Creating Church and School Partnerships to Enhance Educational Achievement of African American Students

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the North American Community: Uniting for Equity.

North American Community: Uniting for Equity

Journal of Interdisciplinary Education

Trenace Lewis, Ed.D.

Abstract

This qualitative descriptive case study focused on the impact of urban church/school partnerships on the Black/White achievement gap in the United States of America. The problem is the disparity in the academic achievement of African American students as compared to European American students reflected in national test scores. The racial delineation of this disparity might imply inequity in educational opportunity which is in opposition to the democratic ideal upon which the United States of America was founded. The presumption of equity in education would be contingent upon the degree to which it benefits the diverse totality of its constituents thereby greatly reducing, if not eliminating, an achievement gap. Fifteen men and women were interviewed to understand their perceptions of how their church/school partnerships worked together to accomplish this task.

It has been 400 years since the first Africans set foot upon the soil of what is now the state of Virginia; to cultivate that soil first as indentured servants and then as chattel slaves translating the land into a lucrative and dominating world power (Bennett, 2012). As the nation commemorates 400 years of evolution in aspiring to the democratic ideal, it is important that equity in educational opportunity felicitous to productive citizenship be consistently scrutinized to ensure moral integrity in actualizing the nation's basic constitutional tenets. It is to that end that this article focuses on the impact of two urban church/school partnerships on the Black/White achievement gap.

The problem is the persistent disparity in the academic achievement of African American students as compared to European American students reflected in national assessment test scores (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessman, 2019). Mathematics scores for fourth and eighth-grade students were higher in 2019 than in the early 1990s. However, the average mathematics score for Black fourth-graders was 24 points lower than for White fourth-graders in 2019 (Mathematics and Reading Assessments, 1990-2019). Likewise, White eighth grade students scored 32 points higher on the average in mathematics assessment than Black eighth graders (Mathematics and Reading Assessments, 1990-2019). Fourth grade reading assessment scores for 2019 reflected a 26-point gap and eighth-grade reading assessment scores reflected a 28-point gap on the average between Black and White students with Black students consistently trailing behind (Mathematics and Reading Assessments, 1990-2019).

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS, 2018) followed the academic progress of students who began kindergarten in the fall of 2011 through the spring of 2016. The disparity in the reading assessment scores between Black and White students increased from a 16-point standard deviation in the fall of the kindergarten year to a 35 point standard deviation when the

students were completing their fifth-grade year. Likewise, the disparity in mathematics assessments between Black and White kindergarteners increased from a five-point standard deviation to a 65-point standard deviation by the time those same kindergarteners were completing fifth grade (ECLS, 2018).

The fact that the disparity in achievement is racially delineated suggests that there continues to exist inequity in educational opportunities and in social economic opportunity (Hanushek, et. al, 2019; Kozol, 2012). The essence of the democratic ideal is the achievement of equity in the extension of specified basic rights to every individual felicitous to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Education is one of these rights (Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018). The nation united in maximizing the potential of the totality of its human capital will be that nation that endures (Comer, 2004). It is, therefore, necessary to continually revisit the problem of educational inequity reflected by the Black/White achievement gap and be unrelenting in pursuit of its eradication.

Fifteen men and women were interviewed to understand their perceptions of how the church/school partnerships with which they were affiliated bridged the Black/White achievement gap. Six themes emerged from the interviews as the details of each partnership were explored for elements of convergence and divergence: 1) high expectations of student learning, 2) the cultivation of strong relationships with villagers (adults in the school, church, and home with the common goal of advancing efficacy in the children in their community), 3) effective communication of all villagers through a shared vision and mission, 4) village involvement that facilitated holistic learning experiences, 5) effective collaboration of villagers, and 6) the need for adequate funding.

The establishment of meaningful relationships with village members as sustained by effective communication and collaboration was identified as the most influential dynamic in the promotion of high achievement. It was acknowledged that increased funding is vital to finance enrichment activities, to promote achievement in schools dominated by African American students. Black churches were found to be uniquely postured to mediate the relationships in those schools and help construct positive self-identities in African American children influential to high achievement.

Literature Review

The task of alleviating the academic achievement gap that exists between African American students and their white peers has spanned American education during the last 50 years (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hanushek et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Paige & Witty, 2010). The gap remains most pronounced in urban public schools where black student density and poverty are most concentrated (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, & Chan, 2015). The fact that Black students are far less likely than their White peers to achieve the required levels of proficiency, particularly in literacy, is therefore problematic due to the potential to negatively impact all other areas of a student's academic performance and life (Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018). The problem of the achievement gap is further magnified by the fact that data substantiating its existence is only collected on students who remain in school. Dropouts are disproportionately more likely to represent minorities (Siegel & Welsh, 2014).

