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# The Social Perceptions And Attitudes Held By African American Males Who Participated In A Self-Contained Special Education Middle School Program For Three Years And Dropped Out Of High School After The Ninth Grade

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**THE SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES HELD BY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALES WHO PARTICIPATED IN A SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION  
MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR THREE YEARS AND DROPPED OUT OF HIGH  
SCHOOL AFTER THE NINTH GRADE**

by

**SHERRELL HOBBS**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School  
of Wayne State University,  
Detroit, Michigan  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2010

MAJOR: SPECIAL EDUCATION

Approved by:

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Advisor

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Date

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**2010**

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## **DEDICATION**

To God, be the glory for all that He has done in my life, both through me and for me! If it were not for God I never would have made it through this process. This is a testament to my family that ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!

I dedicate this work to my darling husband who was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of his LOVE for me, his time and resources that has allowed me the opportunity to complete this work. Your dedication to our marriage and your untiring years of support will forever be cherished in my heart. To my children Brandon (Keisa), Enjoli (Brandon) and Britani, my five angels who are truly a testament of love, that God has graciously blessed me with. Thank you for tolerating my missed appointments and for understanding when I had to study or write. ALL of you are truly the ultimate model of what a family really represents. To my mother, Fannie, my friend and my rock who prayed me through many mornings as I drove down I-696 stressed out, not knowing, if or how I would make it, but you kept me calm with your encouraging words. To my brother Ronald, who always had my back and would ask if there was anything that you could do. To my Nana babies Nyanna, Tiara, Jalen, Toni and Teonna. You brought so much joy into my life. All of you have driven Nana to hurry up and finish, so we can be together more! Your belief in me “Little (Big) Brother” is forever cherished. Somehow you ignored me saying, YES, send money! I loved your text messages, LOL. To my sister and best friend Lillian who prayed for me. THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING IN MY LIFE AND FOR BEING A PART OF OUR HOBBS FAMILY!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Problem and Setting

It is the first day of school and once again the bell rings for classes to begin. For many students there is only one simple question in mind, “. . . who will be in my class?” A translation for this question could be, “Who will become my new friend, and what will they think of me?” The attitude toward this expectation can be overwhelming at best. When certain actions, behaviors, and body language manifest, the student draws even more uncertainties. Simultaneously the perception of what is happening at the moment could preset certain predictors for the outcome and acceptance of each unique situation that follows. Interpretation of ones perception of right or wrong in a world system can only be interpreted through the lens in which it is seen through. Descartes believed that this type of thinking causes one to be skeptical. Thinking that is fueled by skepticism is perception becoming a reality. In Descartes’ words, “And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind” (Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, & Kenny, 1985).

#### Socialization and Belongingness

Starting at birth, human beings have an innate desire to socialize and to belong in society. During each growth and developmental stage of a child’s social journey, relationships, connections and attachments are made to the environment. There are two parts to socialization, informal and formal. In the United States, informal lessons of socialization come from a child’s primary caretaker(s). Imagine a child growing up in this informal setting only to see the world from one perspective through that unique experience. Later the child goes into a formal school setting, to realize that the world is

not one-dimensional and to learn socialization skills. To children schools represent a place within society where they are led to have some of the same experiences, expectations, beliefs, and similar personality traits (Barnes & Pickering, 1985).

### The Social Journey through School

School is a social function. The social journey through school consists of many different people who come from different backgrounds. Karl Marx who partnered with Friederich Engels authored *The Communist Manifesto* (2005). Marx introduced the ideals of modern socialism and communism. The viewpoints they proposed could infer that depending on the environment, a student's classmate can have either a negative or positive influence. As students progress through school and develop into adolescence, they begin to seek out new opportunities for friendship and acceptance from their peers. A sign that the student is seeking acceptance is when self-value is associated with certain dress wear (clothing), or the activities chosen to participate in. Rapidly emerging are the likes and dislikes for certain things that might be based upon their friend's choice(s) and not their own. Adolescents known for having numerous friends are commonly referred to as out going, exciting or popular among their peers. This new status of association places the student into a different group and into a different society at the school.

Societies have five basic commonalities—single interests, common goals, privileges, laws and specific social structures. Gaining access to a society and receiving benefits comes through meeting certain criteria. Some societies cause conflicts to increase because of the rift between, as Karl Marx described—people who have, from those who do not have. In other words people are either privileged or

unprivileged. From Marx's viewpoint, if the struggle continued between societies, then it would lead to a classless society (Lenski, 1984).

Over time as certain criteria are met, the individuals in the group develop into a culture. Each culture has its own norms, expectations and perceptions. As children learn ways to belong and think as citizens, they are able to meet the basic goals of society in a uniform manner. When certain natural social conventions of socialization fail, some students may be inclined to drop out altogether.

#### Defining peer relationships

McClellan & Katz (2001) state that,

“Peer relations contribute substantially to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behavior, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture, are seriously at risk” (Hartup, 1992, p.1).

Socially an adolescent who does not have any friends is sometimes labeled a loner, strange or different. Adolescents sometimes struggle to find ways to make new friends. When a teacher observes the adolescent in the classroom, awkwardness may be noticed when others are around. It is not uncommon for one adolescent to pick on another in an effort to gain their attention. This problem often arises after an adolescent recognizes potential in an individual and makes an attempt to communicate a need for friendship. Aristotle's theory of potentiality describes this process as true happiness

and friendship—needing to be cultivated and treasured. A true friend is there “to hold, as ‘twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (Pangle, 2003). Aristotle saw human beings in politics as naturally seeking out community where an extended family existed with its own set of norms peculiar to it. The norms under this established rule that are developed outside of the natural setting are translated through a school curriculum.

### Curriculums

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (Michigan Department of Education, 2008) emphasizes that the main goal of curriculums in schools is to promote uniformity across programs. Amid the basic curriculum—Reading, writing and arithmetic; public education provides two major curriculums—general and special. Mostly every child who attends school for the first time starts out in the general education curriculum.

#### *General education curriculum*

At the elementary school level, the general education curriculum requires children from kindergarten through third grade to participate in self-contained classrooms. Each classroom has approximately 17:1 to 32:1 ratio of students and teacher. In this setting, one primary teacher is responsible for teaching all of the academic subjects in the curriculum (See Figure 1:1).



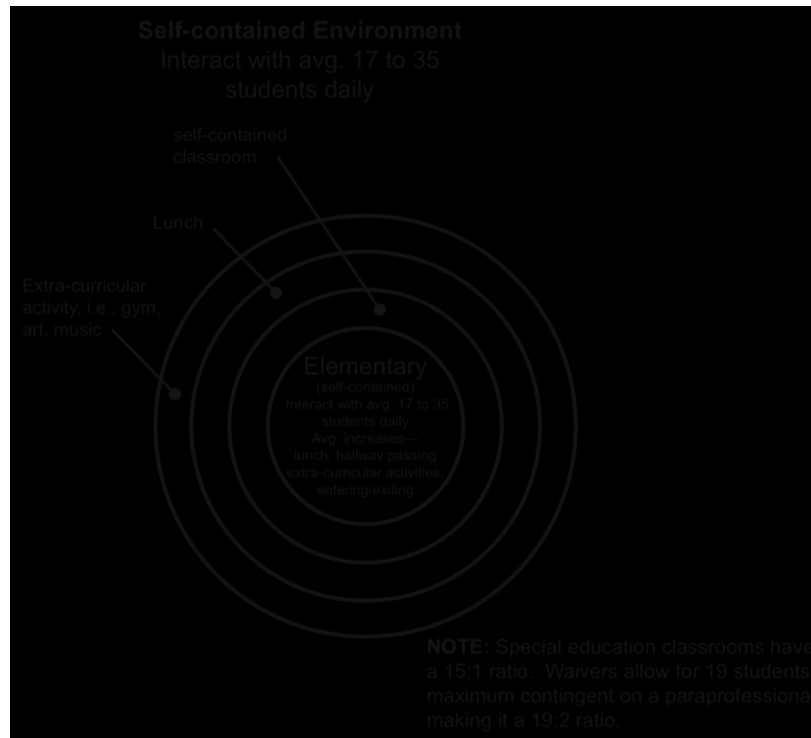


Figure 1:1 Elementary school setting

At the middle and high school levels (see Figure 1:2), there are different teachers who are responsible for instruction in the four academic areas—English Language Arts (ELA), reading, mathematics and science. The exception is middle school students typically travel as one homeroom class to each teacher’s classroom. While in high school, students have individual schedules with a different group of students in each classroom.

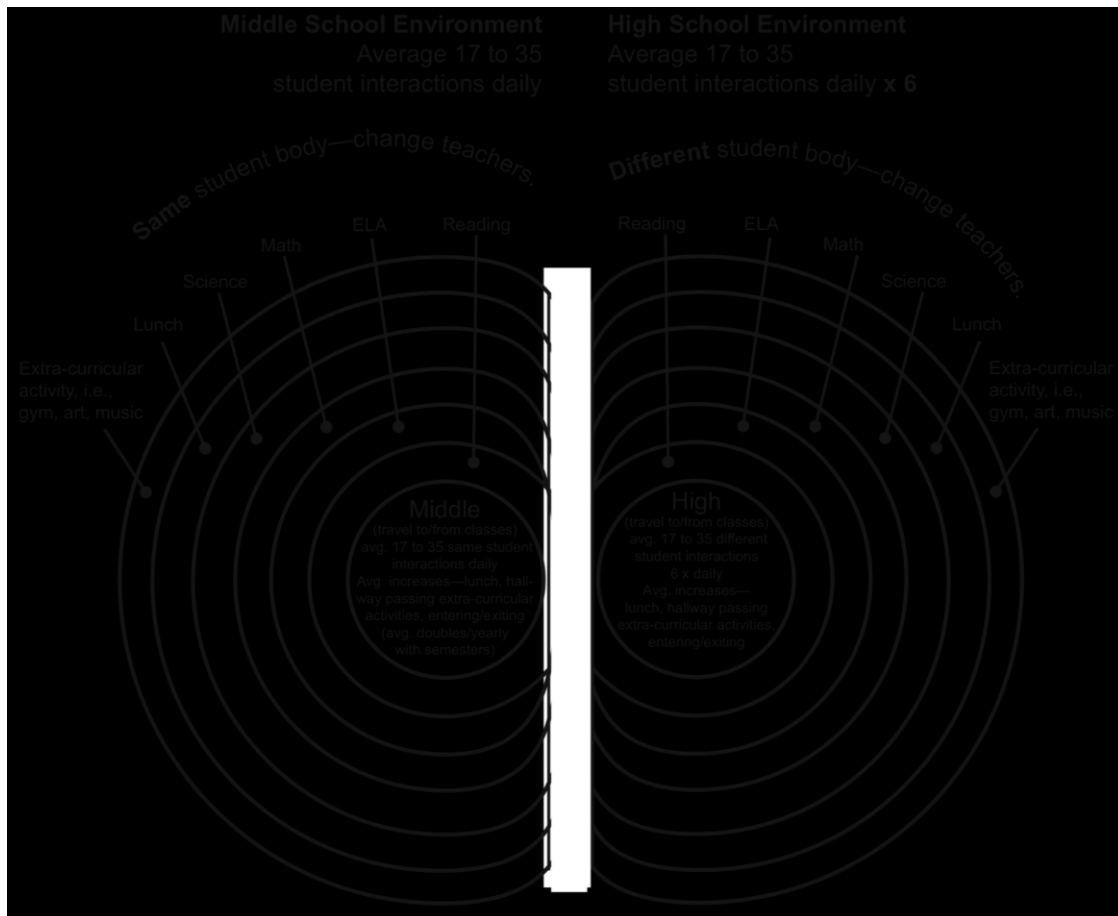


Figure 1:2 Middle and High school settings

The above chart shows how high school students have an even greater advantage of increasing socialization skills as they travel independently down the hallways to participate with a different set of students in each classroom.

### *Special Education Curriculum*

Before certain laws were passed, special education programs were intended to provide students who have a disability, impairment or physical handicap with a separate curriculum. The special education curriculum involved a self-contained classroom setting. Each student who is eligible to receive services is given an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP states the demographics, eligible disability, frequency of

services, accommodations, and obtainable goals and objectives of the student. Participation in a special education program can begin at the pre-school level and extend into high school.

The intent of the special education curriculum is to help students who have a disability improve upon existing skills and use strategies that will help them to become successful learners in the classroom. To qualify for a special education curriculum, the student has to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The special education curriculum is divided into three types of programs—self-contained, mainstreamed and resource. Students participate either fulltime (self-contained), part-time (mainstreamed) or receive resource support services (inclusion).

Prior to new federal and state initiatives to provide a least restrictive environment (LRE), students in special education were typically placed in a self-contained classroom to receive special education services on a full-time basis. This usually involved a segregated setting outside of the general education curriculum. Mainstreamed students who have a disability may participate in both general and special education. The privilege to do this is earned and usually predicated upon “good” behavior. The amount of time spent in general education, is between two and three hours per week. Resource students are students who have an IEP and participate in the general education curriculum the majority of the time. A typical student receiving resource support is most often diagnosed with having a specific learning disability. A maximum of fifteen hours per week are spent supporting the student in general education classrooms.

In the year 2005, the Michigan Department of Education (Thompson, 2006) through the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services identified the total number of students with IEPs between the ages of 6 to 18 years of age as 214,902

pupils. Information from Figure 1:3 reveals that the number of students with an IEP entering middle school was approximately 30% higher than students entering into kindergarten at the elementary school level. Comparing the number of students entering high school to middle school, there was about a 5% change. Overtime the total number of students with an IEP continued to increase from elementary through middle school. In high school, the number of students with an IEP in the ninth grade was 19,427, and 17,250 in the tenth grade. The chart does not indicate if the difference in the number of students with an IEP after the ninth grade was due to students dropping out of high school, which could have caused the 11% decline from the ninth grade to the tenth grade.

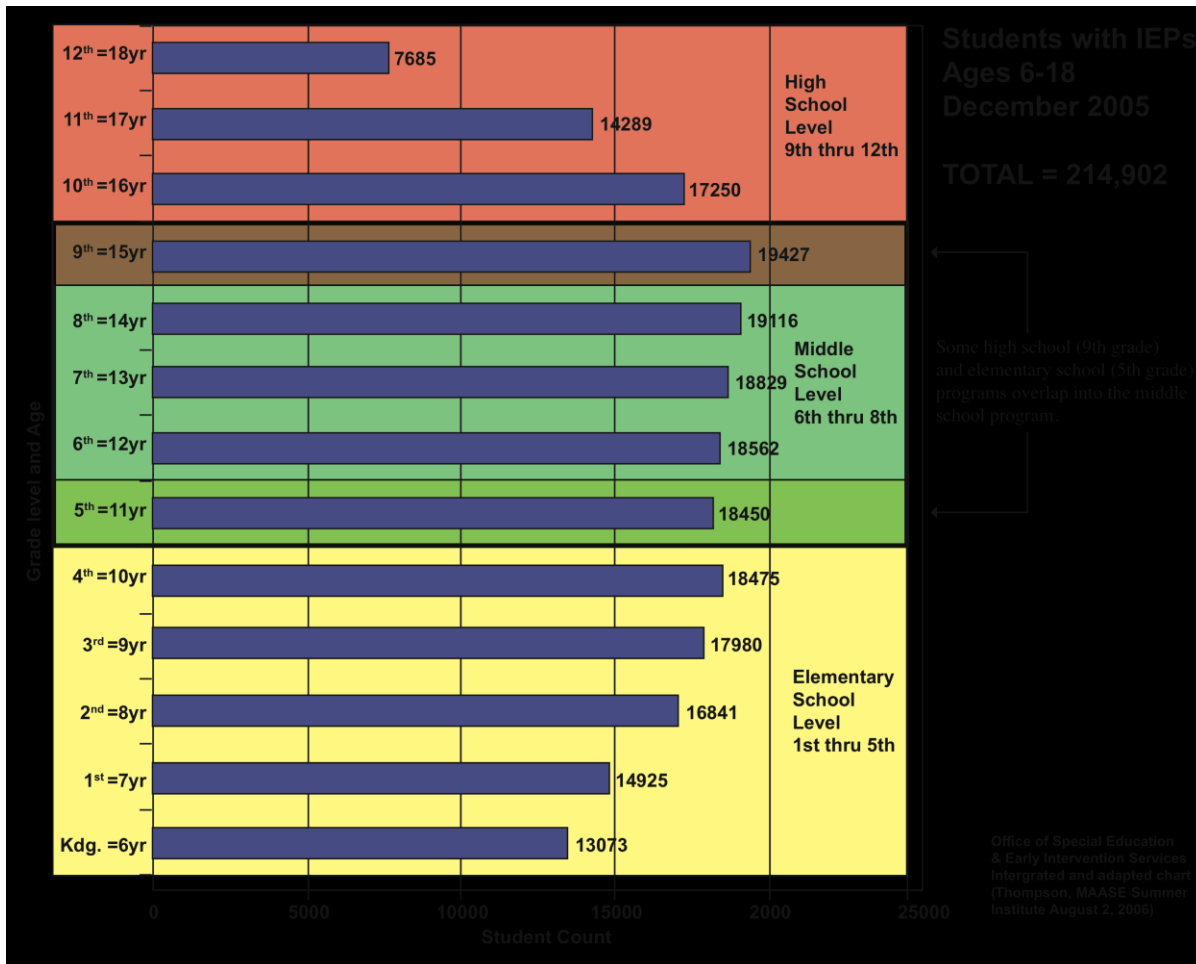


Figure 1:3 showing students with IEPs between the ages of 6-18 in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade.

In Michigan, the dropout rate matters for students with disabilities. The Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (APR-2006-2007) acknowledges the following statement—“Students with disabilities have an increased risk of dropping out and may need additional support. High dropout rates are an indicator that barriers to learning exist. Students who drop out of high school experience higher rates of under- and unemployment and/or involvement with the corrections system than high school graduates (p. 57)”. The office further states that, “Addressing the complexity of school failure requires an ongoing analysis of which students drop out and which students graduate. This information is critical to student success (Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, APR-2006-2007, p. 63).

In an effort to curve the dropout rate, the state of Michigan has defined initiatives to reduce the number of students assigned to special education. Teachers are required to provide additional informal strategies and classroom support in response to intervention (RTI). In theory the number of students being referred to special education and the number actually being given an IEP should reduce overtime.

A school that practices RTI knows that when a student displays some learning difficulties in the general education classroom the teacher is responsible for providing additional strategies to support the student’s efforts to learn. If the student is not making progress or if the progress is limited, there needs to be a formal response to intervention that includes an observation conducted by the teacher to determine what the student’s learning style is and which multiple intelligences dominate the student’s

ability to understand lessons. The goal of the observation is to provide strategies that support the individual student's needs.

When it is determined that the student is not responding to the intervention strategies, a pre-referral is made to the resource coordinating team (RCT). The RCT is a group of educational experts who represent general and special education, psychology, social work, speech and language. The team reviews attendance records, academic achievement and assessment scores to determine if the student is eligible for special education services.

After the student is found eligible for services, inclusion of students with disabilities with age appropriate peers in appropriate educational environments is important because it, "Supports access to and achievement in the general education curriculum, increases the level of expectations for students behaviorally, and academically, creates an inclusive and accepting educational community, which is supported and advanced by State Board of Education policy, and, supports educators, parents, and students to have expectations of behavior and performance for ALL students (Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, APR-2006-2007, p. 63)."

#### Statement of the Problem

Federal regulation (IDEA 2004), require states to first consider providing specialized student services to all students who have a disability in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The least restrictive environment is the democratic right of all students with a disability. This process is most commonly referred to as inclusion. In the absence of full inclusion, special needs students receive services in self-contained classrooms. Varying perceptions and attitudes develop throughout a self-contained

middle school special education experience. While placement in specialized student programs are rapidly increasing for African American males, the dropout rate in high school is also increasing for African American males who have a learning disability (Pangle, 2003). To date, it has not been determined whether self-contained special education placement in middle school has had any bearing on the high school drop out rate for African American males who have a learning disability.

Placement decisions in special education should be based on research based theory. For school districts attempting to determine appropriate placement of African American male students in special education, it is important for the district to consider if there is any associated link between African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and the high school drop out rate. John Kordalewski (1999) noted that perceptions held by the students involved should be included in the efforts of school improvement.

In support of The State of Michigan's initiatives to address the problem of overrepresentation of students in special education, research is necessary to examine the practices of self-contained special education middle school classrooms. An "interpretive lens," which means to explore the meaning of things, is used to understand how self-contained special education middle school programs meet the goals and expectations of democracy and education for African American males.

#### Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the affect that participation in a three to four year self-contained special education middle school program may have had on the decision made by African American males who have a learning disability to drop out of high school after the ninth grade. The study will be primarily based on the attitudes and

perceptions of the African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school program, and up to the year they decided to drop out of high school.

### Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of African American males who have a learning disability, toward self-contained special education middle school programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions held by African American males who have a learning disability, of the self-contained special education program at the middle school level, who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom?

Research Question 3: Based upon the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who have a learning disability and participated in a self-contained special education middle school program, might this setting have influenced African American males to drop out of high school? If so how?

### Significance of the study

While inclusive teaching practices do exist in public education where African American males who have a disability are educated, there are still African American males who are placed in self-contained special education middle school classrooms in 2009. This research is important because it explores the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and if the experience had any influence on their decision to drop out of high school.



As a result of this study, by examining the specific needs and requirements revealed through a focus group of African American males who have a disability who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and dropped out of high school; public school districts and special education school administrators may be in a better position to make “informed decisions” about how special education programs are designed and implemented for ALL students.

Researchers like Okwumabua (1999), Adams & Singh (1998), King (1997), Mauer (1999), Dunbar (1999) all have their own depiction of African American males who have a disability post high school. Defined below are five considerations for the study—dependency, self-esteem, and lack of control, social identity, and understanding of decision-making:

*Dependency:*

Some African American males cannot make critical choices because a person who made all of their decisions for them for four years is no longer available to assist them in high school; therefore they become frustrated and avoid the educational process (Okwumabua, 1999).

*Self-Esteem:*

African American males choose to drop out of school because they lack coping and social skills to adapt into a large social body of students at the high school level (Adams & Singh, 1998).

*Lack of Control:*

In an attempt to control their own environment effectively, some African American males may outwardly display various types of volatile negative behaviors in an attempt to achieve respect from their peers (King, 1997).

*Social Identity:*

African American males, in their quest to identify with their peers at the high school level, lose respect for the educational process as they find themselves still in special education, thus they rebel in the school and become subjects of disciplinary actions because they are separated from their peers inhumanely (Mauer, 1999).

*Understanding of decision-making:*

After these African American males leave the educational system they lack the necessary social skills that would allow them to become productive citizens in society and to make critical decisions that impact their life. In order for these African American males to survive, they continue to seek approval and support and find themselves in a negative pattern of destitution (Dunbar, 1999).

There is a considerable amount of research that has been done with regards to segregation; self-contained special education classrooms, and African American males who have a disability and drop out of high school. However, there is not sufficient research available regarding the attitudes and perceptions held by African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and dropped out of high school. Actual individual voices and perceptions in a responsive manner to the socialization process of special education and self-contained middle school classrooms have not yet been analyzed.

#### Limitations of the study

Because of the qualitative and ethnographic characteristics of the design, this study's results could vary considerably and may not be generalized to the larger population.

1. This study is limited by the data collected from three African American males (18 years of age or older) chosen by purposive sampling and who agree to participate.
2. This study is limited to only African American males who have a learning disability and participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom.
3. This study is limited to the same volume of data per participant under a strict time restraint.

#### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Special education	A separate curriculum that specializes in meeting the specific goals and objectives identified on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but does not usually provide access to the general education curriculum.
General education	The traditional educational model where students without a disability all learn together without specialized student services.
Self-contained classrooms	A place where students with special needs are educated on a full time basis with limited access to the general education student population.
Empirical Paradigm	Values technical knowing - the root activity is work: intellectual and technical work that will help people

relate to and control the natural and, by extension, the social world. Efficiency, certainty, and predictability are valued, and knowledge in the form of facts, generalizations, theories, and cause-and-effect laws is sought (J. Habermas, 1971).

Interpretive Paradigm

Relating people to their social world (Aoki, 1978)

Transition

For the purpose of this study, transition means to leave a self-contained middle school classroom after the eighth grade or at the age of fourteen years old, to pass on to a ninth grade high school special education classroom.

Inclusion

General education students and students who have a disability participating in the same general education school curriculum without pullouts for special education services.

Cross categorical

Students with various disability labels, i.e., learning disabled, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment all educated in the same classroom.

Departmentalized

A daily setting where special education students change from one special education class to the next—core academic subjects (science, math, language arts, and social studies) are taught by only special education teachers.

Overrepresentation of African American males	Occurs when the percentage of students in special education is close to the total student population.
Disproportionate placement of African American males	Where the number of African American males placed in special education supersedes the total number of females and Caucasian males who are placed into special education combined.
Voice	The inner feeling of a person that requires an oral response to what is directly impacting their life. The democratic process of oral communication for change.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*To know where education is today is to know the purpose for education . . . only then can one assume to know if its purpose is being fulfilled for all it is intended for.*

The theoretical framework for this study is generated through the notion that democracy in education is how human beings develop a sense of what is acceptable and their response to socialization in society (Puolimatka, 1996). To develop a clear understanding of the purpose of democracy, it is necessary to understand the consciousness and mind of society and the theoretical underpinnings of learning theories.

This chapter will address the constitution of education in society; the consciousness and mind in society; democracy; gaining/obtaining and maintaining access to education; learning theories and their influences in education today; and the purpose of curriculums.

#### The Constitution of Education in Society

A group of people who share a defined space and culture is called a society. Societies began with the existence of man (Aristotle, 1813). In the United States of America, a formal education system has been used to promote social efficiency for all people in society. Social efficiency is how schools are responsible for preparing its students for the world of work (Larabee, 1997). Each society represents people in search of formal organization, sustained living and fairness. Social efficiency is accomplished under the guidance of the norms and expectations of the group. Through the acceptance of the norms within the society, many different expectations and perceptions are also developed. Over time, all societies progress and regress. After a

period of regression, many societies also attempt to rebuild and restructure its infrastructure to become stronger than before. All societies have two common threads—they are politically motivated and economically generated for the proposed good of its citizens. It is not unusual for each citizen of a particular society to develop an attitude and perception for the overall effectiveness of the society.

Thomas Hobbes (1651) wrote in his book—Leviathan, about equality and man. Hobbes's theory of equality described the world as like a Leviathan (a massive beast). Extrinsicly, human beings are equal by nature and share the same generic makeup. When external resources and access to obtain some are not evenly nor generously distributed, this causes inequities among people. Hobbes made a distinction between human equality and the equality of man. With all things being equal, Hobbes believed that man does not have the right to claim any advantage over another. Therefore, true equality in mind is the willingness to share ones goods so that man is truly equal with all things common (Stevens, 1997).

John Locke, an English philosopher, played an important role in social theory. Locke had specific "ideals of individualism, property rights, free markets, and representative government" (Capra, 1982, p.69) Jefferson was greatly influenced by Locke, and used his ideas to formulate the writing of the Constitution (Capra, 1982). Locke was also strongly influenced by Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton, by his analysis of human beings as developers of knowledge who use sensory perception in the process.

Words to live by came through Thomas Jefferson on July 4, 1776. These words, now known as the United States Constitution, set a foundation and justification for existence as an American citizen. The constitution as Jefferson wrote it, states:

*“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defen[s]ce, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America”* (Thomas Jefferson, July 4, 1776).

The constitution was ultimately declaring that all people should have the same rights and opportunities to access resources in the United States of America. The main objective of the Constitution of the United States of America was to establish equality for all mankind.

From 1801 to 1835, John Marshall, the chief justice of the United States felt that the Constitution was, “Intended to endure for ages to come, and consequently, to be adapted to the various crises of human affairs” (Stevens, 1997 p. 147). Ultimately, what developed through the Constitution are different societies that held different regards and interpretations toward the Constitution. With each interpretation being different, three classes of citizens surfaced—Rich class (wealthy), Middle class (working) and poor class (impoverished). Each class of people, different as they are, has in common some disdain and or a lack of appreciation and understanding for the other classes (Warner, Meeker, & Eells, 1949).

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, was a prodigy under Plato, another Greek philosopher. It could be said that Aristotle’s philosophical work on socio-economic classes were centered on politics. The poor class at the bottom rung of a ladder, receive supplemental monetary government supports and have less discretionary funds. At the top of the rung, the rich class, receive the most monetary breaks from taxation. The middle classes’ high taxed status, provide the means for both classes to be subsidized.



Aristotle saw the middle class as the catalyst that the rest of society needs to survive. Furthermore, he believed that only people who were involved in political parts of government, albeit if only to vote, should be allowed access to citizenry (Aristotle, 1813, p.461-463). Aristotle's final analysis of the classes did not include women or minorities. The examples of classes in society still exist today. Whatever laws were under review by the public were only passed or refused by the majority rule—the only ones allowed to vote at that time. Women and minorities in society were the last group allowed to cast a political vote. Educational institutions within each class were not exempt to the disparity in resources set aside for each class.

### The Consciousness and Mind of Society

Approaching the end of the twentieth century, with the publication of his book, *The Turning Point*, Fritjoff Capra (1982) initiated formal inquiry into two paradigms—The Newtonian World-Machine and The New Physics. Each paradigm represents an attempt to understand the impact of the consciousness and mind of society. The attraction to his inquiry began with the works of René Descartes and Isaac Newton. René Descartes was the first philosopher to show the differences between the mind and a state of consciousness. In his analysis of the brain he believed that it is the seat of intelligence. The mind is a suspended function that is indirectly linked to the brain. Descartes' theory is known as The Mind-Body Problem (Goldstein, 1983)—the mind is immaterial, while the body is “an entirely material thing.” Further explanation of this reveals that through Descartes' interpretation, the body cannot think, the mind however does think. Although the brain is the tool from which the mind is presumed to originate from; the brain is part of the body where the mind is not, therefore they are opposite from one another (Tweyman, 1993). This theory spun the Cartesian method of thinking.

Descartes made many contributions to the mind in society by clarifying what he believed was the universal purpose for existence. To Descartes there was “no purpose, life, or spirituality in matter. Nature worked according to mechanical laws and everything in the material world could be explained in terms of the arrangement of movement of its parts” (Capra, 1982, p.60). Descartes changed the perceptions of people toward thinking about the body by presenting that motions and functions of the body are related to mechanical operations. Organisms, he thought were “nothing but automata” (p.61). Descartes’ fascination for automata sent him on a journey to prove this. In his research he used clocks, artificial fountains, mills and other similar machines. Through various observations and experiments, Descartes saw absolutely no mechanical differences compared to what nature defined as humans and what was revealed through objects. These findings greatly contributed to the development of life sciences.

Sir Francis Bacon (Lewes, 1871), unlike Descartes did not actually discover any new philosophy, but rather he set outlines for many of which already existed. Bacon believed that the work of the philosopher is to use inductive reasoning to establish fact and then to present an axiom that interprets that fact into a law. In his quest to find an advancement of learning, he stated,

*"Men have sought to make a world from their own conception and to draw from their own minds all the material which they employed, but if, instead of doing so, they had consulted experience and observation, they would have the facts and not opinions to reason about, and might have ultimately arrived at the knowledge of the laws which govern the material world"* (p. 126)—Francis Bacon (1591-1626).

Bacon’s empirical observations of “idols of the mind” reveal how awareness of outside influences is critical in avoiding biases that influence how and what decisions are made. The four distractive idols Bacon thought were significant were—The Idols of the tribe; the cave; the marketplace; and the theatre (Atkinson, 2000). Table 2:1 details Bacon’s analysis of the human mind and uses quotes to sum up how the mind “shelters prejudices and inclinations that militate against progress in science” (Merrill, 2008).

<b>Idols of the Tribe</b>	<b>Idols of the Cave</b>	<b>Idols of the Marketplace</b>	<b>Idols of the Theatre</b>
<p>People center primarily on self and see themselves as more than they really are in society.</p> <p><i>“Everything may not be what it appears to be, and we should be aware of that.”</i></p>	<p>People make assumptions and tend to generalize about the world but only through a limited perspective of the immediate environment, circumstances and experiences.</p> <p><i>“Never assume anything.”</i></p>	<p>People have imperfections of language as a means of communication.</p> <p><i>“By attempting to understand the wonders around us and describing them via the limits of language, we do not do them justice nor are we fully able to comprehend them.”</i></p>	<p>People are the inherent flaws of philosophy itself. Great thinkers devise and set forth lofty notions about things.</p> <p><i>“. . . beliefs built on shaky foundation of our own faulty perceptions.”</i></p>

Table 2:1 (Mannion, 2002)

Isaac Newton a modern scientist in his own right opened up the years of enlightenment. The years of enlightenment took place as Newton began reexamining the belief system one supreme being of the universe, God. While Newton’s intent was not to diminish God in any way, he challenged the philosophical existence of God alone being responsible for existence and interjected the idea of the role of Nature. His work supported both Bacon and Descartes’ discoveries as it. During the Age of

Enlightenment there was a constant evaluation of traditional institutions, customs, and morals. A very controversial period—enlightenment meant that self-freedom was being sought which strayed away from traditional thinking. Capra wrote, “Although Descartes’ simple mechanistic biology could not be carried very far and had to be modified considerably during the subsequent three hundred years, the belief that all aspects of living organisms can be understood by reducing them to their smallest constituents, and by studying the mechanisms through which these interact, lies at the very basis of most contemporary biological thinking (Capra, 1982, p.102).

The worldview of Descartes, Hobbes, Bacon and Newton (Capra, 1982) provided Capra with an in-depth look into many worldwide schools of thought—health and livelihood, quality of the environment, social relationships, the economy, technology and politics. At first, Capra describes a man made system that functions as a worldview approach to consider each system as a separate entity. Although the manner in which Capra approaches these crises is not isolated, through his quest to gain knowledge into the many world crises, Capra discovers that the world does have reoccurring isolated crises. Capra explained this perspective through Albert Einstein’s New Physics as a worldview of modern physics. Capra described how parts are all part of a whole. Niels Bohr wrote, “Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems” (p.80). The universe as a whole can be divided into separate parts, which minutely can be broken down into molecules and atoms. This theory became known as relativity—the notion of parts shifting from individual objects to relationships, become interrelated and develop varying characteristics (p.81). This shows how Einstein was greatly influenced by the Cartesian thinking.

Descartes' theory is referenced as Cartesian dualism. Locke and Thomas Aquinas, an Aristotelian and an empiricist, challenged Descartes because they believed they understood the purpose for democracy. The Cartesian theory upheld the framework for democratic principles to progress further. Followers of Aristotle and his belief system scrutinized the Cartesian theory. Aristotle did not believe in democracy. Instead, he taught that there were three best forms of government—monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional republic. If any one of the government forms became tainted, then he believed that they would be reduced into a tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy (Mannion, 2002).

### Democracy

Prior to the twentieth century the term democracy was used primarily to refer to political states originating from western civilization. In the beginning there was a tremendous amount of resistance to the concept of democracy (Wallerstein, 2000). The research of Democracy in America (interchangeably, the United States) for the purpose of defining a democratic society began with the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, as accounted by Richard Heffner (1956). Heffner's seminal work interprets Tocqueville's philosophy of the Democracy of America and the sovereignty of the people in America, as the majority rule. In the first part of Tocqueville's writing, he states that,

“Perfect liberty of the mind exists in America just as long as the sovereign majority has yet to decide its course. But once the majority has made up its mind, then all contrary thought must cease, and all controversy must be abandoned, not at the risk of death or physical punishment, but rather at the more subtle and more intolerable pain of ostracism, of being shunned by one's fellows, of being rejected by society.”

Tocqueville acknowledges that what so many other powerful forces failed to achieve with regards to the governing of people, democracy succeeded, “For the strength of the majority is unlimited and all-pervasive, and the doctrines of equality and majority rule have substituted for the tyranny of the few over the many the more absolute, imperious and widely accepted tyranny of the many over the few” (p. 20-21).

Tocqueville describes the beginning stages of mankind as obscurely spent in the toils or pleasures of childhood. It is afterwards that manhood sets in, says Tocqueville, and he likens this process as, “The germ of the vices and the virtues of his mature[r] years is then formed.” Tocqueville’s aim is to present an early awareness of the development of the child starting with infancy where the lens of life reveals the future of adulthood. Interpreted, this event expands through the individual’s unique circumstances, prejudices, influences and ideals. In a world where Democracy does not exist, Tocqueville describes a scenario where unruliness exists much like a child who is wayward due to a lack of parental involvement. Forgoing this rearing, the child is left to the ways of street life, where wild instincts may develop (p.30). Following those events, laws through a democratic process were established (p.39). Furthermore, Tocqueville states, “Men in democracies put a premium upon equality and sameness rather than upon difference, and soon they become intolerant of the very freedom to be different” (p. 21).

#### A Democratic Society

Tocqueville’s interpretation of government was seen as the “absolute sovereignty of the majority.” A further review of Tocqueville’s work, presents how the democratic process is a cycle of cultural evolutions that channel from government as an institution to define parameters for people living in a democratic society (See Figure 2:1).

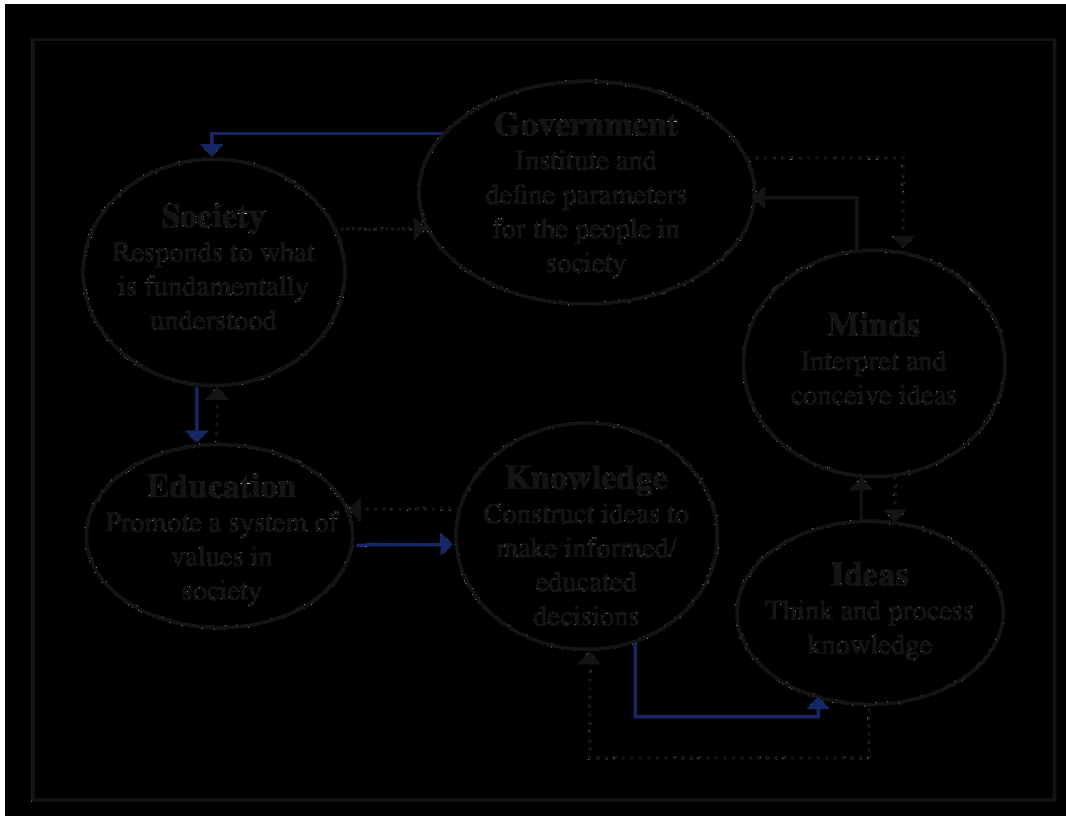


Figure 2:1 showing how government influences the minds, ideas, knowledge, education, and society, as each part is interrelated.

The underlying structure of the Constitution and democracy in the United States was developed through an Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Saxon's perspective of governing individuals was founded upon the following guiding principles: English speaking, male dominated, Caucasian and Christian (Capra, 1982). According to Capra, the expectations of these principles would become outdated towards the end of the twentieth century. Capra strongly urges the understanding of a multifaceted culture, and the need to shift people's perspective from the notion of static social structures to the perception of dynamic patterns of change (p.26). Capra is astounded, how seemingly the U.S. does not recognize a perpetuation of social problems. From his

viewpoint, societal ills have gone unresolved. For example, in Figure 2:2, he makes the following monetary comparisons of inequities relational to prioritizing human welfare.

