb going off when a certain thing is said. I wanted to go back to ----- was talking about the DEAR time and silence and kids not bothering her when she is reading. A lot of children just don't have a space at home and the TV is never off or the radio is never off. There is never a silent time for them to sit somewhere even that 15 minutes and they have to be taught you don't interrupt because when you sit at your desk or you say I'm

going to open this then may I use the restroom, may I sharpen my pencil, just whatever when it's their time to come up and interrupt you and they have to realize they're interrupting other people. So it teaches them a time to be quiet, settle down and let other people share this time and so now you have them really sitting down and focusing on what they're supposed to do so they don't disturb other people.

P1: Reading has become not so much okay, you're going to read this and then I'm going to sting you with some questions immediately after this. I'm going to sting you again because I'm going to give you a worksheet which I think is very unfortunate. We've talked some about having someone come on our campus and really inservice on setting up book talks and reader workshops and things like that. When children realize that I'm reading this and it is not because I've got to be able to answer that teacher's question but I'm reading it because I enjoy reading. I want to be part of that story and it's really becoming part of them now. I don't think that was something that we did a few years ago. I don't think it's something I did a few years ago but as I see my children struggling more and more. My children enjoyed reading a few years ago. More of my children don't so it has become a sales job and the only way to sell it is to really show them how much I like it and I can't sell it if I'm going to test them on it each time. So we need to understand that a lot of the time those worksheets or those questions, those comprehension questions immediately after that to take away from a book.

R: To read.

P1: Just don't come to my desk because I'm not going to be happy with you if you take me out of my book. I really want to read this.

P5: Unless you're taking AR as a grade, you know, to have good talks. I mean participation is so objective. What kind of grades are they going to get? Is it based totally on participation or is it based on how much they did? You saw them reading and how interested they were and maybe they're just not good at sharing what they know and they're not comfortable talking in a group and that kind of thing.

P5: Now when they take a math test and they've got 10 minutes left over, they pick up their AR book whereas; before, they might pick it up and fake like they're reading and talk to their friends but now they're actually over there reading. It's really, you have to say put that book down. I told you don't take that book out. Do not talk to me about an AR test.

R: So they are picking up the books reading any time during the day.

P4: Yes, at first it wasn't for points but now I think it's because I like this book

and I really want to see how well I'm going to do when I take a test. Mostly I'm finished and I need to turn this one in and get another book so once they want to have books and take the test but mostly they're ready to get another book and move on.

P2: I remember we were talking to the parent group last night and I told them it was kind of like our Random Act of Kindness Program. When we first started it, kids were staging things to get their little stars. It didn't last very long then they started just doing things naturally and that's pretty much what's been happening with the reading.

P4: We talked about it where we emphasized AR the last six weeks. They enjoyed seeing they read five or six books. Not just one. I'm reading a chapter book so they brag about what they're doing.

R: They see themselves as readers now.

P4: Yes.

R: Do you do any kind of phonics in fourth grade?

P1: We were just discussing that today. We're hoping as we see students feed into our fourth grade that we're not going to see the weaknesses that we have seen in the past. We have a void. We see some of our fourth grade students who do not have any of those skills. Our teachers at our lower levels are addressing that with the Saxon Program. We do teach spelling. I try very often to show them how and why the words are put together, what are the similarities in those words. What are some of the rules that you could apply to those words and we group our words and again, I feel these students are very visual. We really do make boxes on our notebook paper and put them together and come up with a rule of why they're together. If I don't do that on Wednesday and Thursday, my spelling grades are lower. If I spend that time during the week talking about the rules and I don't really think it's because they studied more. I really do think it's because they see the relationship of the words. I see much higher scores. We're beginning to select a new spelling book and you see some good things coming out and we see some books that are really addressing the phonetic rules.

P2: Yeah. There are some good spelling books coming out now and it's kind of along the lines of Saxon because they group them. The kids that they have this year were involved in Saxon Phonics at mid year of last year, so they didn't get a full year of it. I'm sure they can kind of relate to the things. They did get to talk about the medial, the initial and you know the final. They need a process. We can't assume that they have the process you have to give them a process by which to figure things out and then pretty much they do okay.