The Cycle: School Failure/Juvenile Delinquency/Mass Incarceration/Family Demise

Research demonstrated that high school dropout rates among African American high school students exceed the rate of White students who drop out of high school (Status and Trends, 2019). School failure is the number one contributor to juvenile delinquency (Alexander,

2010; Siegel & Welsh, 2014). Juvenile delinquency has contributed to the mass incarceration of young Black men, which fosters the disproportionate ratio of Black families that are being sustained by Black mothers and who are victimized by poverty, which perpetuates generational and cyclical destruction for Black families (Alexander, 2010; Paschall et. al, 2018). These facts highlight what some researchers consider to be the most urgent threat posed by the achievement gap and its continued existence. That threat is the failure of public education to fulfill its constitutional responsibility to promote the common good (Comer, 2009), constituting its persistence as the greatest civil rights issue of the 21st century (Paige & Witty, 2010). Emphasis is placed on the achievement gap to highlight the more significant issue that a disproportionate number of Black youth (and Hispanic and poor White youth) are failing to achieve a level of educational mastery that will enable them to lead independent and productive lives

National Acknowledgement of the Gap

The achievement gap became a national focus in 1959 with the launching of SPUTNIK by the Soviet Union (Johanningmeier, 2010; Manning, 2001). National leaders viewed this as a crisis in American education. It was determined that priority be given to 1) pursuing a more intensive level of accountability and rigor; 2) training more scientists and engineers; and 3) increasing national security (Kimmelman, 2006). Efforts to close the perceived gap between the Soviet Union and the United States resulted in legislative actions such as the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 (Kimmelman, 2006), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)(Kimmelman, 2006) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, Kimmelman, 2006). Efforts such as increased funding, faith-based initiatives, and educational partnerships became a part of America's educational landscape (Johanningmeier, 2010).

The concept of educational partnerships was first introduced by Dr. James Comer in 1966 who posited that there are environmental and economic factors that delay the social development of many minority children thereby contributing to their potential for academic excellence or failure (Comer, 2004). He further theorized that children who have been deprived of healthy, holistic development benefit from the collaborative efforts of home, school, and varied community organizations and agencies designed to support the various aspects and stages of child development. Comer's whole school reform program, in combination with Edward Ziglar's early childhood Head start Program resulted in CoZi, a whole school reform tool useful in facilitating the success in closing the achievement gap experienced by one of the schools in this research study (Comer, 2004; 2009).

The benefit of educational partnerships demonstrated by CoZi was substantiated by Joyce Epstein's theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (2012). Epstein's work corroborated that children benefit from the educational partnership of those institutions that share the common goal of helping them to grow and maximize their potential (Epstein, 2012). Tajfel's theory of social identity (Brown, 2019) suggests that because the social identity of Black children is more likely to have been shaped by societal forces that have generationally resulted in their poverty and oppression, these children are more at risk of academic failure and would benefit from educational partnerships (Comer, 2004). A review of literature validated the Black church and public schools as forming a uniquely effective partnership in the war to close the Black/White achievement gap.

Origin of the Gap

Researchers have constructed a compelling thesis that connects the origin of the Black/White achievement gap with the roots of African American history (Manning, 2001).

These researchers postulated that an understanding of the racist underpinnings of American slavery which have created a legacy of retarded educational development for African Americans is essential to closing the achievement gap (Manning, 2001; Morton, 1995). Researchers have further maintained that this legacy is preserved by social and psychological oppression and enforced illiteracy (Briggs, 1997) resulting in the following theories.

Achievement Gap Theories

Theories explaining the existence of the gap emerged with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Beecher & Sweeney, 2008; Dee, Jacob, Hoxby, & Ladd). These theories have been categorized into five general groupings the origins of which can each be traced to the residual effects of slavery stemming from the psychology of oppression and white supremacy. The five categories are: social economics, socio-pathology, genetic inferiority, Black identity, and educational deprivation. **Social economics** attributes the gap to the historical oppression that legally forbade Blacks from learning to read or write during slavery and , later forced Black children to work in fields while their White peers attended school (Anderson & Moss, 1999, Bennett, 2012; Davis, 2010; Briggs, 1997; Foote, 1990; Goldenberg, 1978; Lincoln, 1861; Sertima, 1976). **Socio-pathology** attributes the gap to statistically proven social ills that are pervasive and inherent in Black culture, and are more pronounced in the economically disadvantaged, mitigating against academic achievement. **Genetic inferiority** attributes the gap to the empirically unsupported belief that Black children lack the intellectual capacity of their White counterparts. **Black identity** dually explains the achievement gap as a deliberate rejection of aspirations for academic excellence by Black children who are raised to believe that hard work is not rewarded and being smart in school is an attempt to act White, resulting in a perception as cultural incompatibility (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In opposition to cultural