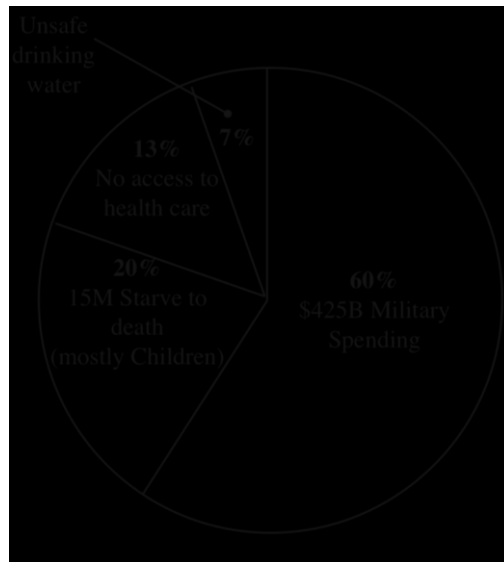


Figure 2:2 showing the priority for federal spending is relative to military support. Children and health care according to the graph are basically unimportant.

In a Democratic society, there exist other existential societies. One of the first working societies to exist in America was based primarily on agriculture and produced through the slave trade. As America began to progress toward manufacturing and labor, an industrialized society surfaced. A major thrust in society that mobilizes the United States is information and technology (see Figure 2:3).



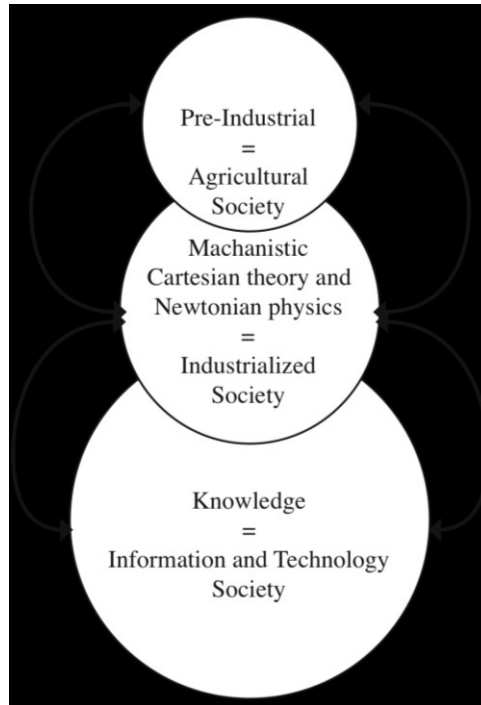


Figure 2:3 showing how all of society has an influence on the other.

All of the societies in Figure 2:3 were founded upon democratic principles. Each emerged into a *Democratic Society* through the education of its citizens. The principals in Tocqueville's analysis of a democratic society in theory, symbolizes a majority rule— At the top are Caucasian males. Men and Women are separated into separate tiers. Caucasian men are at the top of the first tier in the first class. Minority men are in the first tier in the second class, but are a little lower than Caucasian women.

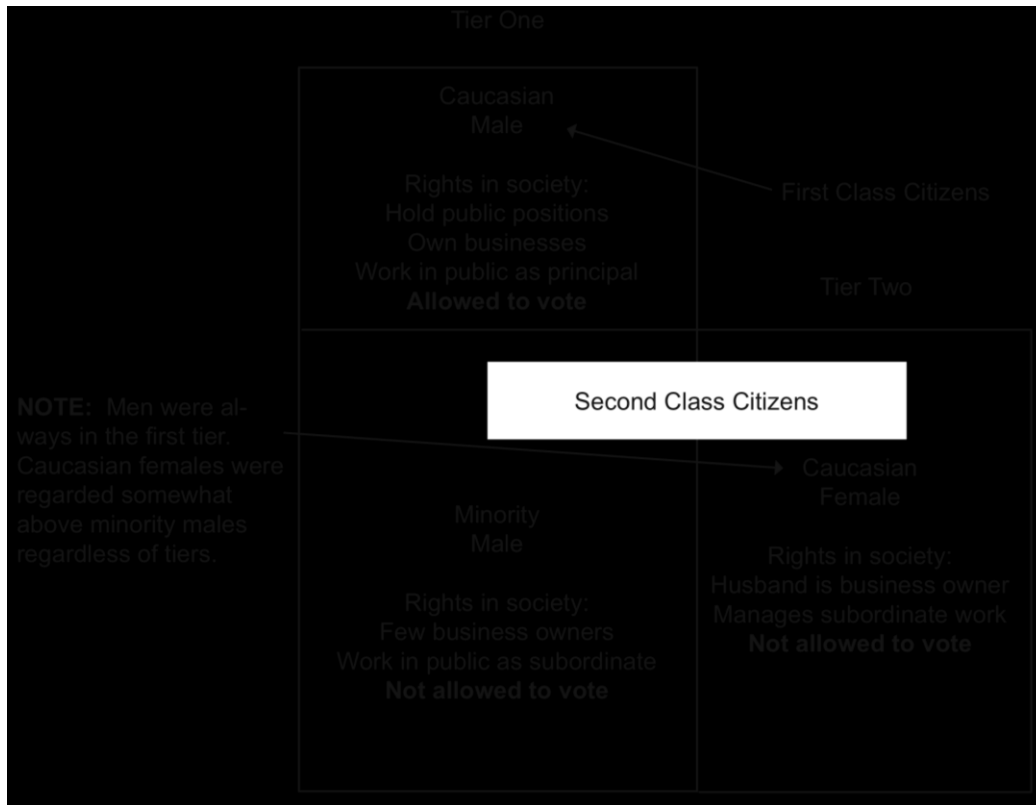


Figure 2:4 is indicative of a historical display of proposed tier success.

Since the installation of George Washington as the first president of the United States in 1789, the American people have never elected or honored a non-Caucasian nor a minority as president or principal chief ruler until the historical election of the 44<sup>th</sup> president, Barack H. Obama, in 2008. As of 2009, neither a woman nor any other non-African American minority has ever been elected to the rank of president. The timeline in Figure 2:5 below represents 220 years of a continuum of the characteristics of the aforementioned majority rule.

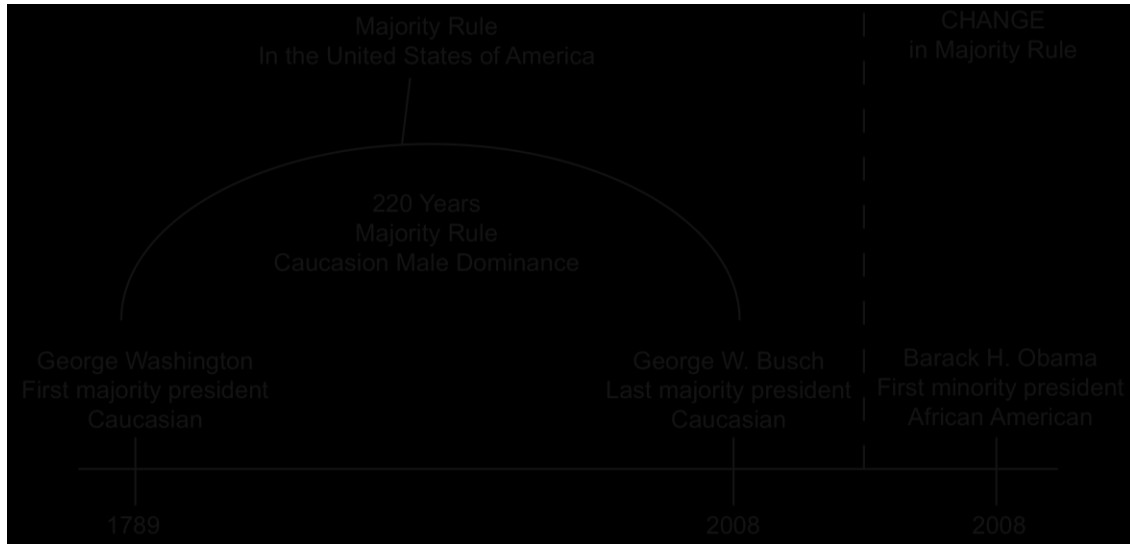


Figure 2:5 showing change from majority rule to a minority leader in America.

Unlike Toqueville's analysis of the beginning stages of mankind toiling in pleasure. Carter Godwin Woodson, a Harvard graduate, the second African American to earn a Ph.D. in 1912, had quite a different perspective and translation of this process. In Woodson's book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, Negroes are described by Caucasians as wild beasts and heathen slaves. The process of educating them began closer to 1835, and the sole purpose was to train them to meet the needs of their new environment outside of Africa, and to become profitable for slave masters in the United States (p.11). What was yet undecided was how much knowledge was required, and for what purpose was it necessary to educate the Negro.

#### Gaining/Obtaining Access to Education

Philosophers who advocated for a democracy decided that the principles of democracy needed to be formally taught through schooling, and our education is everything but democratic. When the majority of the people of the South began to realize that an educated slave would not remain profitable, privileges and access to education were revoked. The consensus was that an independent thinker could make a

living independent of a master. In other words, when the understanding of captivity became personable and meaningful to the slave, boundaries were no longer acceptable by the slave. Take for an example, this quote by Carter G. Woodson (Woodson, 1919):

“The contrast of conditions at the close of this period with those of former days is striking. Most slaves, who were once counted as valuable, on account of their ability to read and write the English language, were thereafter considered unfit for service in the South and branded as objects of suspicion. Moreover, . . . the effort to enlighten the blacks would prove futile on account of their mental inferiority. In fact, by 1835 certain parts of the South reached the third stage in the development of the education of the Negroes. . . . as an enlightened class became such a menace to southern institutions . . . it was deemed unwise to allow them any instruction beyond that of memory training; and finally, when it was discovered that many ambitious blacks were still learning to stir up their fellows, it was decreed that they should not receive any instruction at all. Reduced thus to the plane of beasts, where they remained for generations, Negroes developed bad traits which since their emancipation have been removed only with great difficulty” (p. 7).

Many unanticipated circumstances and events made early efforts to educate Blacks short lived.

In 1863, after Abraham Lincoln executed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the freedom of all slaves, a newly found acceptance afforded African Americans another opportunity to participate in the process of social efficiency for all. African Americans were allowed access to education. This began the awakening years of education in the early 1900s. What Thomas Jefferson’s declaration of independence

did not do for African Americans the Emancipation Proclamation did. This paradigm shift represented many changes in attitudes toward educating African Americans.

Radical changes and new ideas were emerging to recast education from the traditional one classroom schoolhouse to multiple story buildings and classrooms throughout (Woodson, 1919, p.44). As the philosophy of education began to take shape throughout the 1900s, the U.S. government continued to develop and establish policies to educate all people in society. Public education then required that all children beginning at age 5 must attend school.

#### A Paradigm Shift

As philosophical beliefs change people develop into a separate culture of thinking. Capra describes a paradigm shift as being, “a profound change in thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality” (Capra, 1982, p.30). This is true today. The American people can expect that as the shift in America’s leadership has changed from an all male Caucasian dominance to a minority leader—a new thinking model will continue to surface. Capra (1982) spoke prophetically about the changing tide. In fact, he suggested that a minority leader should take center stage to change the course of events that he feels are disastrous in America as it is being played out in politics even in society today (See Figure 2:5). Each culture is as unique as the people who are associated within it to form a system. In the past, paradigms involving learning, thinking, and socialization in the United States (U.S.) have mostly been interpreted through a democratic process as set forth by the Declaration of Independence in fulfillment of the Constitution.

In 1916, Dewey stated,

“Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things, which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions—like ways of responding to expectations and requirements” (Joas, 1985).

Gutmann (1987) initiated formal inquiry into democracy relative to education with the publication of her book *Democratic Education*. This literary work identifies several factors involved in the education process to generate general questions about democracy and democratic citizenship. Gutmann’s characterizations are made about democracy as “deliberative to the extent that citizens and their accountable representatives offer one another morally defensible reasons for mutually binding laws in an ongoing process of mutual justification. To the extent that a democracy is not deliberative, it treats people as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, rather than as citizens who take part in governance by accepting or rejecting the reasons they and their accountable representatives offer for the laws and policies that mutually bind them” (p. xii).

In a democratic society, politics play a major role. Gutmann responds to the influence that politics has on education by proposing to go back to basics. When citizens have control of their life and are responsible for the outcome, they are in direct control of how future citizens will be educated. Democratic education in the eyes of some is therefore a political as well as an educational ideal.

Kenneth Howe's philosophy of education examines the issues concerning social inequality in education. In his support of Gutmann, Howe (1997) phrased the equality of education as, "the participatory educational ideal" (p.31). The ideal according to Gutmann, speaks through an empirical frame of thought. It explains that as a child is first governed by this democratic rule in school will later become the leader who imposes the same philosophical belief. Gutmann suggests that education not only sets the stage for democratic politics, it plays a central role in it. To support this claim, Gutmann developed a democratic theory of education.

According to Gutmann, when schools consider going back to the basics of how children should be educated, only the external child is considered. The emphasis are placed on reading, writing, history, mathematics and science, rather than the giftedness, internal desires, or concerns of the individual, i.e., music, art, sex education, violence, etc., (p.5). Support for this analysis comes through the recommendation of the National Commission on Excellence in education for a school reform in order to institute the "New Basics." The Commission's concern is that the "New Basics" should not be what already exists which continues to result in an increasing lack of academic performance. Furthermore, the Commission cites that many of the hindering forces such as intellectual, moral and spiritual concerns are not being strengthened and should not continue to be ignored. Explained further, it is noted that when these basic needs of the

people are met first, it causes them to become knitted together in society. The Commission sets an example of reformed schooling to include art history, sex education, racial integration, and the avoidance of academic tracking. This perspective is dynamically narrow and lacks an evaluation process.

Broadly speaking, Gutmann aims to explain, "The problem is not that the reforms recommended by the Commission are necessarily wrong, but that we cannot judge them without a more principled understanding of our educational purposes" (p.4). Political forces and powers have shown much controversy over what is considered the moral responsibility of parents and what should be taught in school. As a result of not addressing the problems that exist in society, Gutmann states, "We neglect educational alternatives that may be better than those to which we have become accustomed or that may aid us in understanding how to improve our schools before we reach the point of crisis, when our reactions are likely to be less reflective because we have so little time to deliberate" (p. 5).

An argument for Gutmann and Howe's perspective of education is found in Ivan Illich's book, *Deschooling Society* (1971). This thought provoking literary piece challenges everyone to reexamine how and why we educate people in society. Illich (1971), a critical theorist suggests that formalized schooling degenerates human beings; it fails individual needs; supports fallacious notions of "progress" and development that follow. Ivan Illich believes that "school fuses the growth in humiliating dependence on a master with the growth in the futile sense of omnipotence that is so typical of the pupil who wants to go out and teach all nations to save themselves" (p. 33). The assumption by Illich proposes the deschooling of society (Illich, 1971). One argument that Illich poses is how the achievement of knowledge is actually obtained. The assumptions in a



democratic society are learning is relative to teaching. Teaching under certain circumstances makes knowledge acceptable only through an approved convention, i.e., under a formal public education curriculum. Illich notes that, "Most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction" (p.12). Illich admitted that his assumptions to deschool society probably sounded like treason to some wary schoolmen (p.24).

Phenomenology of public school needs to be defined as the age-specific, teacher-related process of requiring full-time attendance at an obligatory curriculum. Schools require children to obey. Anything contrary to obedience warrants discipline. Mostly all schools are structured with a very detailed discipline policy that is commonly referred to as "The code of conduct" handbook or manual. Based on Illich's writings he would oppose this type of rhetoric by claiming that humans are the only beings that believe that they have to be taught discipline (Illich, 1971).

In Illich's summation of society, it becomes a place where it is believed that people should 'be more', get more, have more and keep more. This perspective, according to Illich perpetuates a problem in society that attributes success to wealth. Illich makes a direct distinction between instructing and learning (pp.34-35,50).

Illich defines learning as human activity that does not need manipulation by anyone. Most learning, he says, "Is not the result of instruction . . . rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. Therefore, "most people learn best by being 'with it'." From Illich's perspective schooling has just the opposite effect as it causes a person to measure and identify their personal achievement and cognitive growth through elaborate planning and manipulation (p.39). This in essence reduces man to any modern staple, which is created to function like a machine.

While Capra (1983) does not necessarily agree with Illich's perspective on schooling, he does, however, acknowledge that democracy has a purpose in society until a more sufficient means can be established. Capra challenges the reader of his book, "The Turning Point to take a circumspective look at the intended purpose for formal education in society. Capra also suggests change by reviewing outdated ideas; dominant social institutional behavior; and a surrender of leading roles to form new cultural forces (p.419).

### The Modern World System

Wallerstein (2000), defined the current world system as a social capitalistic society where people participate in two major systems—education and business. This social system as he described it, "Has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitim[iz]ation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces, which hold it together by tension, and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage. It has the characteristics of an organism, in that it has a life-span over which its characteristics change in some respects and remain stable in others. Wallerstein further defines systems as structures, that at different times may display strength or weakness in terms of the internal logic of its functioning (Wallerstein, 1976).

Each system as noted by Wallerstein is self-contained. Wallerstein makes an argument that most entities usually described as social systems—"tribes," communities, nation-states—are not in fact total systems. Real social systems as Wallerstein suggests, are relatively small, highly autonomous subsistence economies not part of some regular tribute-demanding system and, on the other hand, world-systems. World systems are framed through curriculums that guide the thinking of individuals in an organized manner.

The Principles of self-organization, according to Ashby (1962), supports Wallerstein's belief of self-contained systems. Ashby believed that people travel through large systems into isolated smaller ones. While most systems are non-equilibrium, they transition into an equilibrium state. As each change is occurring, selections are being made in a redundant mechanical manner. "Every isolated, determinant dynamic system obeying unchanging laws will develop organisms that are adapted to their environments" (p.115). This process further supports Capra's notion that man is not like a machine. Capra notes this viewpoint—that to adequately function within world-systems, people are exposed to the past, present, and future mechanically, but this does not make them mechanical by nature. What Capra believes is, "That we can say that nature, as described by systems science, is ordered, organized, and profoundly meaningful. To understand the impact of mechanical learning is to research different theories of learning.

### Learning Theories

Socialists can agree that everyone learns differently. Albert Bandura, in his book, *Social Learning Theory* (1977) said, "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22).

*To present an adequate notion of learning one must first explain how the individual manages to construct and invent, not merely how he repeats and copies—Jean Piaget. Donald. Schön (1992), in his article, The Theory of Inquiry:*

Dewey's Legacy to Education, he describes Dewey's theory of learning as primarily a thinking process that prompts inquiry. The Theory of Inquiry responds to an initial inquiry into the mind and thought patterns. "Inquiry begins, Dewey believed, with an indeterminate (i.e., confusing, obscure, or conflictual) situation and goes on to make that situation determinate. The inquirer does not stand outside the problematic situation like a spectator; he is in it and in transaction with it" (p. 122). Others may describe learning as individual and that it is, "The capacity to build knowledge through individual reflection about external stimuli and sources, and through the personal re-elaboration of individual knowledge and experience in light of interaction with other and the environment" (Sinitsa, 2000, p. 20).

It is apparent that the path of learning is like a road map that leads to destinations of incidental experiences. Learning theories center on behavior, organisms and stimuli. Social psychologists, researchers and educators explain about social behavior, relationships, interactions, perceptions and attitudes in human beings in relationship to their social environments—schools. Social learning environments will be discussed through different learning theories.

There are four major learning theories— behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism and humanism. Figure 2:6 shows the founders and proponents; basic idea; how the learner is viewed and a brief summary for each theory.

	Behaviorism	Cognitivism	Constructivism	Humanism
<b>Founders and Proponents</b>	John B. Watson in the early 20th century, B.F. Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, and others.	Replaced behaviorism in 1960s as dominant paradigm, Noam Chomsky.	John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky, others.	Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, others.
<b>Basic Idea</b>	Stimulus-response. All behavior caused by external stimuli (operant conditioning). All behavior can be explained without the need to consider internal mental states or consciousness.	Mental function can be understood	Learning is an active, constructive process.	Learning is a personal act to fulfill one's potential.
<b>Learner viewed as</b>	Passive, responds to environmental stimuli.	Information processor	Information constructor.	One with affective and cognitive needs.
<b>Synopsis</b>	Behavior may result in reinforcement (increased likelihood that behavior will occur in the future); or punishment.	Cognitivism focuses on inner mental activities — opening the "black box" of the human mind. It is necessary to determine how processes such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving occur. People are not "programmed animals" that merely respond to environmental stimuli; people are rational beings whose action are a consequence of thinking.  Metaphor of mind as computer: information comes in, is being processed, and leads to certain outcomes.	People actively construct or create their own subjective representations of objective reality. New information is linked to prior knowledge, thus mental representations are subjective.	Emphasis on the freedom, dignity, and potential of humans.  Learning is student-centered and personal, facilitated by teachers, with the goal of developing self-actualized people in a cooperative, supportive environment.

(Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2009)

Figure 2:6 showing four major learning theories.

Four overarching paradigms developed through the original four theories—

functionalistic, associationistic, and the neurophysiological (Hergenhahn & Olson, 1993, p. 252-253). Figure 2:7 provides the historical theoretical influence, social psychologists, theoretical underpinnings, social arrangements and examples for each paradigm.

<b>Functionalistic</b> <b>Historical</b> <b>Theoretical Influence</b> Darwin	<b>Associationistic</b> <b>Historical</b> <b>Theoretical Influence</b> Aristotle Locke	<b>Cognitive</b> <b>Historical</b> <b>Theoretical Influence</b> Plato Descartes Kant	<b>Neurophysiological</b> <b>Historical</b> <b>Theoretical Influence</b> Hebb Descartes
Demonstrates the relationship between learning and adjustment to the environment.	Studies the learning process in terms of the laws of association.	Argues that the "black box" of the mind should be opened and understood. The learner is viewed as an information processor (like a computer).	Studies reinforcement centers in the brain. Explore the relationships between the nervous system and behavior.
<b>Social psychologists</b> William James Carl Lange	<b>Social psychologists</b> Burrhus Frederick Skinner Pavlov	<b>Social psychologists</b> Albert Bandura Related to Vygotsky's Social Development Theory	<b>Social psychologists</b> Olds Sperry, Miller
<b>Theory</b> How individuals respond to social situations.  events are what influences behavior and emotions develop through a physiological reaction to the event.	<b>Theory</b> two major theoretical notions—respondent and operant behavior  <b>Respondent behavior</b> occurs when an external factor or stimulus prompts a living organism, such as a human being, to respond to it, thus learning through association.  <b>Operant behavior</b> does not respond to any external factor or stimulus but manifests naturally by the living organism—as in human beings.	<b>Theory</b> Sometimes called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation.	<b>Theory</b> Motor working memory, learning and production of movement sequences  <b>Social arrangements</b> Information is transferred from one side of the brain to the other. Reinforcement by direct brain stimulation, however, has been found to have some unusual characteristics and is therefore thought to operate differently from the more traditional reinforcers such as food or water.
<b>Social arrangements</b> one-on-one direct association group settings.	<b>Social arrangements</b> Daily routines are examples of when operant behavior is occurring. Learning is occurring in both respondent and operant behaviors (Hergenhahn, 1993).	<b>Social arrangements</b> People learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling.	<b>Social arrangements</b> Information is transferred from one side of the brain to the other. Reinforcement by direct brain stimulation, however, has been found to have some unusual characteristics and is therefore thought to operate differently from the more traditional reinforcers such as food or water.
<b>EXAMPLE</b> A person's physical reaction to seeing a grizzly bear in the woods. If the response to the event includes trembling, and a racing heart—then the person interprets this as being afraid. Following this interpretation could signal the person to run out of fear of seeing the grizzly bear (Wagner, 2005)	<b>EXAMPLE</b> A Japanese child being reared in an English speaking home. The child's ethnic origin will have no bearing on how the child is able to interpret language. The initial oral sounds in the English language, reinforce what the child will interpret and speak. The same outcome would be if the child heard any other language, i.e., Japanese, French, or Spanish.	<b>EXAMPLE</b> Students in the classroom constantly interact with their peers and the teacher.	<b>EXAMPLE</b> The human brain constructs visual maps of space surrounding different body parts. In right-brain-damaged patients with tactile extinction, the existence of a visual-peripersonal space centred on the hand has been demonstrated by showing that cross-modal visual-tactile extinction is segregated mainly in the space near the hand (Famé, Pavani, Meneghelli and Ladavas, 2000)

Figure 2:7 displaying the functionalistic, associationistic, cognitive and neurophysiological paradigms.

Specifically, the functionalistic domain reveals how social psychologists, such as William James and Carl Lange, theorized about how individuals respond to social situations. Social influence comes through social arrangements like one-on-one direct association, and group settings. Social cognition occurs through indirect influences, such as imagining “how friends would react to a particular situation. Stereotyping and attitude change are examples of social cognitive processes” (Glassman & Hadad, 2004).

Psychologists William G. Lycan and Jesse J. Prinz (2008), define human beings as higher level living organisms with an advanced cognitive processing center. Living organisms that function at a higher level, may self-associate into colonies, tribes, and other groupings. Individual organisms take on specialized roles to assess the environment, make decisions, and take action. Three primary functions that accurately define living organisms are: 1) The ability to detect different environmental signals and to adjust behavior accordingly; 2) the ability to receive and process external cues; and 3) The ability to acquire information from the environment, as in humans and other complex animals (higher functioning). The actions or reactions of an object or organism usually relates to the environment—behaviorism.

The study of psychology, scientific in design, needs a subject matter like behavior, to be reliably measured (p. 48). Behavior is driven by stimuli. A stimulus is an external signal used to cause a response (behavior) by something. The effect of the stimulus on the subject can be inappropriate or appropriate behavior.

Behaviorism, founded by John B. Watson (1925), is the reality in a person’s environment that is either subjective or objective. In an objective environment, consciousness evolves around an individual’s beliefs, values, and needs that magnify

what a person experiences in a conscious state of mind (p. 253).

Four behaviorism models of human behavior as defined by the school of psychology are, psychodynamic, bio-behavioral, environmental and behavioral (Walker, 2006). Psychodynamic behavior as perceived by Freud, is composed of three interrelating components: the id, the superego, and the ego. The id unconsciously seeks immediate gratification for physical pleasure. The superego is the part conscious and unconscious mind that tells the id when certain boundaries have been superseded. Words that attribute a discussion with the superego are should and shame. The ego is considered to be the “hero” that provides checks and balances for the id and the superego (Roberts, 1975, p.7)

The bio-behavioral theory is the conceptual model that an organic problem exists from within the individual human being. When a notable cultural transformation takes place and it cannot be prevented, then we need to prepare ourselves for a “deep reexamination of the main premises and values of our culture, a rejection of those conceptual models that have outlived their usefulness, and a new recognition of some of the values discarded in previous periods of our cultural history.” The critical point is not to look toward any social group or institution to lay blame for how an educational system is ran, but to seek a new way in which to understand how attitudes and perceptions represent a value system (Capra, p.33). Capra states that, “The old is discarded and the new is introduced. Both measure[ment]s accord with the time; therefore no harm results” (Wilhelm,1968, p.97). The importance of behaviorism in learning theories can be interpreted through empirical findings.

Empirical Paradigm



The empirical paradigm relies solely on practical experiences and rejects any other theory relative to the origin of knowledge. Under the empirical paradigm, work symbolizes the efforts of people to relate to and control the natural, and by extension, the social world. The most valued objective of this paradigm is its ability to generate knowledge through a precise and predictable set of facts (Pearse, 1992).

To no fault of their own, traditional educators typically teach under an empirical paradigm of lecturing and control. Classrooms that operate under this premise place an emphasis on analytical, linear and left-brain thinking (Zvric, 1997). In the United States Left brain men are honored. Caucasian males make up the majority in society. The prevailing learning style of the left-brain learner is auditory. The auditory learner prefers to learn from teachers who lecture (Pytel, 2006).

The opposite is true for right brain learners; who learn best through experiences. African American males tend to fall in the spectrum of right brain learners. Note that it is important not to associate brain function with behavior. Thinking as it relates to the ability to process information is distinctly different from how a person responds based on the brain's ability to function. Brain function associated with behavior or processing should also not be linked to or applied to any race of people (Phelps & Thomas, 2003). Empirically designed classrooms cater to the learning styles of left-brain children (Boyd, 2008). "Left-brained people tend to be logical and analytical, with strong mathematical and verbal skills. Left-brained students are usually able to work well on their own and focus in class, although they may prefer a quiet classroom. Modern schools, with their emphasis on standardized testing, have been accused of catering to left-brained students, since those are the kids who excel at research and memorization" (Boyd, 2008).

Therefore, Caucasian males tend to be more successful in left-brain environments than are African American males in the same environment. The United States' educational system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. In other words modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere (Roger Sperry – 1973)

The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body. The right side controls the left side (see Figure 2:8).

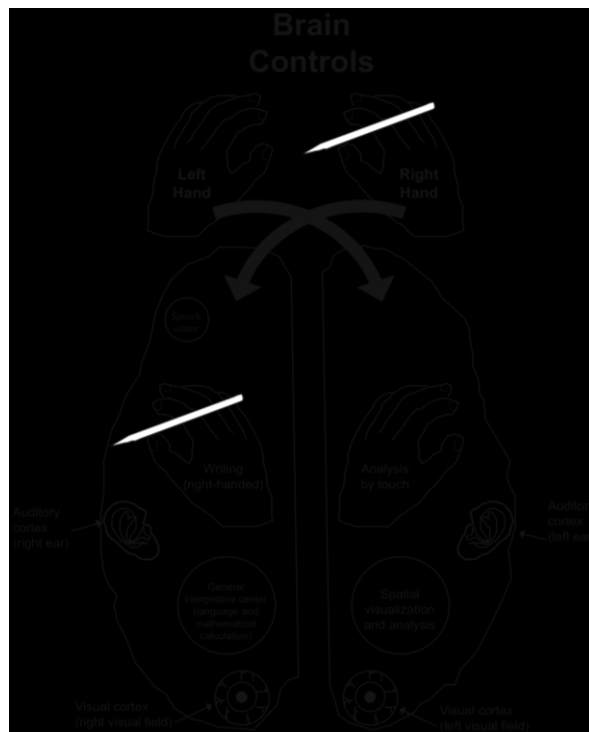


Figure 2:8 (adapted from various images) shows how the body is controlled by opposite sides of the brain.

The population seems to be equally split left and right. A brain can be half left/half right, predominantly left or predominantly right. Since half of the students are right brained, teachers who teach in different modalities benefit all students versus only some students in a predominantly lecture styled environment.

At a conference in Michigan, Jane Bluestein (2005) presented research about the individual learning preferences and needs of children. She supports Howard Gardner's (2006) theory of multiple intelligences, recalling that there are different styles of learning that utilizes the five senses. In particular, she notes preferences to noises. Bluestein distinguishes between differences and comfort ability, noting that most people have a tendency to expect that someone else prefers to learn the same as they learn. Bluestein suggests that teachers provide accommodations that are child centered. In an environment that is child centered; she learns how to be responsible for her own learning needs. Bluestein provides a fresh and positive look at classroom management by explaining how to have "The Win-Win Classroom." In a win-win environment stress is reduced; brain functioning is understood; learning styles are celebrated; and social and emotional issues on student behavior are dealt with in a positive manner.

To support these efforts, Bluestein lists twelve points to, "Avoid falling into the "rules and punishment." They are,

- Establish win-win authority relationships while defusing conflict and opposition
- Build a positive, caring, and emotionally safe learning climate
- Encourage student cooperation, motivation, self-management, and on-task behavior
- Accommodate a wide variety of learning styles and preferences in a brain-friendly atmosphere
- Minimize academic failure and frustration—even with pressure to "get through the content"
- Reduce social conflict and emotional outbursts

- Eliminate defiance, dependence, and disinterest
- Engage even the most defiant, defeated, or resistant learner by using powerful alternative strategies
- Make your classroom (and school) culture much more positive
- Build relationships with parents and other staff members
- Reduce stress and burnout and make your work more enjoyable

### Whole Brain Learning

As we develop our creative skills we must also develop our ability to suspend the left-brain and to release the right. The ultimate goal for humans should be to approach life and work using a "whole" brain approach. We can't make the mistake of thinking that the left and right brains are two totally separate entities within our bodies. Figure 2:9 shows how the right and left hemispheres of the brain are connected and do have areas of overlap (Pitek, 1998).

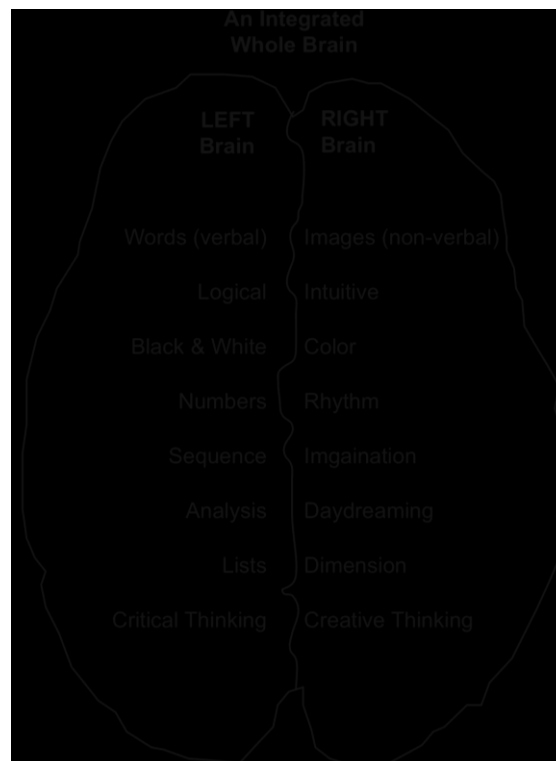


Figure 2:9 adapted from This Week in Innovation.

An integrated "whole" brain approach begins to maximize the untapped potential of the human brain. Curriculums that enable students to use whole brain activities and lessons can increase academic achievement. In the simplest form, learning as could be interpreted as a demand made by Carl Rogers (1983, p.18-19, in Smith, 1999) is,

“ . . . not the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten stuff that is crammed in to the mind of the poor helpless individual tied into his seat by ironclad bonds of conformity! I am talking about LEARNING - the insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent boy to absorb everything he can see or hear or read about gasoline engines in order to improve the efficiency and speed of his 'cruiser'. I am talking about the student who says, "I am discovering, drawing in from the outside, and making that which is drawn in a real part of me." I am talking about any learning in which the experience of the learner progresses along this line: "No, no, that's not what I want"; "Wait! This is closer to what I am interested in, what I need"; "Ah, here it is! Now I'm grasping and comprehending what I need and what I want to know!" An effective curriculum provides students with the opportunity to have a reflexive, organizational, and voluntary environment that stimulates motivation. This is shown in Figure 2:10.

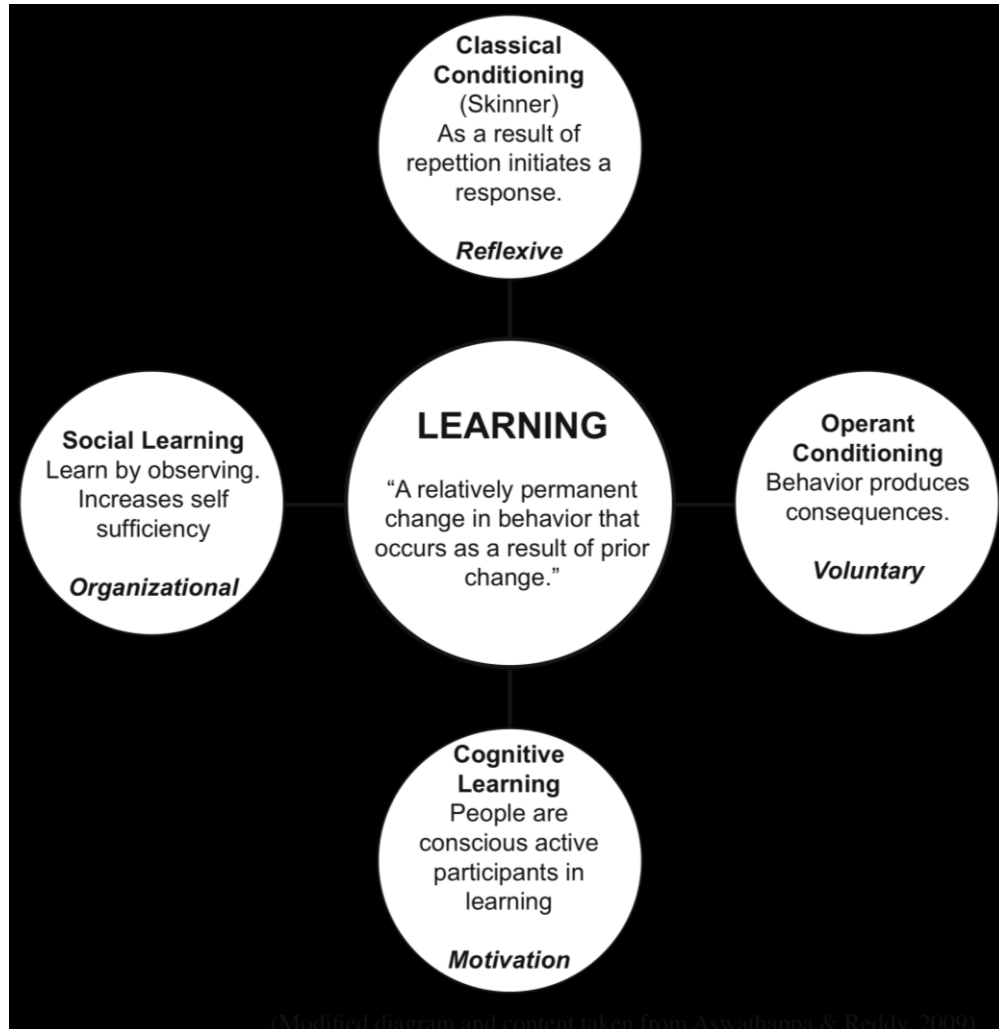


Figure 2:10

Depending upon who is asked, teachers, parents, administrators or students, there are varying perceptions about general education curriculums and special education curriculums. Curriculums and their usefulness will be discussed more in depth later on.

An analysis of the constitution of education in society, delivers the consciousness and mind of society that has evolved through a system of Democracy. It is a fact that in a democratic society, gaining and obtaining access to education has not always been easily obtained or equitable for all people. As shown in this literature review, people have the capability of using the whole brain to learn. Still today, in the twentieth-first

century, a nineteenth-century teaching model is still being used. This means that many of the current teaching models in schools today focus on left-brain learning theories that appeal to lecture, wrote material and memorization.

### Major Schools of Thought

The foundation of schooling in the U.S. as defined earlier continues to be refined over time. Two notable philosophers Dewey and Mead made a great impact on the educational system.

#### **DEWEY**

A thorough analysis of how experiences exist and are structured, are revealed in the two books (all in one volume) that make up *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, edited by John J. McDermott. McDermott's anthology of Dewey defines both the structure of experience and lived experiences as a basis to form a philosophical perspective of education (McDermott, 1973). Dewey's work has been chosen for a number of reasons. First, Dewey's work is cited in many types of literature involving psychology, sociology, and has had a major influence on the philosophy of educational reform.

Dewey's school of thought is identified as pragmatic as he searched for meaning in education through empirical theories. Dewey believed that experiences are predicated upon various ways of experiencing. One such way is to experience by knowing about things and structuring their relationship in a logical manner that involves some form of inquiry. The role of the body in Dewey's philosophy is considered of central importance (Dewey, 1967). Dewey felt that, "All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members" (p.7). Dewey would not apologize for his thoughts, as he passionately believed that education primarily controlled the minds of its pupils. In his summation, industrialization

is all that was netted. He described a factory type system that unconsciously produced workers. The worker is designed for their only prescribed work. Boys are manufactured to become manual laborers—auto mechanics, fieldwork and girls for domestic work—sewing, cooking activities (p.13-14). It is presumed that the progression of school affords one the opportunity to be guided socially in life through the efforts of learning lessons and receiving mutual assistance. Dewey challenges this philosophy by suggesting that the one place where learning is intended, in all actuality school is the least amount of life and existence where learning occurs (p.17). The research and analysis of both John Dewey, a researcher in the nineteenth century and Jawanza Kunjufu a researcher in this twentieth first century concur that education is a means of control for citizens.

Dewey stated,

“In this school the life of the child becomes the all-controlling aim. All the media necessary to further the growth of he child center there. Learning? Certainly, but living primarily, and learning through and in relation to this living. When we take the life of the child centered and organized in this way, we do not find that he is first of all a listening being; quite the contrary” (p.36).