R: So do you see phonics as a benefit to them?

P2: Most definitely.

P1: Most definitely.

P3: I do. I'm a teacher of 26 years and I think that these students really need a phonics program. They don't know how to break a word between syllables, they don't know what to do when they see a vowel. They just don't know how to decode a word.

R: Thank you for your participation; you've been very helpful!

M. Angelou

February 4, 1998

5 Participants

Time: 45 Minutes

R: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please discuss with me the literacy methods you believe are most effective with African American students.

P1: One of the new strategies we started using last year with our classes is Reader's Workshop in which children read books of their choosing at their own level. And we feel this is a real motivating factor for children who might not want to read out of the basal or as tested they like reading those crate books, they like reading, they really enjoy the conferencing with the teachers.

P2: Oh yes, every time we start Reader's Workshop, I have three African American boys that go, "Is it my turn to meet with you today?" They want to read out loud and they want to read the books they pick.

P1: If you haven't conferenced with them in three weeks but they know when it's their turn.

P3: They each have the opportunity to choose. In my classroom, my own personal library whatever it is they want to read. Their interest is quite varied. For instance, I have several that like science fiction, the animals, the adventures. Some of them will go with the sports. Last year the African American girls like the *Babysitters Club*. I don't know, it's a year to year thing on what the topics are.

P2: The conferencing also helps to build their skills. I don't know if it is because they chose them that they are interested in that. I am going to stop and ask what causes that person to stick with the relationship that is still a lot easier that it was in the baseline.

P1: Also, self selectiveness is a home reading program rather than sending home a basal. We can send home three books on their level during the six weeks and report on them. One thing that I have incorporated and which has gone over real well is that they expect you to build a project. They can do a project. They like to make the projects and they like to share them in the classroom all about their book and how they the did the projects.

P5: A lot of time they want a book that is not too hard for them but they will challenge themselves. So you pull their reading skills up at the same time.

P1: The way we have our libraries set up. One section on mysteries, science fiction, section on books about animals, and historical fiction. A lot of

mine like historical fiction, that's where a lot of the multicultural literature is. They are available for them in the classroom. There is one African American girl in my class who is very culturally aware and she likes to read about other cultures also. She's probably read this one particular Jewish book 10 times.

R: You're saying that you provide a variety of multicultural literature in your classroom.

P1: We have a diverse group of students. Our Social Studies and Science is primarily based on literature with trade books. We use a lot of the multicultural literature in those subjects. As we study the history of Texas, we include the literature that discusses the different Ethnic groups in Texas and how they came to be. For example, we plan to use *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* and follow with *The Drinking Gourd*.

P3: We have them to read about different immigrants. We have them to compare and contrast experiences of immigrant children with African American slaves after they were freed and became citizens of the United States. How was it different and how was it the same? it really gave my students insight.

P4: Another motivational thing that we use is the 600 minute club and they get free ticket to Six Flags. They work really hard to get their free tickets.

P2: We try to get Mom and Dads involved too. The parents have to sign if they've read. This helps the parents to be more aware.

P4: We use the Guided and Shared reading where they work in small groups.

P1: This helps everybody in the classroom.

P3: Their background knowledge is so varied and limited in some cases.

R: What do you do to enhance background knowledge?

P3: It helps when they share writing. It helps my students to hear about the experiences of others. They build background from the literature.

P4: I use material to help build background.

P1: I think that if they have a lot of opportunities to put their hands on books, this will really allow them to learn a lot. They'll go to that bookshelf when they only have a minute. They'll go over there to get a book to read or they'll get the Atlas and start looking at a map. Some of them will just get a dictionary and go over the words.

R: Practice is so important.

P1: I group by level or by skills. If there are some who don't understand a certain skill; I'll pull those while the others are working on reading. The students may be on different levels.

P1: The last thing I have is Writers Workshop which gives the students the opportunity to express themselves. They're allowed to choose what they want to write about. Sometimes they're writing to a prompt that has been given. They have the opportunity to share their writing with a whole group or a small group. They can also share with a partner. We also use the peer editing which helps them to learn to edit their own work and somebody else's. They examine sentence structure.