incompatibility is cultural compatibility. Black identity proponents of cultural compatibility maintain that a strong educational achievement orientation is resident in the African American community to counter the domination of United States' schooling practices by European American culture; that the educational orientation serves to facilitate success in the Black community and those students who excel exemplify models of success. (Whaley & Noel, 2012).

Educational deprivation is based on the belief that all children can and will learn at high levels (even the most economically disadvantaged African American child) when every child receives the opportunity to attain the type of education necessary for his or her achievement (Comer, 2004).

Church and School Partnership

A review of literature indicates that the Black church has historically played a crucial role in shielding powerless, disenfranchised, and economically challenged African Americans from the adversities of oppressive social, political, and economic forces that impacted their identity, shaped their worldview, and defined their existence (Comer, 2004; Davis, 2010). The Black church has also historically served as an agent of social change and advanced the pursuit and power of education as a catalyst for positive change (Bennett, 2012; Mitchell, 2004), such as providing an education for African American children prior to their inclusion as recipients of public education (Mitchell, 2004). The Black church is therefore armed with the social and cultural capital necessary to metaphorically purchase the freedom of its children from the generational bondage that has been inflicted by inequitable educational opportunities, thereby helping to reduce, if not eliminate, the Black/White achievement gap. (Jeynes, 2010)

This current study investigates how inner-city churches, working in partnership with public and private schools, help to facilitate higher academic achievement in African American

105

economically disadvantaged students by providing a framework for partnership interaction, the utility of which may potentially serve as an emulative model for other urban church and school partnerships.

Data Collection and Analysis

Utilizing the qualitative method and Dressman's Social Theory (2008), three theoretical propositions were formulated from synthesis and summation of the literature review pertinent to this research study. These theoretical propositions served as the basis for conclusion drawing and verification in the analysis of the data: 1) that academic excellence must be preceded or accompanied by healthy and holistic child development and fostered by compassionate adults who contribute to the shaping of the child's positive social identity and sense of self (Brown, 2019; Comer & Ben Avie, 2010; Brown, 2019); 2) that every child can learn and will learn when adults clarify what children are expected to learn, teach children in accordance with the way that they learn, and use formative assessment and informal methods to ascertain that learning has transpired (Chenoweth, 2009); and 3) that schools functioning as professional communities of learning, in partnership with community agents; in this cases, churches, will cultivate the unity, sense of mission, vision, and collaboration necessary for learning (Comer, 2009; Davis, 2010; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Epstein, 2012).

The data for this interview study were compiled from the responses of 15 participants, 10 women and 5 men, representative of three categories: church/school - leaders, teachers, and parents. Instrumentation consisted of a total of 21 standardized, open-ended, and substantive questions divided into three sets that were specific to each category of participants. Data were collected via audio recordings and subsequently transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Interview questions are included in the appendix. Tables 1 and 2 reflect

the demographics of each study participant, as distinguished by the partnership and organization

with which each was (is) affiliated.

Table 1

Partnership 1: New Testament Church and Barr Park Elementary

Organization	Participant #	Gender	Position	Age
New Testament Church	1	Male	Pastor	60-65
Barr Park Elementary	2	Male	Principal	65-70
Barr Park Elementary	3	Male	Teacher	45-50
Barr Park Elementary	4	Female	Teacher	65-70
Barr Park Elementary	5	Female	Teacher	50-55
Barr Park Elementary	6	Female	Parent	45-50
Barr Park Elementary	7	Female	Parent Liaison	65-70

Table 2

Partnership 2: Revelation Church and Reality Christian Academy

Organization	Participant #	Gender	Position	Age
Revelation Church	8	Male	Pastor	70-75
Reality Christian Academy	9	Female	Principal	65-70
Reality Christian Academy	10	Female	Assistant Principal	75-80
Reality Christian Academy	11	Female	Teacher	40-45
Reality Christian Academy	12	Female	Teacher	50-55
Reality Christian Academy	13	Male	Parent	50-55
Revelation Church	14	Female	Teacher/Mentor	70-75
Revelation Church	15	Female	STEMA Consultant	50-55

Questions were divided into three protocol sets specific to three categories of partnership

roles. The set of questions specific to the pastors/church Leaders, principals, and the assistant

principal all of whom capacitated comprised category one (leadership category) were denoted as

protocol set one; the set of questions directed to the teachers of both partnerships were denoted

as protocol set two; and protocol set three was composed of those questions that were addressed

to the parents of both partnerships. Interview responses to each of the protocol sets yielded a

thick and rich description of individual partnership experiences. The responses were analyzed in

accordance with a framework for procedural analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), modified, to ensure its utility for this research study, from four to two phases: data transcription, and data reduction.