Kunjufu presents evidence in his book, *Black students: Middle class teachers*,

“What I see in the educational and social service sector in not education and empowerment, but professionals who label, categorize, and control. The labels and categories include: remedial reading classes, lower-track classes, regular classes, honors, advanced placement, magnet schools, gifted and talented programs, behavior disordered, educationally and mentally handicapped,



mentally retarded, learning disabled, hyperactive, and attention deficit disorder” (p168).

If what Kunjufu presents reveals a pattern, it is understandable why there is a growing concern for people who are primarily affected by this phenomenon. Thus, when a student recognizes they are caught in this evolutionary pattern, the perception of the quality of ones life may be internalized as a failure. Failure, if perceived negatively, and not as a positive, causes a transition for change to occur, and may stimulate a desire to drop out of school.

Dewey explained life in the human body as a constant evolution. “The doctrine of evolution was of central importance to the development of classical American philosophy, particularly as found in the writings of C.S. Peirce, William James, G.H. Mead, and John Dewey” (p.31). “The influence of Darwin upon philosophy resides in his having conquered the phenomena of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to the mind, morals and life” (p.35).

The combination of both an empirical method and the theory of pragmatism yields philosophical results that, “All knowledge is prospective in its results, except in the case where notions and theories after having been first prospective in their application, have already been tried out and verified. Theoretically, however, even such verifications or truths could not be absolute (p.49).” According to McDermott, pragmatism has a metaphysical implication. Interpreted, it is not enough to look only at the present but to consider the future where the works of life are incomplete, but not without consequences (p.50).

The experience of knowing is in some ways ambiguous to consciousness and experience. In an effort to define consciousness, Dewey participated in several

developments of “pragmatic empiricism” which included an analysis of the individual. The psychology of the person at the preset of the analysis is all that is considered. Thereafter, the way in which the individual is conceived, attributes value to him, and the things in his make-up arouses interest is what is presented sociologically—the social life. An autocratic society rules with absolute authority. In an aristocratic society there is an authoritarian rule by a select group of elite people. A democratic society encompasses both an autocratic and aristocratic form of leadership. Within each of these societies there are different estimates of the worth and place of individuality. The psychology arising in each reveals a political science (p.161).

Psychology deals with consciousness “as such” in its various modes and processes (p.162). McDermott believes that if; “consciousness” or “state of consciousness” is given intelligible meaning. This conception is the gateway into the fair fields of philosophy. McDermott notes that there may be a distinction between the meanings for a metaphysician versus that of a psychologist. Psychology is the historical perspective where experiences originate. Philosophy involves values of the criticism and justification of certain validities (p.170). After psychology has been defined, according to Professor Caird (1924), Psychology, and not Logic, is the method of Philosophy.

## **MEAD**

The philosophy, social theory, and the theory of thought of George Herbert Mead as written by Mitchell Aboulafia (1991) puts in context Mead’s position in intellectual history and his early philosophical social beliefs. Dewey described Mead as “a seminal mind of the very first order” and the very first mind in philosophy in America of the last generation (Thayer & Peirce, 1982, p.338, in Aboulafia, 1991).” Mead’s work involves

the analysis of self and is greatly attributed to the works of philosopher Charles Darwin and the emergence of the mind. Darwinism in theory tells us how a certain amount of diversity in life forms can develop once we have various types of complex living organisms already in existence (Johnson, 1993). He is most noted for his theory of human evolution—man in preexistence versus the primal existence of the ape and the development of man. Darwinism was not without criticism as it meant for many philosophers who believed in God and the creation of man as a superior mammal--the representation of Atheism, or the absence of God, where nature exists first.

Dmitri N. Shalin (Aboulafia, 1991) outlines the political pathway of Mead's journey toward his movement for social reform known as the Progressive Agenda. Filled with a strong dedication to his radical democratic convictions, Mead's lifelong attempts proved to provide a framework of American democracy. Throughout this social reconstruction, progressivism evolved (p.21). The socio-historical context of progressivism interpreted a change in the way that citizens were being socialized in America and the major influences that existed.

Critics of the Progressive Agenda feared the loss of power. They contended that under a social and industrial democracy the capitalist society that was currently operating in America could possibly weaken the relentless drive toward monopoly and the growing polarization of wealth—the results, severely altering the wealth patterns (p.23-24). On the opposite side, supporters of the agenda charged that state control does not work, that equalizing opportunity is indeed the government's business. Mead fully acknowledged the socialists' role in exposing capitalism's seedier sides and raising the workers' awareness of the need to fight for their rights (p.46).

The work of Karl Marx, a sociologist who Mead was inspired by, propelled the thought that socialist teaching is ultimately concerned with socializing man's action and thought. Mead quoted Marx as saying that, "Its [socialism] reality lies in the essentially social character of all conduct, and the gospel, according to socialism, is the recognition that all self-seeking has and must have a social end, if it belongs inside a social organism. What society is struggling to accomplish is to bring this social side of our conduct out so that it may, in some conscious way, become the element of control" (Mead, 1899b, p.406, In Aboulafia 1991). Furthermore, Shalin states that, "Indeed, as long as our motives remain private and we act without regard for other members of society, democracy will continue to breed injustice and human misery. It is only when the individual takes into account the larger context, when he "takes the role of the other," that social control becomes a guiding force in society and democracy realizes its true potential as a political system: "Social control depends, then, upon the degree to which the individuals in society are able to assume the attitudes of the others who are involved with the in common endeavor" (Mead, 1964, p.291 & p.47, In Aboulafia 1991).

Jürgen Habermas discusses a paradigm shift in Mead. His theory of intuitive self-knowledge, reflection, or introspection was being replaced. The analytic philosophy of language and the psychological theory of behavior proposed an analysis that began with linguistic expressions or observed behavior, which invoked inter-subjective testing. A reconstructing of the philosophical belief system of the knowledge of rules that were familiar from logic and linguistics; behavioral psychology took over the methods of observation and strategies of interpretation established in studies of animal behavior (p.137).

Using some of Charles Sanders Peirce notations, Mead presented his theory under the rubric of “social behaviorism” because he wanted to stress the note of criticism of consciousness. There are however two methodological differences separating Mead’s approach from behaviorism. The model from which he starts is not the behavior of an individual organism reacting to stimuli from an environment, but an interaction in which at least two organisms react to one another and behave in relation to one another: “We are not, in social psychology, building up the behavior of the social group in terms of the behavior of the separate individuals composing it; rather we are starting out with a given social whole of complex activities, into which we analyze (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it.” As a result, Mead rejects not only the methodological individualism of behavior theory but its objectivism as well. Mead states that, “Social psychology is behavioristic in the sense of starting off with an observable activity—the dynamic, ongoing social process, and the social acts which are its component elements—to be studied and analyzed scientifically. But it is not behavioristic in the sense of ignoring the experience of the individual—the inner phase of that process or activity” (p.138-139).

The paradigm shift prepared by Mead’s social psychology clears the way for a communication concept of rationality. He declares that, “We are what we are through our relationship to others. Inevitably, then, our end must be a social end, both from the standpoint of its content . . . and also from the point of view of form. Sociality gives the universality of ethical judgments and lies back of the popular statement that the voice of all is the universal voice; that is everyone who can rationally appreciate the situation agrees” (p.164).

Many other schools of thought have greatly influenced modern day education.

Figure 2:11 shows an at-a-glance of the influential role, each of the theories play in curriculums today.

<b>Philosopher</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Influence in education today</b>
G. Stanley Hall	Child-centered education	Led many school reform efforts. Paved the way for Piaget to make his mark. Hall argued that the high school should be a place similar to a "people's college" so that it could be more of an ending for those who would not be continuing their education to the next level (Greulik, May 1999).
John Dewey	Systems theory looks at the world in terms of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena	Dewey's theory of a schooling system opened the door for hands on learning through trial and error (Hickman, May 2000)
John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner	Behavior theory examines the environment to determine how it impacts organisms through some form of conditioning	Helps people to learn new skills and behaviors in a variety of settings. "Problems may be phrased in such a way that refined methods in behavior eventually will lead to their solution" (Watson, May 1999).  "Observation overemphasizes stimuli; experimentation includes the rest of the contingencies which generate repertoires" (Dews, 1970, p18).
Jean Piaget	Cognitive theory focuses on internal states within the mind	Looks at motivation, problem solving, decision-making, thinking, and attention. Piaget was not certain that everyone who reaches the fourth cognitive developmental stage that he defined as "Formal Operational" at age 11 or 12 and up, could think abstractly, or reason theoretically (Presnell, May 1999).
Vygotksy	Children construct their knowledge; development cannot be separated from is social context; learning can lead development and language plays a central role in mental development.	Suggests that social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in children's thought and behavior that can vary greatly from culture to culture (Woolfolk, 1998).  Basically Vygotsky's theory suggests that development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help form their

		own view of the world (Gallagher, May 1999).
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Figure 2:11 summarizes the influence that major theorist provide for education today.

Curriculums are used to propel one major school of thought forward into society. The usefulness of a curriculum serves as a medium for individuals to obtain knowledge about the past, present and future. As students are taught historical facts, they understand ways to form an identity and connection in society. Curriculum selection comes through a pre-determined government agency. The materials used for instruction guide the learner through life skills, ideals and reinforces the democratic value system. George Herbert Mead theorized that knowing and understanding the past was “an efficient vehicle of nationalism and moral education.” Subjects taught through the curriculum help the learner to communicate and appropriately use the values learned (Phenix, 1961). As complex as this is, Mead was quoted in *The Philosophy of the Present* as saying that in the present,

“We assume that the happening of earlier events carries with it a probability as to the nature of later events, even if this probability can be reckoned only on a theory of chances. The basis of this determination of the future by the past is found in the fact that something is taking place (p.33).”

Generally speaking, the perspectives of many social theorists imply that parents are not regarded as capable of producing socialized children alone. As a result, organized schooling became an expected norm in society. Through a concerted effort to get it right, a continuing effort and challenge for formal schooling in the world’s system, was the change from classical education to modern reforms. Public education in the Twentieth-first century still operates under the founding democratic principles.

The same principles that present democracy as a commitment to values of tolerance, cooperation, and compromise, of the people it represents. These principles are taught through a set curriculum with the intention of providing best practices.

Curriculums provide common people with an opportunity to share opinions based on philosophy and belief systems. As students progress through the curriculum they develop pathways to participate in social, cultural and art movements to form a school of thought. As the needs in society change, a new school of thought emerges. Reinterpreted, a paradigm shift causes a “new” and “old” school of thought.

Originally used in business, the term “best practices” has been used for years to define and improve the quality of institutions in society. Best practices serve as a guideline to improve the overall effectiveness and usefulness of businesses. The success of the use of “best practices” prompted an extension into the management of educational institutions (Butt & Ruetzel, 1994). Determining best teaching practices for the socialization of students should be determined by social theories that are researched based and proven successful. The absence of best practices in a formal setting can lead to an environmental change and acute conflict.

As many different institutions continue to influence the attitudes of people, and shape the perceptions of experiences, school is at the forefront of all social institutions. The efforts of modern society’s elementary curriculum develops students through the fundamental process of literacy and numeracy to shape moral character, honesty, hard work standards and patriotism (Connell, 1980). Secondary education’s basic intent of a traditional curriculum is to provide a system of thinking by means of mental training. This includes a curriculum of classics and mathematics, later referred to as liberal education.



### Training the Mind versus Intelligence

The work of Lev. S. Vygotsky, in *Mind in Society* (1978) echoes the problems encountered in the psychological analysis of teaching. Vygotsky believes that in order to correctly resolve or even formulate an analysis the relationship between learning and development in school-age children must first be examined. As discussed earlier, theoretically learning is considered as a “purely external process that is not actively involved in development. It merely utilizes the achievements of development rather than providing an impetus for modifying its course (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is separate from development, whereas development is directly associated with thinking. In Vygotsky’s analysis of learning, he held two major theoretical positions: 1) “Learning forms a superstructure over development” and 2) “Learning is development.”

Reflex theorists, Woodworth and Thorndike (Vygotsky, 1978, p.82) disagreed with Vygotsky’s theory. They founded that learning was basically responses to training of the mind and a “complex of abilities—powers, of observation, attention, memory, thinking, and so forth” (pp.79-82).

Controversial researchers like Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray who published *The Bell Curve*, in 1994, designed a work that in their opinion would “explain, using empirical statistical analysis, the variations in intelligence in American Society, raise some warnings regarding the consequences of this intelligence gap, and propose national social policy with the goal of mitigating the worst of the consequences attributed to this intelligence gap.” The work presents reference norms and expectations for the intelligent quotients (IQ) of African Americans and Caucasians. This research supports Charles Darwin’s philosophy of human differences but it failed to

explain the paradox of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism believes in equality. The Bell Curve is only a valid measurement,

“As long as people remain on top of the social heap by accident of a noble name or parental wealth, and as long as members of despised castes cannot rise no matter what their talents, social stratification will not reflect intellectual merit, and brilliance will be distributed across all classes; but when true equality of opportunity is attained, smart people rise and the lower classes become rigid, retaining only the intellectually incompetent” (Gould, 1994).

Based on Gould’s assessment of equality, it could be asserted that when all things are equal, than can true intelligence be adequately discerned and true incompetency is fairly measured. If this is put into consistent practice it could weaken gender and or race biases being used to measure intelligence.

Janice Hale in her book, *Learning While Black* (2001) provides an in-depth study on how students, particularly African American males learn. Hale describes how the quality of education for African American children, “Requires that they somehow become connected to academic achievement.” Figure 2:12 shows a model to demonstrate Hale’s emphasis on classroom instruction.

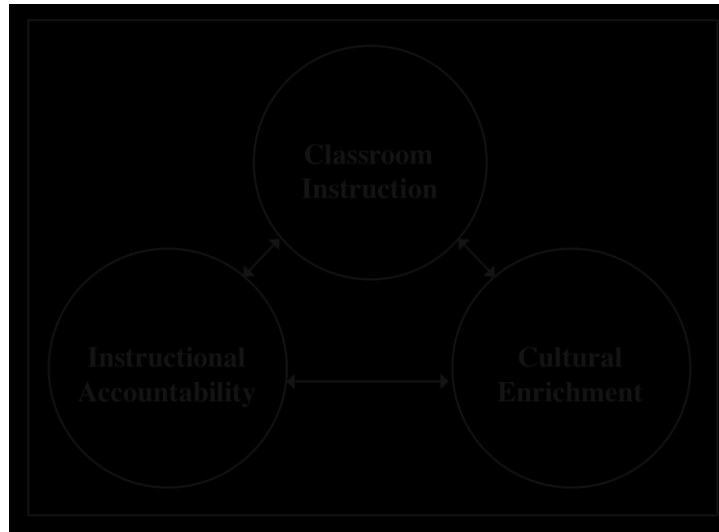


Figure 2:12 Instructional Model

Without the effectiveness of the classroom instructional model that Hale describes she states that,

“Most African American children, particularly African American males, do not like school. Many drop out intellectually by the time they are in the fifth grade and make it legal at sixteen years of age. People who do not finish high school and those who finish with poor records are not able to obtain jobs through which they cannot conceptualize a future for themselves” (p113).

According to Hale’s analysis, African American students who are exposed to culturally relevant pedagogy may become motivated to learn and more interested in school (Hale, 2001).

Hale’s classroom instruction model (Figure 2:13) identifies how the instructional accountability Infrastructure, and cultural enrichment opportunities are used to support a curriculum.

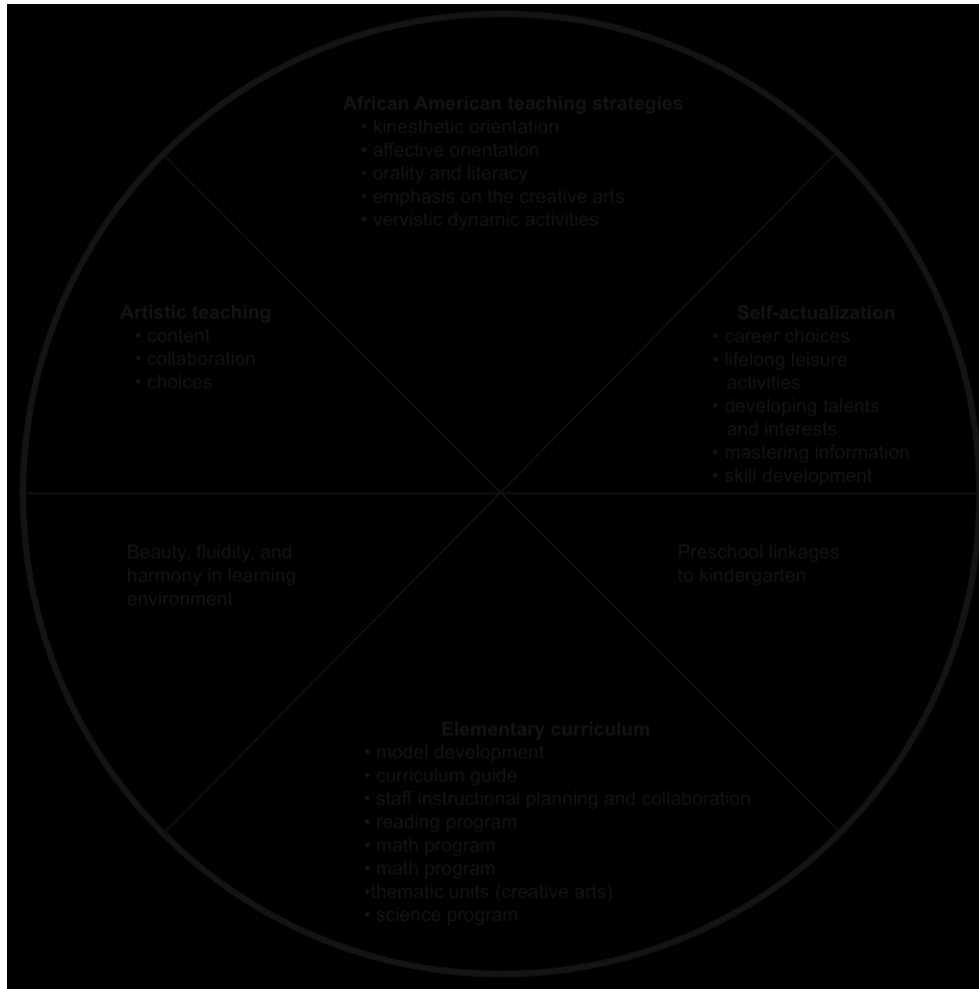


Figure 2:13 Classroom Instruction (Hale, 2001, p. 114)

### Curriculums and Intelligence Quotients (IQ)

The provision for classroom instruction is divided into two curriculums—general and special education. To participate fully in the general education curriculum, ones I.Q. must be above the 70 percentile. Students are not pre-identified or selected for I.Q. testing. Whenever a student begins to demonstrate a problem with articulating, retaining or linking information, usually they are later considered for specialized student support services.

Self-contained classrooms in the special education curriculum tend to use more differentiated and direct instruction practices to help the learner achieve goals and

objectives. This could be thought of as a liberal approach to learning. When students learn in a flexible environment, they are encouraged to use kinesthetic activities to gain experiences through exploration, thus more opportunities to socialize.

Opponents of Hale who still support Herrnstein and Murray's Bell Curve, argue that the high rates of social problems that African Americans experience is primarily based upon an "innate inferiority to Caucasians and other racial groups." As a result, the predisposition of genetic traits and characteristics increases the ability for African Americans to engage in problematic behavior at higher rates than Caucasians (Garrett, 1961; Jensen, 1973, *in Oliver, 1989*). This is in direct opposition to what Gould (1994) said about equality and the ideals of democracy as the cause of inferiority complexes. Some researchers often attempt to define poverty as a culture. "The culture of poverty perspective is another body of assumptions designed and often used to explain the etiology of social problems among Blacks" (p.16). The major problem with this perspective according to Oliver is, "it fails to explain why only a small percentage of Blacks who experience poverty and exposure to community social disorganization engage in behavioral patterns that suggest the internalization of values and norms in conflict with mainstream values and norms" (Hill, 1972, *in Oliver, 1989*).

There continues to be a wide gap between what causes African Americans especially males to experience many adverse situations. The many speculations and accusations that have been made about African American males should not be ignored. Attitudes and perception about events, situations, circumstances and phenomena should not be generalized. Accurately interpreted, it is an individualistic experience.