P5: Sometimes I'll read it myself, but I don't include the student's name and we'll critique it.

P1: Sometimes we make overheads to show them the editing process.

P3: We read to them and show them the strategy. We also do this with writing. In Guided Reading, we model different skills. We also model 1 on 1 when they're still having problems with some things.

P1: If they don't have phonics they need it. I have been doing quite a bit with phonics particularly suffixes, prefixes, and syllables.

P2: We have them make their own words like automobile, cut the letters, and tell them to make words that have 'au' in them. That usually is our spelling words. They always try to race to see what the magic word is.

R: You are teaching some phonics.

P5: During Readers Workshop when we conference, we talk to them about the hard 'c' sound and others.

P4: It's mostly included into spelling. Our students have very poor phonics background.

R: I really appreciate your participation in this study. Thanks for your time.

P. Wheatly

February 4, 1998

4 Participants

Time - 45 Minutes

R: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please discuss with me the literacy methods you believe are effective with African American students.

P3: One thing I would like to comment is the fact that I've noticed that it doesn't matter which child it is, African American, White whatever, those who come from families who give them lots of experiences, lots of work, and everything is an educational experience. They have it easier than everybody else. It doesn't matter who they are. Those are the easiest ones to teach.

P1: We do a lot of novel units.

R: Talk about those.

P1: We are not huge basal users. We use a lot of novels. We have a reading buddy program where we're paired up with first graders to help them read, encourage them to read, do reading, enriched activities, but the humorous part of this is the fourth graders learn a lot about reading. It's like they can put themselves back into the shoes of the first graders and see the first graders sounding these words out and I think that really enriches our students' reading. When they start reading orally how they attack words. I think being with the first graders sort of helps them see the process again. Anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour with our class that we're paired up with the reading buddies and they become just mentors and best friends. I think that's one of the best things we do in reading, usually that's short books that we can do in that amount of time.

P4: Language experience activities, making posters or...

P3: We have an oral reading strategy that we do called popcorn reading. It sort of just to keep them on track. The whole goal is to keep them focused, but they really seem to love it. I let them choose three sentences on a page. That's a minimum that they can read is three sentences. The maximum they can read is a page, some students that are a little fearful of reading orally don't feel like they have that whole of reading.

P2: Is this what you're talking about?

R: What you're talking about is independent reading. You're talking about different ways of practicing reading.

P1: Yes

P2: Is that what you want?

R: Yes

P3: In my class we have oral reading every week where they have to prepare something for one minute and it can be a poem, it can be a paragraph or whatever. The reading I started doing was because in my writing stuff, we found out that the reason why they can not figure out what's good writing is because they don't have a lot of experience. So I was going how can I give them a lot of experience and reading lots of different types of reading so it doesn't matter what they read. So that's a modeling sort of thing because all of the kids see the other kids reading and listening to them read. It's also giving them a lot of experience of different kinds because I have kids that are bringing in fiction and non - fiction.

P1: It's just amazing.

P4: They'll read a little part of a chapter of a book and the other kids want to read that book, and going oh, oh, oh that's really good. They've really gotten into poetry.

P1: They love poetry.

P3: They are real heavy into poetry. That's something else that we do that I feel like is a modeling sort of thing for the kids that maybe come from homes where they have been read to a lot. Now they're getting a lot of different kinds of reading.

R: Plus they have to practice reading independently to be prepared.

P2: Sometimes you do find problems because the kids that maybe don't get the support from home.

P1: Nobody is helping them at home.

P1: And of course we all know that's the biggie. If we can just get those parents to read to them at home when they're little and then sit down with them and read, that will help a lot.

P3: Yeah. It will make such a difference in these kids' lives.

P1: And it doesn't take hours.

P1: That's what I tell my parents when they come in. You will have them read for 15 to 20 minutes a day and I don't care what they read, just as long as they're reading something that they are interested in. You are going to see a difference in these kids.