Data were transcribed from the audio-recorded interviews using Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS, NVivo 11). Additionally, CAQDAS (NVivo 11) was used to advance the data reduction phase through the identity and extraction of key words and phrases from the transcribed data. The failure of software usage to establish meaningful patterns and a consistent context was followed by a manual review which yielded key concepts through a reiterative process until meaningful patterns and themes began to emerge.

Core Themes

An initial interpretation of the data identified six themes emerging from a description of the quintessential components of their church/school partnerships that the participants perceived were critical to the high academic achievement of their students. Those themes were: 1) high expectations for student learning, 2) relationship-building, 3) village involvement that enabled holistic learning, 4) communication, 5) collaboration, and 6) the need for funding.

Theme 1: High expectations for student learning. Thirteen of 15 participants shared that they collaborated to determine how each could, in his or her respective role, let students know that they were expected to attain standards of excellence in their academic performance and that mediocrity would be unacceptable. Participants shared that they consistently articulated and demonstrated to their African American students faith in their students' ability to excel academically and high expectations that they would. One pastor said that he believed the link between their high expectations of the students and the improved academic achievement of the students was self-efficacy. "When we believed they could do it [improve academically], they

believed they could do it." Another participant shared, "We inspired the students to want to learn." Another said, "We told them they could do it. We told them over and over and over again until they finally started believing us. Next, they started believing in themselves. The rest is history."

Theme 2: Relationships. Thirteen of the 15 participants interviewed in this research study shared that relationship-building was perceived as having the greatest impact on student achievement. Participants who were the pastors and principals of both partnerships shared that they sensed a relatedness to the struggles faced by African American students in their efforts to achieve academic success and believed that the formation of their church/school partnerships was inspired by an intense commitment to that success. Participant two, principal of the public school, responded to the first question of the interview protocol which asked about the origin of his church/school partnership by saying, "I went from being motivated by goals for academic improvement to being motivated by relationship." The principal said, "My motivation changed from an academic to a relational focus" and he continued, "I spent evenings and weekends riding through the neighborhoods." Principals of both schools in this study described how they believed relationships with caring adults led to improved academic achievement. Participant two, the principal at the public school, said that he asked teachers to submit the names of "students who were remedial, deficient, whatever, and the teachers would send me a list." The principal went on to explain that he "prioritized this list" and groups of children were assigned to the various deacons and trustees who came to tutor. "The same students would work with the same deacons on an ongoing basis. They didn't have a lot of new faces all the time."

Theme 3: Village involvement that enabled holistic learning. A definition of the village, as contextualized by the totality of the responses from participants in this research study is a

109

network of individuals related in their ability to provide cultural capital to generations of African American children that will ensure their success in life. The participants in the public school/church partnership openly discussed their partnership's commitment to home, school, and community involvement and repeatedly referenced as fundamental to that commitment, belief in the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." All the participants in partnership one referred to themselves as "villagers.", a title they say was coined by their principal during the partnership. The titles of "village" and "villagers" will, therefore, be used to discuss the participants' responses. The collaboration of the village to create more positive attitudes toward school, learning, and higher academic motivation, was interpreted by the author as defining holistic education.

The principal and assistant principal of the private Christian school/church partnership discussed the value of what they termed as holism in education. In their individual responses, the principal and the assistant principal both equated holism in the education of their students with the creation of multiple avenues for student success. Participant 11, a teacher in the private school partnership said that she believed that taking ownership of and preparing for special assembly programs throughout the school year motivated the children to improve academically. She said, "I have witnessed how participation in these programs has changed children's attitudes about themselves and about learning." Participant 11 continued in her response by saying that in performing on assembly programs, students become aware that, "I may not be the smartest reader or mathematician, but I am a great whatever, or I'm good at this." The teacher went on to say that this attitude made the students try harder in the classroom. "When they know that academics don't define them, they are not afraid to try." All 15 participants self-identified as

villagers and, in enumerating what they perceived as the benefits of their church/school partnerships relative to high academic achievement, mentioned the "village."