Theorist Charles H. Cooley suggests that the way that a person responds to himself is how they believe others view them. He penned the phrase, "looking glass

self.” The Looking Glass Self is the process where self-images are first developed as to the signals and perception of how a person believes they are being viewed. The perceived perceptions are not necessarily real but they are real to the individual themselves. The three components that Cooley theorizes about the *looking glass self* are how—

We imagine how we appear to others.

We imagine what their judgment of that appearance must be.

We develop some self-feeling, such as pride or mortification, as a result of our imagining others' judgment (UOC Department of Sociology and Anthropology: Biographies of Sociologists, Accessed 2006).

Research in the area of attitudes and perceptions held by African American males who participated in a self-contained middle school classroom and dropped out of high school is burgeoning. This study can contribute to existing research about African American males and their right to inclusive schooling.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

*The study of perception shows that nothing is seen as “directly” as supposed in common sense—Richard L. Gregory.*

Perceptions are ambiguous—meaning the way that something appears to one individual does not necessarily reflect the same perception or interpretation of another. Perception is dependent upon interpretation that translates into attitudes that form opinions.

Exploring the attitudes and perceptions relative to the social experiences of African American males’ peer relationships provided insight into how a student’s perception of a self-contained middle school classroom influenced their decision to drop out of high school. This study is a response to the disproportionate placement of African American males who are identified to receive specialized student services, resulting in an overrepresentation in special education. The purpose of this study was to examine the affect of self-contained special education middle school classrooms with African American males who drop out of high school. The study is primarily based on the attitudes and perceptions of four African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school program.

Adequate research on the placement of students who have a disability in separate classrooms, social relationships, tracking and the dropout rate among African American males has been founded (Capper, C., Frattura, E., & Keyes, 2000; Dudley-Marling, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1989; Hale, 2001). Other research studies have analyzed some of the inconsistent practices of special education and how African

American males are seemingly affected the most by each decision that is made (Michigan Annual Performance Report, 2003-2004). This study is a document that is primarily based on information obtained by the participants in an unaltered and unbiased manner.

Using the voice of the participants, this study focused on the social perceptions and attitudes held by Tommy Strong, Peter Sanchez, Fresh Bee and Curt Jackson, African American males who participated in and graduated from a self-contained special education middle school classroom and dropped out of high school after the first year of attending.

The questions that guided this study include the following:

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of African American males who have a learning disability toward self-contained special education middle school programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions held by African American males who have a learning disability of the self-contained special education program at the middle school level, who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom?

Research Question 3: Based upon the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who have a learning disability and participated in a self-contained special education middle school program, might this setting influence African American males to drop out of high school? If so how?

### Research Design

The design for this research study is qualitative with a case study format. John W. Creswell (2007) makes the distinction between quantitative research from that of qualitative, stating that, "qualitative researchers try to interact with their subjects in a



natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner.” The ultimate goal of the qualitative researcher may be to “better understand human behavior and experiences” in an effort to “grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p43).

In education, the method of qualitative inquiry has the ability to delve into the learning about teaching and the cultural views and responses to how a particular program is operated, and its overall effectiveness. To obtain an unbiased outcome, it is important to treat research subjects as individuals with varying perceptions (Morris & Hurwitz, 1980 in Bodgan & Biklen, 1997).

An interpretive paradigm was used for participants to construct their own philosophical beliefs and meaning of their experience(s) while participating in a self-contained special education middle school program and the events that have influenced these African American males who decided to drop out of high school.

The main objective of this research design was to use an ethnographic approach to present the research participant’s voice and to describe any attitudes and perceptions that may have influenced their decision to drop out of high school. Palena Neale, Shyam Thapa, and Carolyn Boyce (2006) suggest that it is appropriate to use a case study to present an interesting or unique story. Robert Stake (1995) suggests three different types of case studies—intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An Intrinsic case study can provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon within a program, i.e., the natural setting where the phenomenon occurs; and the use of holistic inquiry to explain the “why” in an in-depth picture. The instrumental case study focused on overlooked phenomenon that appears subtly and is independent of the researcher’s rationale for using a particular case. In a collective case study, phenomenon can occur

on one or multiple site locations. The responsibility of the researcher for this report was to provide only the lessons learned in the final analysis.

Robert Yin (1994) and Tellis (1997) had somewhat of a different perspective of case studies. Yin and Tellis identify three case study design types as, exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. In an exploratory case study, Yin (1994) recommends that the application of recommended procedures be dependent on three conditions: 1) type of questions, 2) the researcher's influence, and 3) the amount of focus placed on contemporary events. According to Yin (1994, p.20) in an explanatory case study, cause and effect is explored. Descriptive case studies involve in-depth research of either a single person or a group of people in a phenomenon (Thomas, Nelson and Silverman, 2005).

The case study design that the researcher used in this study is a descriptive, collective qualitative and naturalistic approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A naturalistic inquiry is further defined by Guba (1978) and House (1977) as “. . . [the] evaluation which attempts to arrive at naturalistic generalizations on the part of the audience; which is aimed at non-technical audiences like teachers or the public at large; which makes extensive use of arguments [in an] attempt to establish the structure of reality.” This will allow the researcher to better understand and to theorize about the attitudes and perceptions held by African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and dropped out of high school.

#### Limitations of the Study

The researcher chose to use a case study method because of the increased ability to provide data from multiple sources gathered from interviews and a focus group. The limitations of the study included length of time, the tendency for the

researcher to interject biases, and a proneness to overgeneralization (Neale, et. al., 2006).

### Validity and Reliability

The steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability in the study include “being systematic” in the “data collection” by “generaliz[e]ing findings to theories,” just “as a scientist generalizes from experimental results to theories” (Yin, 2003). Some suggested methods to improve upon validity, reliability and generalizability and to insure accuracy in the findings, were made in the form of prolonging the processes of data gathering on site. An example of this is, “Employ[ing] the process of triangulation,” meaning using “a variety of data sources” rather than relying on one method; open discussions between the researcher and the subjects to check for accuracy of data gathered—what is said is what is intended for meaning; engage in peer consultation to “establish validity through pooled judgment” (Becker, Dawson, Devine, Hannum, Hill, Leydens, Matuskevich, Traver, and Palmquist, 2005). Becker, et.al, also state that:

Although little can be done to combat challenges concerning the generalizability of case studies, "most writers suggest that qualitative research should be judged as credible and confirmable as opposed to valid and reliable" (Merriam 1985, in Becker, et al.). Likewise, it has been argued that "rather than transplanting statistical, quantitative notions of generalizability and thus finding qualitative research inadequate, it makes more sense to develop an understanding of generalization that is congruent with the basic characteristics of qualitative inquiry" (Merriam, 1985, in Becker, et al.). After all, criticizing the case study method for being ungeneralizable is comparable to criticizing a washing machine for not being able to tell the correct time. In other words, it is unjust to criticize a

method for not being able to do something[,] which it was never originally designed to do in the first place.

### Description of the Setting

This study took place in Detroit, Michigan. The subjects participated in a case study format. Participants were selected from within the city of Detroit. The researcher is a State of Michigan certified teacher with a Learning Disabilities endorsement and a certified School Administrator. Arrangements were made to meet the male participants at Riverside Preparatory Middle College Academy, an alternative high school for at-risk youth who either dropped out of high school or who were administratively transferred because of student code of conduct violations that were incomprehensible. Other meeting locations were the Considine Recreation Center, Taco Bell and Burger King, all of which are located in Detroit Michigan.

To develop an in-depth overview about their involvement in both school settings, a brief (personal) case history, as suggested by Yin (2008, p.177) was done on the participants in the study who dropped out of high school. Each participant was asked to express attitudes and perceptions that they held about teachers, peers, and the administration—and, what attitudes and perceptions they believe teachers, peers, and the administration formed about them as they participated within both settings. During the males' experiences, both positive and negative attitudes were expressed. The males were asked to describe their attitudes relative to specific events that were personal and unique to them. Each individual male was asked to reconstruct their personal experience from the inception of qualifying for special education services to the day after the last day of high school attendance.

At the conclusion of each individual case study, each of the males was asked to participate in a focus group. The focus group was used to construct a proposed model of a social experience of an African American male student receiving specialized student services in a middle and high school program. The model was not exclusive to only a self-contained setting. In an effort to decrease the high school drop out rate and to support African American males in special education, the model also included and defined each of the roles of the administrator, teachers, students, program supports and intervention strategies. Figure 3:1 shows the perceptual intersubjectivity of the respondents.

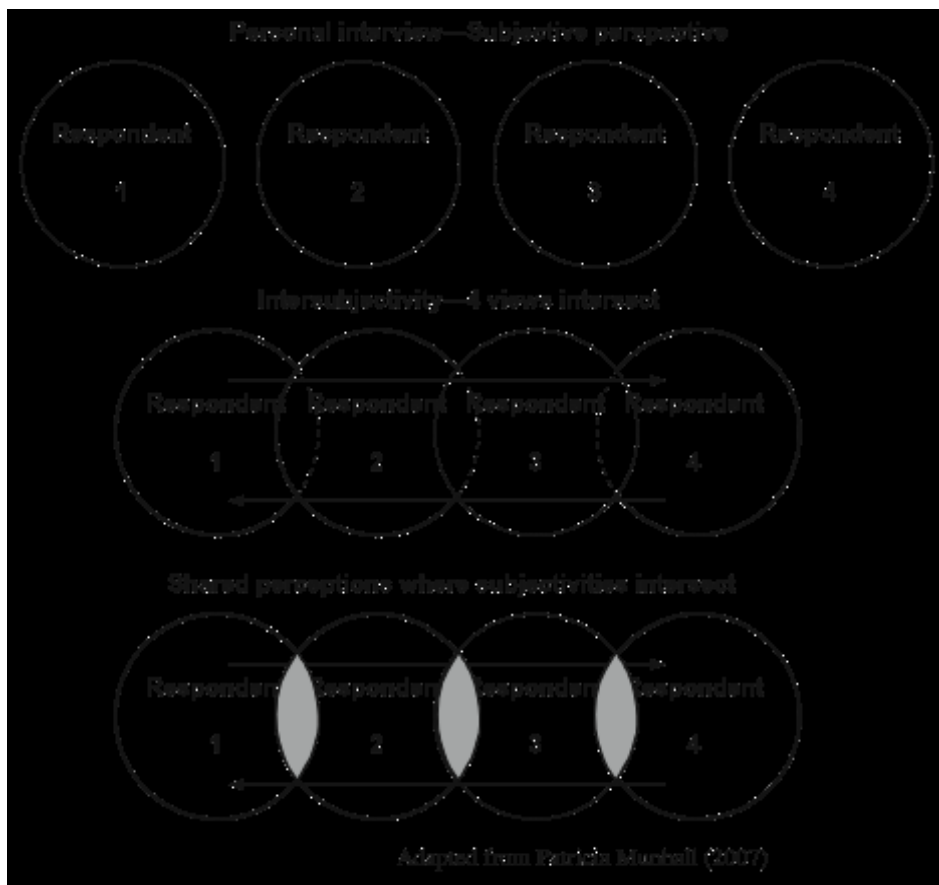


Figure 3:1

There are five qualitative approaches to inquiry: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Table 3:2 shows contrasting characteristics of each approach. The “focus” and the “type of problem base suited for design,” are key in differentiating between the characteristics of the approaches to use for this study. The grayed columns indicate the choices of the researcher.

While there are similar characteristics in each approach, this study will combine the use of phenomenology and case study research to collect data. The number of “Xs” indicates the relevance to why it is necessary to use Phenomenology Research and Case Study approach for this study.

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Narrative Research</i>	<i>Phenomenology</i>	<i>Grounded Theory</i>	<i>Ethnography</i>	<i>Case Study</i>
	<b>XXXXX</b>	<b>XXXXXXXX</b>	<b>XXXXX</b>	<b>XXXXX</b>	<b>XXXXXXXX</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Exploring the life of an individual	Understanding the essence of the experience <b>X</b>	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field <b>X</b>	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group <b>X</b>	Developing an in-depth analysis of a case or multiple cases <b>X</b>
<b>Type of Problem Best Suited for Design</b>	Needing to tell stories of individual experiences <b>X</b>	Needing to describe the essence of a lived Phenomenon <b>X</b>	Grounding a theory in the views of participants <b>X</b>	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group <b>X</b>	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases <b>X</b>
<b>Discipline Background</b>	Drawing from the humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology,	Drawing from philosophy, psychology and education <b>X</b>	Drawing from sociology <b>X</b>	Drawing from anthropology and sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science, medicine <b>X</b>

	and sociology				
<b>Unit of Analysis</b>	Studying one or more individuals <b>X</b>	Studying several individuals that have shared the experience <b>X</b>	Studying a process action, or interaction involving many individuals <b>X</b>	Studying a group that shares the same culture	Studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual <b>X</b>
<b>Data Collection Forms</b>	Using primarily interviews and documents <b>X</b>	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered <b>X</b>	Using primarily interviews with 20-60 individuals	Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field <b>X</b>	Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, artifacts <b>X</b>
<b>Data Analysis Strategies</b>	Analyzing data for stories, “restorying” stories, developing themes, often using a chronology <b>X</b>	Analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, description of the “essence” <b>X</b>	Analyzing data through open coding, axial coding, selective coding <b>X</b>	Analyzing data through description of the culture-sharing group; themes about the group <b>X</b>	Analyzing data through description of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case themes <b>X</b>
<b>Written Report</b>	Developing a narrative about the stories of an individual’s life <b>X</b>	Describing the “essence” of the experience <b>X</b>	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure	Describing how a culture-sharing group works <b>X</b>	Developing a detailed analysis of one or more cases <b>X</b>

Table 3:1

Yin (2003) suggests six types of information to use to collect data for a case study—documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-

observations, and physical artifacts. The data collection for this research study relied on interviews, questionnaires, and field notes. Yin (2003) also states that, “You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p.13). Creswell (2007) opposes Yin’s choice of using a narrative approach in the research design, as he believes that “the narrative approach is seen as more scholarly because narrative studies tend to focus on a single individual; whereas, case studies often involve more than one case.” With either choice, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that after the data has been collected, the researcher will have discovered the “lessons learned” from the case study.

#### Data Collection

The research took place over a four-month period of time. Phase I of the research, entry into the field, took place over a four week period where baseline data was collected during four one and half meeting sessions. Phase II consisted of face-to-face interviews that involved individual participants answering questions separately, to describe attitudes toward and perceptions of their self-contained special education middle school setting and their high school participation. This phase took place over a five-week period of time, with each session lasting between one and one half hours each. Phase III involved all of the respondents participating in a focus group where they collaborated collectively and shared their experiences. They also discussed openly their attitudes and perceptions about self-contained special education middle school classrooms and why they decided to drop out of high school after the ninth grade.



*Transition statements* – encourage participants to delve into their past and deepen the content of the discussion toward the original key components of the research study;

*Key questions/statements* – keep the group centered upon the goals of the study; and, ending questions/statements – summarize each session and provide closure and a continuum for the next session(s).

Interview questions were not predictable nor were they pre-determined in a qualitative research study that used case studies. Therefore, the questions below were designed to provide a general guide for the researcher to establish a basis for conducting the interviews. Listed below are a sample list of questions that were asked during the interview sessions. The questions in Table 3:2 should not be reviewed as all-inclusive or exhausted in content or type.

<b>BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION</b>
1. Tell me about yourself. (Include information about your life outside of school)
2. Talk about your first days of school, how you felt about being away from home, separating from parent/caretaker, etc.
3. Explain your experiences as it relates to how you first began to struggle in school.
4. What expectations did you have about school?
5. What were your attitudes toward teachers, peers, administrators
6. What were your perceptions about school, special education, parents, and classrooms?
7. Why did you have those attitudes/perceptions?
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>
1. Describe some characteristics of middle school students.
2. Describe your experiences working with middle/high school students in general education.
3. Describe your experiences working with middle/high school students in special education.
4. What three expectations do you have of schools/teachers/peers?
5. How do you learn?
6. What three expectations do you have of yourself?
7. Describe your deficit area(s).

<b>TEACHER and CLASSROOM WORK ASSIGNMENTS</b>
1. How was the <b>teacher</b> prepared for class sessions?
2. How did the <b>teacher</b> allow you to ask questions in class?
3. How did the <b>teacher</b> stimulate/motivate you to learn in class?
4. How did the <b>teacher</b> provide lessons that you felt you could succeed at?
5. How did the <b>teacher</b> How did the teacher make students feel comfortable about answering questions?
6. How did the <b>teacher</b> treat students with respect?
7. How did the <b>teacher</b> How knowledgeable do you think the teacher was about teaching students with disabilities?
8. How did the <b>teacher</b> deal fairly with students?
9. How did the <b>teacher</b> make activities in the classroom fun, interesting and stimulating?
10. How did the <b>teacher</b> provide directions for assignments?
11. How did the <b>teacher</b> distribute assignments in the classroom?
12. How did the <b>teacher</b> maintain control in the classroom?
13. How did the <b>teacher</b> deal with students who interrupted the class?
14. How did the <b>teacher</b> handle conflicts in the classroom?
15. How did the <b>teacher</b> use technology in the classroom?
16. How did the <b>teacher</b> use classroom supplies, materials and other supports in the classroom?
17. How did the <b>teacher</b> arrange students in the classroom?
18. How did the <b>teacher</b> use groups, individuals and pairs during classroom work assignments?
19. How did the <b>teacher</b> teach to your learning style?
20. How did the <b>teacher</b> display students' work in the classroom?
21. How did the <b>teacher</b> respond to students who worked much slower than the rest of the class?
22. How did the <b>teacher</b> respond to students who worked at a faster pace?
23. How did the <b>teacher</b> respond to students who "just don't get it?"
24. What happens when groups of learners are presented with leveled children's assignments?
25. What happens when student's experience authentic lessons?
26. What happens when groups of learners are required to work on group projects?
27. What happens when individual students are required to turn in individual assignments?
28. How did having one <b>teacher</b> for all subjects matter?
29. How did not having a different <b>teacher</b> for all subjects matter?
30. How did watching non-disabled peers participate in an inclusive
31. What classroom strategies helped you learn better in reading, math, etc.?
32. What role do standardized tests play in learning?
33. What role do teacher made tests play in learning?
34. What happens when students are given an opportunity to identify individual goals to address the skill areas they have deficits in?
35. How can teachers improve instruction to motivate students in special education?

35. How can administrators improve inclusive opportunities to motivate students in special education to participate in extra-curricular activities?

### **SELF-CONTAINED, MAINSTREAM, AND RESOURCE SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

1. How is participating in a self-contained classroom different from being mainstreamed?

2. How is participating in a self-contained classroom different from resource room support?

3. How is being mainstreamed different from resource room support?

4. (Have a choice to decide whether to participate in a self-contained, mainstreamed or resource support program) How do you see yourself participating in the special education program?

### **TEACHER and CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

1. How did the **teacher** manage negative behavior(s) in the classroom?

2. How did the **teacher** handle students who were talkative?

3. How did the **teacher** provide opportunities for students to share ideas/information?

4. How did the **teacher** make examples of other student's behavior?

5. How did the **teacher** share information about students behaving negatively?

6. How often did the **teacher** have to manage conflicts in the classroom?

7. How did the **teacher** regain control of the class after a negative encounter?

8. How did the **teacher** handle disciplinary actions?

9. How did the **teacher** differentiate between students who were constantly displaying negative behavior vs. those who did not?

10. How did the **teacher** respond to the same students causing most of the concerns in the classroom?

11. How did the **teacher** respond to another teacher who entered the classroom during students misbehaving?

12. How did the **teacher** respond to an administrator who entered the classroom during students misbehaving?

### **PERCEPTIONS HELD BY STUDENTS ABOUT Middle school/High school**

1. What are **student's perceptions** of entering middle school from elementary school?

2. What are **student's perceptions** of teachers in middle school?

3. What are **student's perceptions** of other students in middle school? General education and Special education.

4. What are **student's perceptions** of administrators in middle school?

5. What are **student's perceptions** of other teachers in middle school?

6. What are **student's perceptions** of participating in a self-contained classroom in middle school?

7. What are **student's perceptions** of extracurricular activities with non-disabled peers?

8. What are **student's perceptions** of participating in school-wide events/activities?

9. What are the various social services available to students in middle school?

10. How often do your parent/caretaker visit the school?

11. What are the thoughts and feelings of students during hallway pass time?

12. What are the thoughts and feelings of students during lunchtime?
13. What are the thoughts and feelings of students to and from school?
<b>DECIDING TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL</b>
1. What event/circumstance led up to your decision to drop out of high school?
2. What roles do other dropouts play in deciding to drop out of high school?
3. What roles do other students play in deciding to drop out of high school?
4. What roles do teachers play in deciding to drop out of high school?
5. What roles do administrators play in deciding to drop out of high school?
6. What roles do social workers play in deciding to drop out of high school?
7. What roles do counselors play in deciding to drop out of high school?
8. Why do students who seem to do well in school drop out?
9. How do people who decide to dropout out of school notify others of their decision to drop out?
10. What are the various social services available to students in high school?