P2: We do peer reading in the classrooms. Sometimes, some days we just read with your partner and they'll sit down all over the room on the floor with just their partner and read to each other. We do a lot of that.

P1: We do that with our novels too. I'll say read a chapter. Partners have these two chapters today and they sit side by side and read them where the other person can hear you.

P1: So that your faces are close to each other and you don't hear all the way across the room. You don't hear them so much. I even let them do their questions together and discuss them for a few minutes because there is only going to be like two or maybe three questions on the board. They discuss them first because they go back to their seat and write any answers and then that gives them some of that oral language also. For that little kid that really isn't interested in learning a lot.

P2: Classrooms are set up in cooperative groups.

All: That's right (in unison).

P1: We actually read, she and I do a lot of partner stuff. Partner reading and we're reading the same novel and sometimes we've brought our students together. Partnered them up versus always doing the same in the class. Well, this is not necessarily reading but even for math it helped. One time she was a week ahead of me in math and my students came in and her students taught my students how to multiply and I thought to myself, I've never had such a class multiply as well. I know it's because her students taught them not me. It was because they have that one on one with someone that was their peer. They weren't threatened, they felt very comfortable in the situation.

R: That's the way the student explained it. It was more to their level of knowledge.

P1: Yes exactly, used their vocabulary and their language.

P3: We do a thing at the end of the year that we call Book Chats and it's kind of like a book club. They pick their own books and they have certain papers that go with every book and then they read their book. They discuss the chapters and they work through some of the questions. They read another part of the book and it's set up like a contract and they're on their own and they

learn so much from it.

P2: They have a whole variety of books.

P3: They get to pick whichever books they want.

P1: When I do buy books, I have become more and more aware of trying to make sure that I have something that is for my African American, Hispanic, and my Asian students. Books that talk about the different cultures and how we're alike and how we're different and some of those books bring those in and I try to some of those.

R: And even just books that show African American, Hispanic, or Indian, whatever characters in the story.

P1: Right

P4: I probably bring that more into social studies than I probably do into reading. Partly because I'm not aware as to what even just a race that the author is of the book. A lot of the characters if they're not pictured, they're not necessarily described.

P3: They could probably be any race or color.

P3: We did a large study of cultures, they have been bringing in their family histories and sharing. We made a big graph and that was very, very wonderful for a lot of the kids.

R: So that was a good lesson.

P3: It really was. It actually explained that you have a heritage, you have background. We actually took about a week or so on that too because they brought in things from their culture. They brought in food from their culture and we all tasted different things. I brought in baby books and had them look up their names, what their names meant and they all had asked their parents how they got their names, where their names came from.

P1: Plus one of the books we read has a lot of different countries in it. We do a major research on all different countries and it's just - they're always so interested in all of it anyway.

P4: I have book reports. I don't kill them. I only just do two a semester. One usually is just simply broad non-fiction, then we do a fiction. They get to choose those books, they usually have a project they bring in, a presentation, your normal kind of book report routine.

R: Self selection is always important.

P1: We do a thing on inventions and the inventors and there's wide variety.

P1: A lot of it has to go with our themes or whatever. A lot revolves around our novels. They're a very large part of what we do. Writing and everything.

P2: I started something different last year with that. Book festivals.

P2: There were like five or six books for each classrooms and they came with a little packet in there. A little plastic take home thing so I've taken like two small books and put in there. They have cards that have activities on it. I've stuck those cards in and if it is a thick book then there's just one. We have a book report due like once every, about once every five weeks. They choose an activity from each side of the card so if they've got a thick book and they've got two activities. If they've got two little books then they've got four activities. None of them are break your back kind of things and then they have to share one of them orally on the day that they're due and they love it. The parents are going these kids love these book reports.

R: Whatever hooks them.

P2: They really have enjoyed doing that.

R: They're motivated to read.

P2: They've read about six to eight books since school started.

P3: They don't feel overwhelmed.

P2: They've got a lot of time to do it and also they like the activities that are on there. It's not a write me a book report telling me the name and the author.

All: Right (in unison).

P3: It's more fun.