Theme 4: Communication. Thirteen of 15 participants expressed that communication was fundamental to helping economically disadvantaged students in their partnership excel in academic achievement despite the social ills that characterized many of their home lives. The participants shared a common goal of communicating to students daily that they were accepted, capable, and successful, and had a contribution to make to society. The goal was intended to instill self-efficacy in their students. One teacher participant commented on how directness of communication was articulated at the monthly meetings. "We could always depend on hearing two questions: Have we clarified what we want our students to know and be able to do? What has been the most effective response for students who are not succeeding?" The teacher went on to share how church deacons that tutored students for remediation were always a part of these meetings. The principal of partnership one shared that the directness with which he approached the church congregation to initiate the partnership was the same directness of communication that he demonstrated to sustain the partnership. "It was not a hard thing to be direct and to the point when I communicated with my employees and our church partners because all communication centered around the vision and mission that had already been established." The principal said that the vision was his destination for the students and the mission was "how we get them there." Disciplinary communication was strategic, a collaborative effort toward a common end, the promotion of self-respect, and self-regulation or self-government.

Theme 5: Collaboration. Thirteen of 15 participants from both partnerships who were school administrators, teachers, and church partners, including the parent liaison, expressed that collaborative teams guided the daily practice of the partnership. Participant two, principal of the

111

public school, said, "I initiated collaboration by getting all representatives from the partnership, including a student, to brainstorm, develop and write a mission for the school." The principal stated, "my vision was to see children happy while learning." He said he realized that "teaching them to become academically self-sufficient was not enough." He said, Students who were happy learners would be more productive human beings beyond the classroom setting. He remarked that once everyone came into agreement concerning the vision, "We came up with ideas of how we were going to get there." All the partnership representatives collaborated to formulate a statement that described their common mission.

The principal in partnership one remarked that collaborating to formulate a mission statement marked the "beginning of change" that he hoped would motivate achievement. "Ownership is key. When people own something, they are more committed… It was important that the adults in this partnership present a united front in communicating with these students. These kids were used to instability and mixed messages." The principal said that he believed partnership adults would convey more passion in relating to the students if those adults could take ownership of what they were expected to communicate to the students. The collaboration was mandatory, crafted into the school day, and included deciding what students would be expected to learn and how villagers would instruct students in their respective roles. Topics for collaboration included the use of assessments, plans for remediation, the execution of disciplinary strategies, and the promotion of professional development.

Theme 6: Funding. Data collected from 10 of 15 participants supported the theme that multiple funding sources are necessary to adequately provide for quality teachers, teacher training, resources, and enrichment required to educate economically disadvantaged African American children. Participants shared how their students, after having previously received

national acclaim in progressing from a failure status to the 96th percentile on nationally standardized assessments, returned to failure status when the funds depleted. The principal, promoted to deputy superintendent, felt that he was unsuccessful in that position because he was not allocated the funds necessary to replicate his church/school partnership program on a district-wide level.