Table 3:2

The questionnaire was designed to support and understand the attitudes and perceptions related to entering the self-contained classroom on the first day of placement after removal from the general education classroom; to explore the feelings of the individual after being informed of the impending placement into a self-contained special education middle school classroom; describe typical school days that involved being outside of the general education environment; explore attitudes and perceptions related to school-wide activities, i.e., when everyone is required to participate and sit with their class during a general assembly; understand the transition from a self-contained middle school program to a high school program; From the respondent's perspective, the specific objectives are to: describe the qualifying process involved in self-contained middle school special education programs; describe the student's journey throughout all phases of the qualifying process; present data that states specific reasons for dropping out of high school.

### Summary

The researcher outlined the research methodology that was appropriate to conducting a narrative research case study. The research design included a clear explanation that is relative to the differences between quantitative, qualitative and mixed study approaches. The methodology further defined the appropriateness for choosing a qualitative method to conduct this particular study. The researcher served as the primary data collector and used case study histories, face-to-face interviews, field notes and questions to explore student perceptions and attitudes toward self-contained middle school special education classrooms, their experiences and decision to drop out of high school.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

*“In the field one has to face a chaos of facts, some of which are so small that they seem insignificant; others loom so large that they are hard to encompass with one synthetic glance. But in this crude form they are not scientific facts at all; they are absolutely elusive, and can be fixed only by interpretation, by seeing them sub specie aeternitatis, by grasping what is essential in them and fixing this. Only laws and generalizations are scientific facts, and field work consists only and exclusively in the interpretation of the chaotic social reality, in subordinating it to general rules.”*

— Bronislaw Malinowski

Many research studies provide information based upon external factors that seek to provide knowledge that relies upon how the phenomenon is interpreted through observations, surveys and artifacts. This qualitative research study sought to obtain and gather information that would provide introspection into the academic experiences of mainly three African American males who participated in a self-contained middle school special education program and then dropped out of school after the ninth grade.

The overarching questions:

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of African American males who have a learning disability toward self-contained special education middle school programs?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions held by African American males who have a learning disability of the self-contained special

education program at the middle school level, who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom?

Research Question 3: Based upon the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who have a learning disability and participated in a self-contained special education middle school program, might this setting have influenced African American males to drop out of high school? If so, how?

The research questions were critical in developing the most effective ethnographic interview that would primarily focus upon each individual's attitudes and perceptions about their middle school and high school experiences and, *"To grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize HIS vision of His world"* (Malinowski, 1961—in Geest, 1996). Understanding and following James P. Spradley's (1979) twelve elements to conducting an ethnographic interview before entering the field were essential to helping me understand how to create a relaxed and productive session with each participant. To uncover the system of cultural meanings that the participants used, each of the eight sessions involved (Spradley, 1979, p.67):

1. Greetings
2. Giving ethnographic explanations
3. Asking ethnographic questions
4. Asymmetrical turn taking
5. Expressing interest
6. Expressing cultural ignorance
7. Repeating
8. Restating informant's terms

9. Incorporating informant's terms
10. Creating hypothetical situations
11. Asking friendly questions
12. Taking leave

Since perceptions are ambiguous—meaning the way that something appears to one individual does not necessarily reflect the universal thinking of everyone. Each of the above steps in its entirety yielded a very inclusive study. Glaser and Straus (1999) express how qualitative researchers are able to extract critical data from the field. The six overlapping steps in figure 4:1 commonly known as theoretical sampling, illustrate Glaser's methods into emergent themes as theories.

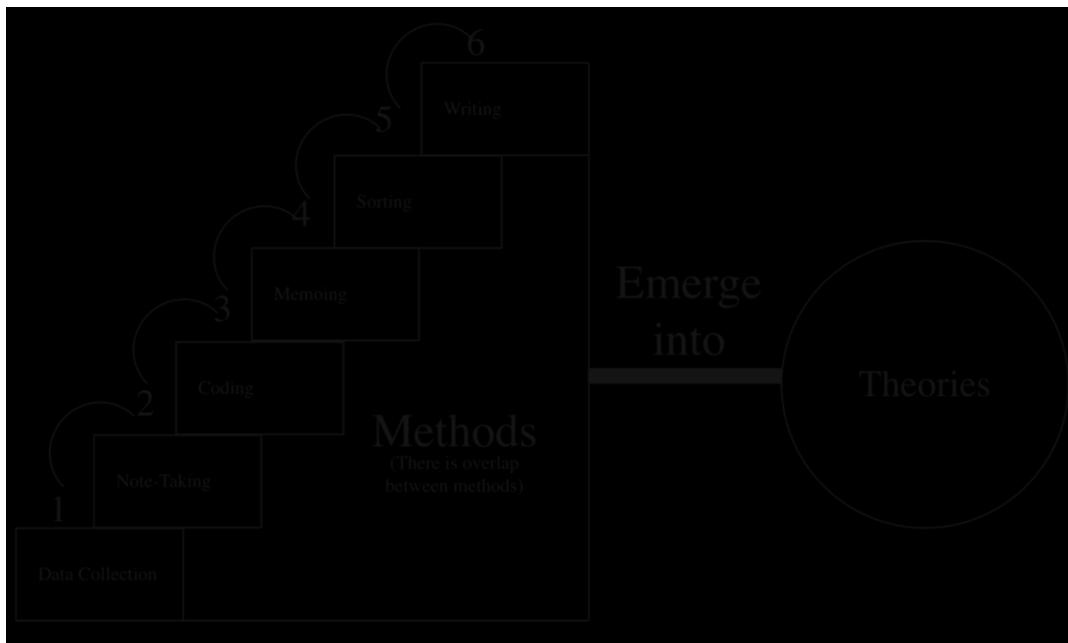


Figure 4:1

Unlike quantitative data that uses numbers to show statistical information in a broad text, qualitative data has the potential to relate directly to the reader. Through detailed information that is being revealed directly through a participant's perspective,



there are many connections that can be made by the reader. "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p120). To assist the reader in understanding the events that took place during the field study, connections were made by the researcher. In the first pass of sorting through the data, information was placed into categories to be coded. The initial coding that was used in the first pass of reading through all of the information was color. The use of color as shown in figure 4:2, helped to identify categories where eventually themes would emerge.

<b>YELLOW</b>	<b>GREEN</b>	<b>GREY</b>	<b>RED</b>	<b>BLUE</b>	<b>PURPLE</b>
<b>Affect/ Attitude</b> Emotion mood, presentation, feeling)	<b>Social</b> Interactions with others	<b>Decision making</b> Choices	<b>Background</b> Childhood, Family, Outside situations	<b>Perception</b> Interpreting meaning of situations	<b>Preferences</b> Likes and Dislikes

Figure 4:2

Each of the categories in Figure 4:2 became very evident as each interview participant expressed his own interpretation of the phenomenon of placement in a special education self-contained middle school classroom and the ultimate decision to drop out of school.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), from a qualitative framework, proven reality in naturalistic terms plays an important role in gathering accurate facts in fieldwork. Smith and Heshusius (1986) suggest from a quantitative approach to research that, a "claim that naturalistic research can offer only an "interpretation of the interpretations of others, " and that to assume an independent reality is "unacceptable" for the qualitative researcher (p. 9). The comparison chart below (Figure 4:3),

expresses Lincoln and Guba's approach to "judging the quality of quantitative versus qualitative research:"

<b>Conventional terms</b> Smith and Heshusius (1986)	<b>Naturalistic terms</b> Lincoln and Guba (1985)	<b>Implications for this research study</b>
<b>Internal validity</b> — <i>refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality.</i>	<b>Credibility</b> — <i>assumes the presence of multiple realities and attempts to represent these multiple realities adequately.</i>	Credibility depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton, 1990).
<b>External validity</b> — <i>refers to the ability to generalize findings across different settings.</i>	<b>Transferability</b> — <i>depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred.</i>	The researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
<b>Reliability</b> — <i>According to Kirk and Miller (1986), relates to: 1) the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same; 2) the stability of a measurement over time; and 3) the similarity of measurements within a given time period (p41-42).</i>	<b>Dependability</b> — <i>"Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter"</i> (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p316).	Lincoln and Guba do propose one measure that might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. That is the use of an "inquiry audit," in which reviewers examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (1985, p. 317)
<b>Objectivity</b> — <i>Conventional wisdom says that research which relies on quantitative measures to define a situation is relatively value-free, and therefore objective.</i>	<b>Confirmability</b> — <i>Qualitative research, which relies on interpretations and is admittedly value-bound, is considered to be subjective.</i>	Lincoln and Guba (1985) choose to speak of the "confirmability" of the research. This means providing an audit trail consisting of 1) raw data; 2) analysis notes; 3) reconstruction and synthesis products; 4)

		process notes; 5) personal notes; and 6) preliminary developmental information (pp. 320 -321).
(Adapted from Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researchers, Hoepfl, 1997)		

Figure 4:3

Consistent with the implications for this study, the criteria for each event was recalled using the individual's own voice. The importance of using the voice of the participants stemmed from concern that students are not given frequent opportunities to express their opinions regarding decisions that are made on their behalf as it relates to placement in special education programs. Throughout the United States schools foster a classroom environment that is solely based upon an adult philosophy that children are to be seen and not heard. This is affirmed through certain teacher's classroom management styles and in their approach to discipline. In some instances students are encouraged to work quietly and to work independently. A student who deviates from this expectation is considered insubordinate. Decisions are made by the teacher on the students' behalf to establish ultimate control. Unless prompted to ask a question as stated in the teacher's manual, there may be little or no consideration for input by the students.

In the data analysis, as open-ended questions were examined, the answers to the questions were used to look within the individual's responses and across to other participant's responses in cross-reference to the content of each participants' response throughout the data sets. Grouped categories of the information into various segments helped to discover ways that the content was alike and different. Critical in the use of this method to evaluate the data, many data sets were produced. The scope of each

category was then categorized, grouped and named which yielded emerging patterns. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as patterns emerged, themes within the data were determined. Finally, many questions regarding intersecting relationships were analyzed using frequencies. To extrapolate the necessary information from beginning to end, baseline information into the background of each of the participants was asked. The fieldwork was summarized using data from the focus group session and concluded with what led each of them to drop out of high school.

#### Background of participants

The setting is Riverside Preparatory Middle College Academy (RPMCA), an alternative high school for second chance individuals who were either administratively transferred from a Detroit Public high school or who dropped out of high school. RPMCA was founded by, Reverend Jim Holley, an active community supporter. The school has made a commitment to provide educational opportunities to students who are ages 17 to 20. Three of the respondents attend RPMCA and are all former Detroit Public School students. The fourth respondent would not reveal his former school, but did state that he last attended a Detroit Public high school. The males at RPMCA are fictitiously named: Tommy Strong, nineteen years old; Peter Sanchez, nineteen years old; and Curt Jackson, twenty-five years old. Each of these males participated in a total of eight interview sessions. One other male, a RPMCA student also, was alias Fresh Bee. The only session Fresh Bee participated in was session one, and then he elected to drop out of the research study altogether.

Tommy Strong is the most vocal participant of the three who completed the study. Most of Tommy's responses are a mirror to Peter's and are used most often throughout chapter four. Where there are variances in a response than that

participant's voice is used at that instance.

At the start of the research study, Tommy quickly informed me that he, Peter and Fresh all had two things in common—1) their best friend “Meech” was killed and they were all best friends. Although Fresh did not participate in any other session beyond the first one, he made sure he always asked his three friends about what was discussed. I later found out that Fresh would sit and wait for me to come to the school to conduct the interviews and just as he saw my car he disappeared not wanting to be seen.

#### Background—Tommy Strong

Tommy Strong was asked the question to tell about himself. Immediately, Tommy begins to share what he believes is most significant to know about him—

Tommy Strong: See, I been going through a lot lately, you know what I'm sayin. My daddy passed. Well, he got killed. He worked at Chrysler for 33 years and um, somebody um, he was getting off. Well he was getting his retirement check and um, so he was, he went to go buy another truck. He was about to come drop me and my twin sister off \$500 each. And um, before he could do that, somebody called him way out [another location] and shot him, stabbed him and beat him to death. Put him in a body bag. Put him in a bin.

Tommy could not recall the exact year, stating that it was either in 2002 or 2003 but approximately seven years later the tragedy remains a fresh wound for him to recall to a stranger. There has not been any closure for the death of Tommy's father because the

murderer is still at large. For Tommy, he drops his head and wishes that, he “whoever did this would just turn themselves in to the police so that his father can rest in peace. In Tommy’s mind, after the death of his father this cataclysmic turn of events is what caused everything else to spiral downward in his families’ life. Social Security was the only source of income and was used to pay benefits to Tommy and his twin sister and to help support his mother and his niece. Primarily his family saw those benefits of a source of income, but had not fully anticipated that this would all change in an instant when Tommy and his twin turned nineteen years old. Since there was no prior knowledge of they Social Security benefits system the reality of “getting cut off” hit his family extremely hard because no one else in his family had any other source of income. As a result, the family is homeless and had to split up—residing at various places:

Researcher: Do you stay with your mom now?

Tommy Strong: Oooh, see, see, there’s a lot of things going on about that too. I stay with my homeboy Peter, you know what I’m sayin, Um, his girlfriend momma said I could stay at his house cause I had a hot fight. What I said about my daddy, his benefits was helpin us pay the rent and, um, they talkin bout 19 in two months older so they cut us off so then we had to get, we got put out our house \_\_\_\_\_ and then we had to move in with my auntie. Then my auntie, my auntie being mean to my momma and I ain’t gonna say bein mean to her but that’s her sister, you know what I’m sayin. Certain stuff she do the wrong way. You know what I’m say, she got like

my momma, she got no heat at her house so they livin' with heaters like two heaters in two rooms, you know what I'm sayin, like connected together. And you know they make it but sometimes my momma had to sleep in the chair because you know what I'm sayin there be too many people and then in one room her kids be all in her bed and sometimes my mom and them sleep in the chair, you know what I'm sayin. So it's been goin hard for me but I'm tryin to hang in there. I'm tryin to hang in there.

Tommy is asked to describe how his father played a role in his life:

Tommy Strong: I ain't gonna say he was supportive, but he made sure we had everything we needed. I mean, my momma was like, um, you know what I'm sayin, Mr. Mom, you know what I'm saying. Cause she was there takin us to the doctors, you know what I'm saying, being a mom, you know what I'm saying, and a Dad. But my daddy came through sometimes you know what I'm sayings. Made sure we had diapers though, I can say that. You know what I'm saying, but, um, my momma did pretty much everything for me.

Despite what Tommy is sharing, he is encouraged to remain strong because each day that he is—positions him closer to his goals and dreams.

With the exception of Peter, The other participant, Curt (see Figure 4:4) like Tommy's above, shares a similar upsetting family background like Tommy's. Family dysfunction at its worst is listed below, with Curt's dysfunction tremendously

outweighing Peter's:

<b>Background information</b>	
<b>Family support systems in place</b>	
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive family experiences</li> <li>• Family got along as long as alcohol not a factor</li> <li>• Father supportive when had to repeat 4th grade</li> <li>• Family gatherings at barbeques</li> <li>• Playing games of volleyball</li> <li>• Family basically getting along</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom supported him in his education</li> </ul>
<b>Dysfunctional family examples</b>	
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only act out if under the influence of alcohol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood setting difficult</li> <li>• Parents fought</li> <li>• Feelings of confusion</li> <li>• Father drank</li> <li>• Father &amp; mother fought</li> <li>• Unable to sleep</li> <li>• Couldn't go to school</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Afraid</li> <li>• Couldn't tell anyone</li> <li>• Parents didn't take time with him</li> <li>• If parents had taken more time with and loved him more he could have finished school</li> <li>• Unhappy</li> <li>• Lack of confidence</li> <li>• Hopeless</li> <li>• Fell in love with the streets</li> <li>• Dad didn't care about his education; only cared about drinking</li> <li>• Father drank</li> </ul>

Figure 4:4

After discussing Tommy's parents, a question about his personal goals is posed to him:

Tommy Strong: My goals, I got backup goals like cause my uncle always told



me to have a back up goal. First I wanted to play basketball, but if basketball don't work out I'm good with my hands and want to go into construction or building or something or maybe have my own business, entrepreneur. You know what I'm sayin, tryin to do something, tryin to make it. But I know for sure when I get out of high school I'm going to college, make something outta myself.

Researcher: We'll let's see. You said college? What do you want to do when you go to college?

Tommy Strong: College. College, everybody tell me like, college is like rough and hard and all that but me, I'ma start off little. I'ma go to like a community college or something and I don't really know what I really want to do off hand, but as the months go on, I'ma figure it out, you know what I'm sayin. Put it into play.

Although Tommy says that he has a back up goal, he did not make any distinction between having goals without a plan or how to accomplish any one of his goals. A set focus beyond where Tommy's present state of being is, versus where he aspires to be, was not revealed in any measurable timeframe.

Trust is very important to Tommy. Tommy wants the interviewer to know that he is someone who can be trusted and that he is really a "good" person. He feels somewhat responsible for making others feel good about feeling good. At this time in Tommy's life he appears very depressed but functional. He manages to see himself successful despite all that has happened in his life. He enjoys talking about his situation

and describes it as an opportunity to:

“Say what was on my mind and, you know what I’m sayin’, that I wanted somebody to listen to me. So it was kind of good cause I got a lot of stuff off my chest.”

The pressures in Tommy’s life seem to originate even at an early age. He recalls his first school experiences at the start of school:

Researcher: I want you talk about your first days of school. Were you in preschool or kindergarten first?

Tommy Strong: I think started off in kindergarten first. And when I really went to school, to be honest, I was excited but on the other hand I was like, still young, so I was still like joining the crowds, like really being bad, not really doing my work, so...

Researcher: In kindergarten?

Tommy Strong: Yeah, I was kinda bad in kindergarten. I think, yeah I got suspended a couple times in kindergarten. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

Tommy Strong: Then as I went into first grade, that’s when stuff like stuff really started happenin. Me getting to know more people. Me being the class clown, you know what I’m sayin. As I got older and older and older older, I was still being the clown, so they put me in special ed and in special ed they had like, kids, I mean, I ain’t gonna say they ain’t a little like me but I had to do like three years of this special ed just cause I not doin my work and being hard headed and bein bad. And

teachers just and all of them just thought I was like kinda not smart or nothing. I was being special, I'ma say it like that, like special ed, you know what I'm sayin?

Tommy regrets his actions and interprets his negative responses and acting out in the classroom as "acting special." He believes that his actions are the underlying reasons for why he was placed into special education in the first place.

Peter seems to have somewhat of a different perspective. He was very comfortable when he was approached about placement into a self-contained classroom as if it was somewhat expected since several other family members had already been placed during their schooling. Peter describes his first days of school as exciting:

Researcher: Describe your first day of school? Well, actually describe what was going on before you started preschool? What was everybody talking about? Here, Peter was getting ready to start school. You hadn't gone yet, right. What were they saying?

Peter Sanchez: How they think I was gonna act on my first day.

Researcher: They were wondering how you were going to act?

Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.

Researcher: Ok. So [your] family [is] asking about that. What else?

Peter Sanchez: Mmm, being excited it was my first day of school.

Researcher: They were excited?

Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.

Researcher: Ok. So family excited. Were you excited?

Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.

- Researcher: Why were you excited?
- Peter Sanchez: Cause my older brothers talk about school, school, school.  
So I just wanted to try it and see how it was.
- Researcher: Ok. So older brothers. How many brothers do you have?
- Peter Sanchez: 2.
- Researcher: Any sisters?
- Researcher: And you are the what – middle? Youngest? Oldest?
- Peter Sanchez: Youngest. Well, in the boys I'm the youngest. I'm the oldest when it comes to the girls.
- Researcher: So, youngest boy. Oldest...ok. You live with your mom and dad at that time?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: At that time, both parents?
- Peter Sanchez: Yeah.