P2: They can make projects, they can make posters, all sorts of things. One of them is a non-fiction book and it's telling different stories. One of the activities is to come up with a big poster that has items on it and how much they cost. They have to make up a math problem and they love to stand up here and read out these math problems. I work them in my head. If I buy three so and so's how much is it going to cost and I go \$4.79, is that right and they go yes you got it right. But it's always fun for them to do those kind of activities.

P4: It's a little different from your normal book report.

P3: We take time out of our silent reading at the end of silent reading to share what we read for the day just so they can share with each other.

P4: We do have 30 minutes of silent reading every day.

P1: Well, we really try to give them that reading time every day.

P2: Mine is pretty much do or die. Right.

P3: I get so mad when they interrupt me.

P1: Well the reason I said that is because most of the time it's time between recess and co-curricular and we have 30 minutes so if we get in there late then it's cut down on that time but we do give them some time, other times during the day too.

R: Oh okay, so they can practice.

P3: Yeah. Any time you finish your work, get that book out. Also we started using our SRA again.

P2: Yeah, we sure did.

P3: And usually it's a morning activity. When they come in, in the morning they get out SRA and work on it and they like it.

P2: I think part of it is because it's self-paced and they feel a sense of accomplishment.

P1: Yes and then we start spelling.

P3: And that's probably the one place that phonics has been for us. Why this word is written this way.

P1: We think prior knowledge is lower than it has ever been.

P2: And we know that's because both parents are working.

P3: Television is a scapegoat for a babysitter.

P2: And the computers wouldn't be bad if the kids actually got something besides the same game over and over again.

P1: They're not doing anything intellectual. A parent sitting with them talking to them. I mean that's what we're seeing, kids are coming to school without the oral language and if they don't have the oral language they can't write and if they can't write they can't read.

P1: I will tell you at the beginning of a year we have a parent meeting that I feel like is a big deal for us. We ask all of the parents to come. We sit in here and talk to the parents and told them how we teach and what we expect and we said things like if they leave their lunch at home don't bring it to them. If they leave their homework at home do not bring it to them. They won't starve one day and let them take the consequences for forgetting because that's the only way they're going to learn. They don't learn if you make up for them every time.

P4: Yes.

R: Thank you all for taking the time to participate. I appreciate you very much.

T. Morrison

February 9, 1998

5 Participants

Time: 45 Minutes

R: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please discuss with me the literacy methods you believe are effective with African American students.

P1: We did Emmitt Smith Reading Program. Twenty minutes. We give prizes. A little boy on our campus won a football. You could win a visit from Emmitt Smith.

R: That was on the news.

P1: Yeah, that was really good.

R: So tell me the time and how that worked.

P2: In the afternoon right after recess. They pick their own book, library book effectively.

R: Good. What about when you are doing a reading project or reading assignment?

P2: Yes, a lot of time. Reading is done together, partners reading; buddy reading, especially if someone has trouble with their reading or read slow. We will try to match him with somebody.

P5: We listen to tapes.

R: How long is your literacy period each day? Is it first thing in the morning?

P1: After we finish the lesson, after we come back at 10:30, they have a snack and that is when I have my kids. Mr. announced the Six Flags reading, 600 minutes and they read.

P2: About 30 minutes.

P4: Library

R: That is still their literacy time.

P3: We mentioned phonics and I thought of one student that I have who is African American that really had trouble reading. I thought he really needed

basic phonetics until he learns how to read so I had to that way.

R: Can you see any improvement?

P3: Yes, there is a lady that comes into to read with him on Monday mornings and she can tell too. He is not quite as fluent as most 10 years old.

R: What type of literacy materials do you use?

P5: A variety. This month, in particular, we are focusing on African Folk Tales, but I feel it is important that they get a variety of literature.

P4: Chapter Books.

R: I realize that you all were nervous about this interview, but I appreciate you all agreeing to participate in this study. Thanks.

VITA

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Doctor of Education

Thesis: EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS WHICH ENHANCE THE LITERACY SKILLS OF FOURTH GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AS IDENTIFIED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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