Participants representing the private Christian Academy expressed that even the African American parents who were considered middle class and paid full tuition found it difficult to finance all the extra-curricular projects and activities that made the school outstanding in helping students to excel academically. Despite the challenges posed to high student achievement by insufficient funding, participants credited their success in closing the achievement gap to the partnership of church and school. The commitment of the churches that partnered with their respective schools, and the resourcefulness of the principals and teachers who worked in those schools, helped to assuage its negative impact on student achievement.
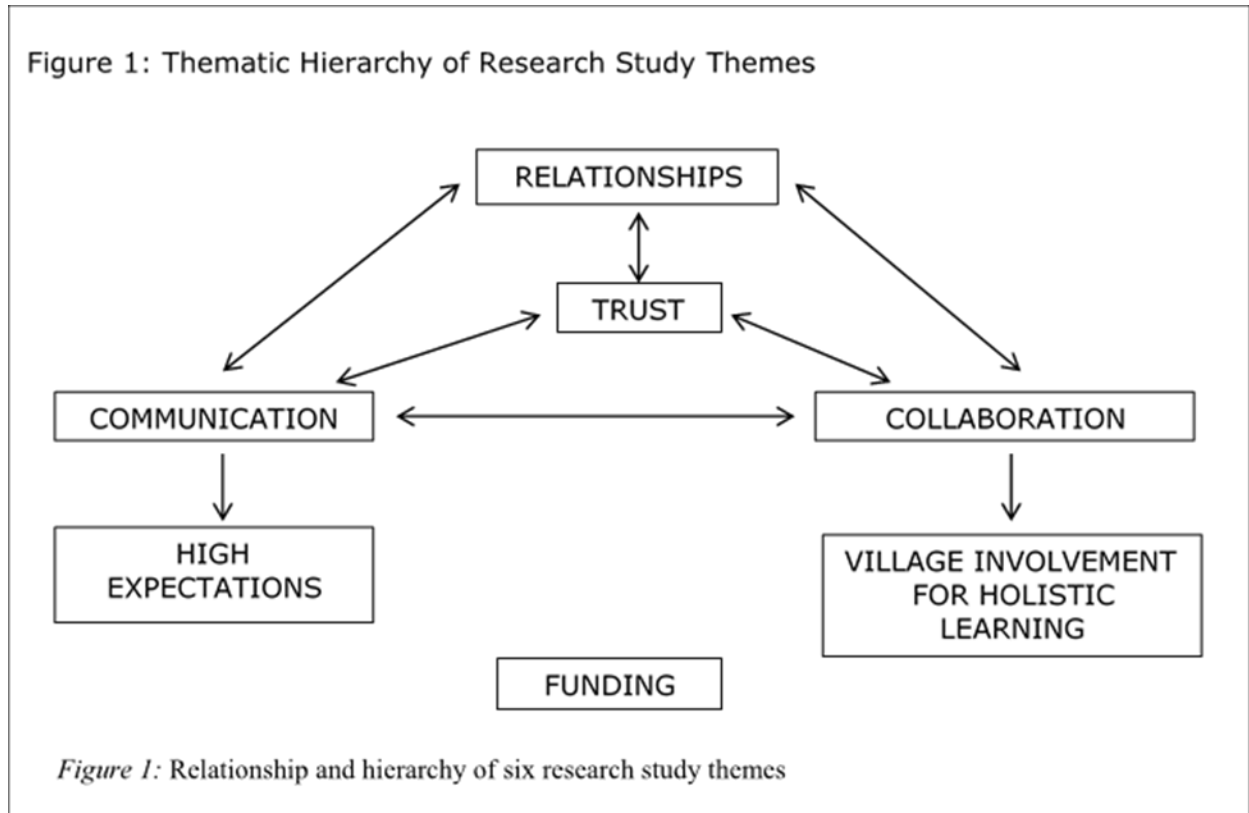
Thematic Hierarchy

A reexamination of the themes generated a discovery of how they were ordered to create a mechanism for enhancing student achievement within the context of the partnerships. The themes were reexamined through a process of data analysis that resulted from the automated processing of five keywords, collaboration communication, expectations, relationships, and village according to the frequency with which each participant referenced one of the five key words in response to question number 12 of the interview protocol: "In reflecting on your partnership experiences, please expound on those experiences that might facilitate success towards closing the achievement gap when implemented in other church/school partnerships."

The transcriptions were then studied manually to exact extract meaning from the contextual usage of the keywords. Meaning was derived from the utility of the keywords in exposing a descriptive element of each of the six themes that had been previously identified as emergent from the church/school partnerships under examination. A study of the data enabled an understanding of how descriptive elements within each theme interrelated in the promotion of high student achievement within the partnership.

Student achievement was enhanced as the mechanism was actuated by a hierarchal flow that was rooted in relationships. This hierarchical flow as depicted in Figure 1 illustrates a subjective process of harmonious interdependence. Each interviewee expressed how the relationships formed during the partnerships between school administrators, faculty, staff, and church leaders were crucial to the success of their collaborative efforts. Data reflected a general consensus that successful collaboration without authentic trust would not have been possible. This was believed to have been attributed to the fact that the church and school leaders had to first win the trust of the students and their parents to cultivate a climate for academic success. The relationships forged during both partnerships promoted positive social identities through daily interactions that communicated unconditional acceptance, both verbally and non-verbally. Unconditional acceptance inspired self-efficacy in the students who were then internally motivated to achieve. Authentic relationships based in trust also ensured that church and school were communicating the same message: one of caring , unconditional acceptance, empathy, and efficacy in the ability of the families, given the necessary support, to rise above obstacles of poverty and its accompanying challenges. Unity in collaboration and communication emanating from relationships based in trust empowered the villagers to launch the students to unprecedented heights in their academic achievement. Funding remains a fundamental concern

114

because it is vital to sustain the process. Research confirms that state funding for education is inequitably allocated in favor of more affluent households causing the economically disadvantaged students to remain so.

Figure 1: Thematic Hierarchy of Research Study Themes

Figure 1: Relationship and hierarchy of six research study themes

Conclusion

This study expands on existing studies to reveal how two Black inner-city church/schools, partnerships utilized their cultural capital to convey high expectations of their students, establish meaningful relationships with their students, promote village involvement that enabled holistic learning, facilitate effective communication, engage in effective collaboration, and provide additional funding for the holistic education of African American students of poverty, some of whom had been previously failing.

Pastors of inner-city Black churches should unite to engage in strategic discourse to formulate a plan of action that will maximize the cultural capital of their leadership and

parishioners. The plan should include innovative programs and curricula constructed from research-based tenets. School leaders in inner-city public and private schools should extend partnership opportunities to Black inner-city churches in order to avail their African American economically disadvantaged students of the cultural capital that exists in the Black church. Black church/schools in partnership should consider the fundamental tenet of relationship-building as the basis for partnership formation and practice. These partnerships should engage in effective communication with an emphasis on conveying high expectations to their students. The collaboration of village members should also be prioritized toward the goal of facilitating holistic learning experiences.

As funding is vital to the successful implementation of any plan of action, school and church leaders should unite to advocate for funding designed specifically to address the learning needs of African American children. This funding must be increased to address socio-economic deficits in the beginning school experiences of those African American children who are economically disadvantaged. In the meantime, churches must join school leaders in maximizing their economic resources to support the plan of action.

Future research should continue to explore the reasons for the achievement gap's persistence. Additionally, differences in the culturing learning styles of White and Black children should be explored for the sake of creating more diverse and equitable assessment forms and educational experiences. Armed with the information set forth in this research study, it is anticipated that future church/school partnerships will be successful in aspiring to the democratic ideal upon which the US was established by facilitating a reduction and potential eradication of the Black/White achievement gap.

References

Alexander, Michelle. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness.* New York: New Press.

Anderson E. & Moss, A., Jr. (1999). Dangerous *donations: Northern philanthropy and Southern Black education, 1902-1930.* Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Beecher, M. & Sweeney, S. (2008). Closing the achievement gap with curriculum enrichment and differentiation: One school's story. *Journal of Advanced Academics 19*(3), 502-530, 551, 554.

Bennett, L. (2012*). Before the Mayflower: A history of the Negro in America, 1619-1962.* Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing Co.

Bohrnstedt, G., Kitmitto, S., Ogut, B., Sherman, D., and Chan, D. (2015). *School Composition and the Black–White Achievement Gap (NCES 2015-018).* U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Briggs, X. de Souza (1997). Social capital and the cities: Advice to change agents. *National Civic Review 86*(2), p. 111-117.

Brown, Rupert. (2019). *Henri Tajfel: Explorer of identity and difference.* New York: Routledge.

Chenoweth, K. (2009). *How it's being done: Urgent lessons from unexpected schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Comer, J. (2004). *Leave no child behind: Preparing today's youth for tomorrow's world*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Comer, J. P. (2009). *What I learned in school: Reflections on race, child development, and school reform.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Comer, J. & Ben Avie, M. (2010). Promoting community in early childhood programs: A

comparison of two programs. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 38*, 87-94. DOI

10.1007/106-43-010-0391-3.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teaching for social justice: Resources, relationships, and anti-

racist practice. *Multicultural Perspectives 19*(3), p. 133-138.

DOI:10.1080/15210960.2017.1335039.

Davis, R. F. (2010). *The Black church: Relevant or irrelevant in the 21st century?* Macon, GA:

Smythe & Helways Publishing.

Dee, T. S., Jacob, B. A., Hoxby. C. M., & Ladd, H. F, (2010). *The impact of No Child Left

Behind on students, teachers, and schools/comments and discussion.* Brookings Papers

on Economic Activity, 149 - 207.

Dufour, R.& Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work.* Bloomington,

IN:Solution Tree Press.

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. (2018). National Center for Education

Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from website

https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/kindergarten2018.asp.

Epstein, J. (2012). *School, Family, and community partnerships: Preparing education and

improving schools.* New York: Routledge.

Foote, K. (1990). To remember and forget: Archives, memory, and culture. *The American

Archivist* 53(3).

Fordham S. & Ogbu, J (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of acting

White. *Urban Review 18*(3), 176-206.

Goldenberg I. (1978). *Oppression and social intervention: Essays on the human condition and the problems of change.* Chicago, IL: Nelson.

Hanushek, E., Peterson, P., Talpey, L., & Woessmann, L. (2019). The achievement gap fails to close: Half century of testing shows persistent divide between haves and have nots. *Education Next 19*(3), p. 8-17.

Jeynes, W. (2010). Religiosity, Religious Schools, and their Relationship with the Achievement Gap: A Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis. *The Journal of Negro Education 79*(3), 263-279, 439.

Johanningmeier, E.V. (2010). A nation at risk and Sputnik. *American Education History Journal 37*(1/2). P.347-365.

Kimmelman, P. (2006). *Education events that led to NCLB.* Retrieved from http://www.us.corwin.com/…/upm binaries/9126_Chapter_1_Kimmelman_Final_Pdf.

Kozol, J. (2012). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's school.* New York:Crown Publishing Group.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: remix. *Harvard Educational Review 84*(1), p. 74-84.

Lincoln, A. (1861). *Message to special session of Congress, Washington, D.C.* Retrieved from Internet Modern History Sourcebook http://www.fordham.edu/holsall/mod/1861lincoln-special.html

Manning, P. (2001). *News and news sources: A critical introduction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mathematics and Reading Assessments (1990-2019). National Center for Education

    Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from

    https://www.nation'sreportcard.gov/nde.core/xplore/NDE

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*

    (2nd. Ed). London: Sage.

Mitchell, H.H. (2004). *Black church beginnings: The long-hidden realities of the first years.*

    Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Morton, K. (1995). The irony of service: Charity, project, and social change in service-learning.

    Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning 2,19-32.

Paige, R. & Witty, E. (2010), *The Black-White achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest*

    civil rights issue of our time. New York: American Management Association.

Paschall, K.W.; Gershoff, E.T.; & Kuhfeld, M. (2018). A two decade examination of historical

    race/ethnicity disparities in academic achievement by poverty status. *Journal of*

    Youth and Adolescence 47(6), pp.1164-1177.

Sertima, I.V. (1976). *They came before Columbus: The African presence in ancient America*.

    New York: Random House.

Siegel, L. & Welsh, B. (2014). *Juvenile delinquency: Theory, practice, and law*. Stanford, CT:

    Cengage Learning.

Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups (2019). National Center for

    Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from

    https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_RDC.asp

Whaley, A. L. & Noel, L. T. (2012). Sociocultural theories, academic achievement, and African-

    American adolescents in a multicultural context: A review of the cultural compatibility

    perspective. *The Journal of Negro Education, 81*(1), 25-38.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

Protocol Set One: Formation and Origin of the Partnerships
1. What motivated the formation of this partnership?
2. What processes were involved in the formation of this partnership?
3. How does the partnership work?
4. What is your role in the partnership?

Protocol Set One: Partnership Roles Specific to the Achievement Gap
5. What specific plans and activities are being implemented through the partnership to help close the achievement gap?
   a. What percentage of your student population is African American and economically disadvantaged?
   b. Were their guidelines that distinguished the development of plans,
   c. activities, and programs specific to the children who were socio-economically disadvantaged?
   d. How (were) are these plans, activities and/or programs funded?
6. What role does each partner pay in analyzing the achievement gap?
7. What is the role of each partner in creating plans and in designing activities that are implemented in the partnership to address the achievement gap?
8. What role does each partner play in analyzing the effectiveness of the interventions in reducing the achievement gap?

Protocol Set One: Communication Patterns
9. How do the partners work together and communicate effectively?
10. How often (did) do the partners meet? Who takes the leadership role in these meetings?
11. What, if anything, distinguished the interventions of the church from those of other partners in the facilitation of high academic achievement in economically disadvantaged African-American students? Of the following three areas, which, would you say facilitated the greatest impact made by the church on student achievement: curriculum, implementation processes, or relationship building?

Protocol Set One: Reflections and Recommendations of the Partnership Experience
12. In reflecting on your partnership experiences, please expound on those experiences that might facilitate success towards closing the achievement gap when implemented in other church/school partnerships.

Protocol Set Two: Specific to Teachers
1. Are (were) you aware of the partnership between the church and school?
2. Do you collaborate with your school's church partner?
3. If so, what are (were) the topics and outcomes of those collaborations?
4. In what ways do you engage with your church' school partner that directly impact the achievement outcomes of your students?

Protocol Set Three: Specific to Parents

1. Are (were) you aware of the church partnership at your child's school?
2. In what partnership activities have you participated?
3. What role do (did) you pay in these activities?
4. Have you been (were you ever) invited to participate in the planning of these activities?
5. How has your parental involvement with your school's church partner impacted the achievement of your student?