NOTE: Although asked specifically about Peter's background and about his parents he is reluctant to give too many specific details about them. In some other instances during other sessions, Peter speaks briefly about being a ward of the state of Michigan.

Continuing with the questions about Peter's expectations of school:

- Researcher: Were they excited about you going to school?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Your mom and your dad? Ok. So now here you are getting ready to go to school. You're in school now. Preschool. How are you feeling on the first day of school?

- Peter Sanchez: I was kinda used to it cause I was used to bein at that time around other people that was my age.
- Researcher: Ok.
- Peter Sanchez: I kinda did very good on my birthday.
- Researcher: Ok. What about the next days? Pretty good?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: So preschool was fine?
- Peter Sanchez: Uh huh.
- Researcher: Ok. What about kindergarten?
- Peter Sanchez: That was fine, too.
- Researcher: Ok. How about first grade?
- Peter Sanchez: Good.
- Researcher: Ok. Good, or okay?
- Peter Sanchez: Okay. Well, it was good. It was good.
- Researcher: It was good? Ok. What about 2<sup>nd</sup> grade?
- Peter Sanchez: Good. I didn't start messin up really until like the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Researcher: Ok. So 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> were good?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Ok. So now we're at 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Describe 5<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Peter Sanchez: Um, I wanted to be the center of attention like the class clown.
- Researcher: Ok. Why was that important to you?
- Peter Sanchez: Basically trying to fit in with the inner crowd.
- Researcher: Describe what you say is the inner crowd.

- Peter Sanchez: Like the people that's in my class, or I know.
- Researcher: Ok. What do you call them? Why do you think they're the in crowd? Or as you said, the inner crowd.
- Peter Sanchez: That's people that's I'd say popular that's in the school or whatever you would call that.
- Researcher: Ok. Alright. So, you say you began to struggle in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. What struggles did you have? Did you have academic struggles?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Ok. What would be your academic struggles?
- Peter Sanchez: Cause I had problems with English and Math. The rest of them I was pretty good with.
- Researcher: Ok. How about English. Describe the problems in English.
- Peter Sanchez: Um, well both of em I know I coulda did good I just wasn't really paying no attention. I was too busy actin like a clown.
- Researcher: Were you able to read?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Would you consider yourself what type of reader?
- Peter Sanchez: On a scale from 1 to 10? Prolly about a 7 and half or 8.

Peter is very quiet and mild mannered. He tends to not be very comfortable with answering questions therefore he is not very expressive or elaborative. However, he is willing to complete the research study.

Curt Jackson is a very reserved young man who is seemingly mature for his age. He tends to be nervous acting as he stutters in some of his statements. Stuttering has

always been a problem for Curt and he speaks very deliberately as to avoid the possibility of stumbling over his words. When asked the question, “What is it about Curt Jackson that you want me to know about?” He starts off by saying:

Curt Jackson: I dropped out of school. I grew up in the, uh, ghetto. Uh, I just had a hard life. Hard life at a young age. And I have seen so much from my mom and my dad. They weren't really getting along at the moment – fighting and fussing. A lot of crazy stuff. And, um, I'm trying to, uh, to figure out what I want to do. And I'm really confused.

Researcher: Alright. Well hopefully in you talking with me over this session, you know, perhaps, you know, you will begin to see yourself and just sometimes just talking and discussing past things can open up your understanding and eyes to different things that have occurred in your life and maybe see yourself in a different light. Okay? Alright, so let's talk about the first days of school for you, okay? I want you to think back. I know you're 25, but I want to you think back, how you felt about being away from home for the first time and being separated from your parent or your caretaker. How did you feel?

Curt Jackson: I felt lonely. Hurt. Confused. I wanted to do something that I never did before but I didn't have the right support so I left home thinking that I could make it on my own. Dropped out of school. Made the wrong decisions. Dated the wrong

females. Hung around the wrong crowd. I don't know. I'm just confused right now.

Researcher: Okay, what about elementary school? Here you are, they've been talking to you at home about going to kindergarten. What is that like for you, thinking about it as a little five year old?

Curt Jackson: I was going to a big playground. And played with other kids that was different than I was or am. Um, I was just having fun.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. Having fun? Those were the good days right?

Curt Jackson: Yes it was.

Researcher: If we could only turn back to those days sometimes, right?

Curt Jackson: How I wish.

Researcher: I know right? Explain your experiences as it relates to how you first began to struggle with school.

Curt Jackson: Um,

Researcher: When you first saw yourself as having some difficulties in school...

Curt Jackson: Well, I couldn't read that well. I was embarrassed. Um, I needed help how to count. I didn't understand how to put two and two together, which I know now that it equal four. But I didn't know then. My mind wasn't there. I wasn't there for real. Just the body. I was, um, influenced from the wrong



crowd which caught my attention at a young age. And that's what I wanted to do.

Researcher: So let's think about being in kindergarten or in elementary school. Were you ever kicked out of school or suspended?

Curt Jackson: Sure I was. Plenty of times. I actually got kicked out of a school completely. Uh, I couldn't go to no other schools that was close to my house. Um, I went to a school that was out of my district due to the fact that I was naïve, not paying attention. Um, a lot of things that context of it.

Researcher: Okay. What were your expectations of school? Here you are a young person, you're in elementary school and you're just thinking about, "Wow! This is a new experience." What were you expecting from school? We hear a lot at home, right? But what were your expectations?

Curt Jackson: Well, one of my desires that I wished to become or to be that was a carpenter. I wanted to pursue that field because I like to build things. But I couldn't, I couldn't get it together in my mind. I just kept following the wrong crowd for some reason. That probably drew me away from what I wanted to do. Maybe it was just me that was seeing more joy out of what they were doing that maybe that made me get off course what I wanted to do. Um, for those reasons, I fail. Not only myself, but I fail others that believed in me as well.

Researcher: How did you see yourself in school in elementary school in the beginning?

Curt Jackson: I looked at it like, "I can do this. I can handle it." I seen myself becoming, um, some type of support for some type service person to give back to the people once I accomplished the things. But that, but that, but that vision, it vanished because I looked at things that was in the way – drugs, women, the wrong crowd, money, the clothes I wished I always had but I couldn't afford them because my mom and dad wasn't working at the time then.

Just like Tommy, Curt's response to look into his background as he answers the question immediately delves into his family's struggles. At the time he seems to have mixed feelings about his attitude towards his teachers. For example:

Researcher: Okay. What were your attitudes towards your teachers at that time?

Curt: My attitudes towards the teachers was sometimes good and sometimes bad. And the reason why I said that because I felt that the teachers could have put more effort into teaching us and showing us how to handle problems that we faced each day in life. Um, I felt that the teachers could've been a little bit more dedicated than what they are. They could've been more fruitful than what they are. And there were days when sometimes the teacher would be not concerned so much. She'd just spend time on one person and forgetting

about the other class, which is to me very selfish. So there's some good and there is some bad.

Curt was mostly a compliant student but had outside influences that was leading him astray. He recognizes that not all teachers were bad but believed that all of them could have improved in the way they supported students in the classroom.

In general, society responds to students who do not conform to a set of pre-described norms, as being oppositional in nature. This perspective can result in students being referred to special education more often. African American males tend to fall into this category more often because they are typically right brained learners who are verbal experiential learners who ask questions, challenge information, and test limits. Traditional education focuses on programming, control and permission based learning. Left brain learners are viewed as responding more appropriately in these sedentary and wrote learning environments. The brain is the foundation for responsive learning. A common perspective of neuroscience is that there is a mind-brain connection that impacts how learning actually takes place (Eisenberg, 1995, in *How People Learn; Mind and Brain*, p.115). Tommy's perception of himself "acting special" signals a perception of negative self-fulfilling actualizations. When a person expresses a need for something such as attention, Maslow's hierarchy of needs processes the fulfillment of the need into belonging. When the opposite is true, then Maslow considers this to be a deficit. A deficit within a need causes one to become immersed into a salient need (Maslow, 1970 in *Discontinuity Theory: Cognitive and Social Searches for Rationality and Normality—May Lead to Madness, Zimbardo (April 11, 2008)*).

Researcher: We're gonna talk about self-contained, mainstream and resource-support classrooms, ok? Or programs. What

opportunity did you have to be mainstreamed in school?

Tommy Strong: I got that opportunity. Like umm, like the special ed classrooms everybody really, they really got along kind a good. But like in the regular classrooms that you got a lot of people, like I said in the last session, 30 people in the classroom there's gonna be some clowns, so, it's kind a hard to be in the regular classrooms with that many students.

Tommy's mainstreaming experience did not provide an accessible opportunity for students to participate in an inclusive classroom where student's who have a disability could receive academic support. Before certain government and state requirements such as, No Child Left behind, (NCLB); least restricted environment (LRE) and response to intervention (RTI) were infused into how students with disabilities were being educated Tommy's initial schooling seemed to lack a support structure within the general education classroom. Although the intentions were not to harm the students academically, the lack of support that was not being given to students who were already identified as having a learning disability was still lacking. From Tommy's perspective he acknowledges that there is an increased chance for *getting into trouble; hanging around negative influences; joining in and acting out*—these same precursors could be what possibly led educators to refer Tommy to special education services in the first place. During Tommy's academic experiences, sometimes haphazardly and with little regard for academic deficits versus behavior problems, students were placed back into the same environment from where the problems originated. Frequently, if a student's behavior warranted reviewing which led to a referral, the student was diagnosed with having a learning disability rather than an emotional impairment because the frame of

mind was to not impact the student with a disability that could cause problems later on in life.

Tommy discusses his attitude and perspective of being in a special education program—

“I really sometimes like the special ed. class a little bit more because it’s like, it ain’t that big, so a lot of people won’t really interrupt your learning, so . . . yeah.”

Sometimes having some support is better than having none. The general understanding that Tommy has about his mainstreaming experience is—in the special education classroom there are fewer learning interruptions. This resulted in him *preferring special education classes*.

In some ways Peter and Curt also preferred being in special education classes after the fact, but definitely not in the beginning as described below. Peter’s initial perspective and attitude about being placed in special education classes:

Researcher: Ok. When you were first told that you were going to be in special education how did you feel about that around your family? Being around maybe your cousins or sister or brother?

Peter Sanchez: Well some of my cousin needed it so they I got my older cousins they was in special education. They did the mainstream thing. They had a few special education the ones they needed the most help in and the other ones were regular classes so. They, they, they didn’t really say nothing like that. It just taught me that I need to do better so when I get to high school I don’t wanna be worried about nothing

like that. Cause it being in special ed student in high school you really get talked about.

Researcher: Ok. Was that a fear of yours?

Peter Sanchez: Uh huh.

Researcher: Why?

Peter Sanchez: Cause I ain't wanna go to school and be the center of attention just cause I'm the special ed stuff like that. Especially being in the ninth grade. A freshman in high school.

Curt was very adamant about his attitude and perspective toward placement in special education—

In the 1700s Thomas Jefferson's philosophy of education was to provide a school system that would identify programs to promote democracy and prepare students to become active, productive participants within a democratic society. Jefferson also believed that to do this, teachers needed to receive formal training in preparation to teach all children and to meet their diverse needs. Following Jefferson's belief system into the twenty-first century, the structuring system of education has not changed, yet the demands placed on teachers, is greater. Teachers are expected to not only "provide academic rigor as they provide subject-area instruction to students but to also offer counseling (Huerta, 2009)." It is through the willingness to provide counseling that Tommy believed that teachers who teach in the special education classrooms, "the teachers kind of showed more care a little bit . . ." Tommy's initial perspective about how special education teachers supported students in the classroom, originated through an outside perspective since he was not formally placed into a

special education program.

Preparation for change is key to helping a student transition into a new setting. Tommy's school experiences involved numerous negative occurrences. As a result of the perceptions that Tommy held, they became internalized and manifested by his acting out. Without permission to actively use his voice, Tommy is held captive by his thoughts and his actions. During memory and brain processes, what is expected for what is assumed to be taking place occurs through "repeated discussions around the same false events spread over time, the children begin to identify these false events as true occurrences (Schacter, 1997, in *How People Learn*, p.125). As a result, children live up to the expectations that are being taught to them through inferences that are made through insults made on their character. For example, the reinforcement of teachers saying to Tommy, "You may as well get your suspension papers now, cause I know you gonna mess up," became a manifested reality and expectation for Tommy regardless of his actual behavior. The teacher expected Tommy to act out in class and so he did. At the same time that Tommy was being perceived as a problem by teachers, Tommy was also formulating varying perceptions about teachers too. Below is Tommy's perceptions about teachers:

Researcher: What about your perceptions about teachers?

Tommy Strong: Teachers. With the teachers there was some teachers that I was like, I was like, cool with but there was the other teachers that was like tryin to tell me something and it was something like I didn't want to hear at the time and some teachers I get into it with and the rest of the teachers I just

be cool with. There was a couple teachers I didn't really like so I was always getting into it with them.

Expectations and events that reinforce and support ways to prepare for transition into special education include,

Researcher: What grade were you in when they first said you needed to go into special ed?

Tommy Strong: If I'm not mistaken I think like the sixth or the seventh.

Researcher: Let's talk about the sixth grade? Were you in fifth grade when they said that or were you in sixth grade?

Tommy Strong: Yeah, I was in sixth grade.

Researcher: So describe when you first found out. What happened? Tell me the events that took place.

Tommy Strong: Ooooh, when I first found out I was going to special ed, I did not like it at all. I did not like that feeling, like other kids, first I'm thinking like other kids gonna be like clownin me like, laughin at me and you know what I'm sayin. Throwin stuff at me, you know, I wasn't like that. I ain't like that period. So when I heard about it I'm like then I ain't really want to go to school no more after I heard that. I'm like I gotta go to special ed, special ed for real ma? She like they just doin some stuff that they think best for you cause I mean you gotta straighten up then maybe they put you back in your right grade. So sixth grade that's when they put me in special ed.



- Researcher: So you had a fear you said?
- Tommy Strong: Yeah, it was a big fear. A big fear.
- Researcher: Before you went to special ed, what were you thinking, your thoughts about special ed, before you were even told this. You know, just being in school period. Did you know anything about special ed before then?
- Tommy Strong: Yeah, I knew about special ed. Like I said I was clownin so I knew people was gonna be clownin me.
- Researcher: So explain what clownin someone is.
- Tommy Strong: Okay, clowning, like you in special ed, you dumb, you stupid, you know what I'm sayin. Stuff like that. Pushing you or something or even tripping you or something. I look at it now like special ed ain't a bad thing. They just put you for the best of you. Just some people can't read fast as other people so sometimes special ed is the best way for you.
- Researcher: You see that now.
- Tommy Strong: Yeah, I see that now.
- Researcher: But did you see that then?
- Tommy Strong: Then I was heated. I did not want to go. I did not like it.
- Researcher: So what month would you say you were going in to this special ed class?
- Tommy Strong: Um, the month? Um.
- Researcher: Thinking about the sixth grade. School starts in September.

- Tommy Strong: Um, sixth grade. September. Um, I'd say it was around about the beginning of September. Because they put me in the special ed class like end of like summer, like September the third or the fifth, like that time.
- Researcher: Okay. So were you in a regular ed classroom just before going into the special ed class room?
- Tommy Strong: Yes.
- Researcher: Okay, so you're in general ed. What happens?
- Tommy Strong: You talkin about like in a regular classroom?
- Researcher: Let's say this is Monday, you're in general ed. Tuesday you're in special ed. How did yours happen?
- Tommy Strong: It was like Monday I was in special ed, they put me in general ed – I mean, Tuesday
- Researcher: No. When you were first told you were going to special ed. When did that first happen? Like the transition from general ed to special ed.
- Tommy Strong: Oh, okay. I see what you sayin. The transition was like finish my week up in school and the next little week they put me right in the class. Right in the class, so I'm like the whole little weekend it was on my head that people gonna be teasin me, clownin me, making fun of me. I just didn't like it at all. I didn't like it. I didn't like the thought of it. I really didn't.

Researcher: So this morning of that day, cause that was the week that passed, so then the weekend comes right? Now, that Monday you come to school; you go to the special ed classroom. How are you feeling? What are you doing? Think about coming up to the school.

Tommy Strong: Umhmm. First walking in, getting out the car, first I'm still like walking slow cause I'm like people, all my friends gonna be laughing at me like I gotta go, cause everyone knew which two classes was the special ed classrooms, cause everybody used to gather round and really just laugh at them, you know what I'm sayin? So when I'm walking to the door, I'm like, nervous. I'm nervous. I get in the school and I guess it just the stress just went off me, you know what I'm sayin. I just went to class, you make fun of me, I'm just let it go. This is for my best. You know, I don't care what nobody think.

Researcher: So now you're in, right? How does that day go?

Tommy Strong: First day? Um, my friends, like, Tommy you in there for real? You in there for real? First I wanted to say no. I'm laughin like uh uh uh. I'm like yeah, they put me in there cause I don't do my work you know what I'm sayin. I'm bad, you know what I'm sayin. I'm trying to make it. I'm tryin to do my work. They tryin to change whatever I'm actin. They tryin to change it up. So, really when I really told them that

everybody really just start bout teasin me. They had little side jokes, my homeboys, and they had little side jokes whenever we was outside the school. But in the school they didn't really let that get to them. They still held it down for me. That's what I liked right there.

Researcher: Ok. So when you looked out and saw the other kids in the general ed classroom how did that make you feel?

Included, but left out

The special education setting for Tommy becomes extremely challenging academically as he starts to develop an attitude or feeling of being left out. This phenomenon becomes frustrating over time. Later, Tommy begins to get used to being separated from his peers. Tommy longs to join in and the only way he seems to accomplish this is directly opposite of his intended goal—so, instead he starts acting out to draw attention. In the mind of a child, when thoughts are not properly processed and or analyzed, the child may make a resolve to think that attention, negative or positive is still attention. Getting noticed is very important for children.

Beyond typical attitudes surrounding the perception of how many students feel about being in special education, overall, Peter did not seem to have major objections about the placement. In fact, he seemed to somehow come to terms with it and began to believe that it was necessary for him to be placed in a self-contained special education middle school classroom. The purpose was so that he could receive the help he believed he needed. As a result, most of Peter's responses were positive. As shown in Figure 4:5, Curt and Tommy shared many similar frustrating attitudes toward the special education setting:

<b>General attitudes about middle school special education after placement</b>	
<b>Positive attitudes</b>	
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferred smaller class sizes and more teacher support offered in special education classes</li> <li>• Understood it was something he needed to do</li> <li>• Peers did not treat him differently</li> <li>• Positive interactions with general education students in gym class</li> <li>• Positive overall feelings about middle school</li> <li>• People got along</li> <li>• Felt he was able to learn</li> <li>• Got the help he needed to prepare him for high school</li> <li>• Would have preferred not to have been in special education</li> <li>• Felt being in self-contained classroom was positive because able to get more work done and avoid distractions</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not have positive attitude about special education placement</li> <li>• Vague responses</li> </ul>
<b>Negative attitudes</b>	
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worried about being teased when told going to be in special education</li> <li>• Would have preferred not to have been in special education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didn't want to be in special education</li> <li>• Didn't think need help</li> <li>• Hated going to special education class</li> <li>• Felt intimidated by general education peers</li> <li>• Felt timid</li> <li>• Depressed</li> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Intimidated by general education peers</li> <li>• Special education peers were supportive</li> <li>• Special education peers were tight knit and supportive</li> <li>• Believes that peers from General education think he's dumb</li> <li>• Questioning the future &amp; his abilities</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerned about what type of people will he be dealing with in high school</li> </ul>
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Figure 4:5

The apparent theme relative to the general attitudes about middle school special education focuses on the perception of peers. Over the course of the sessions with Tommy, it became very important to obtain information about his true perception of the transition from general education to special education. Questions were asked to support Tommy's overall understanding of self-contained classrooms by asking him to describe what he saw as differences in special education compared to general education:

Researcher: Did you ever go to any of the general ed classrooms? While you were in the self-contained classrooms?

Tommy Strong: No. I ain't go to no other. I was just all, when that time came I was just like all special ed classrooms. The self-contained classrooms.

Researcher: So you never got a chance to go to a general ed classroom (after placement in spec ed)?

Tommy Strong: No ma'am.

Researcher: So that would have been mainstreaming. Did you ever want to go?

Tommy Strong: Sometimes. Cause I always saw my friends in the hallway and they'd be tellin' me what they did in the classroom, or, you know what I'm sayin', it was kind of frustrating at first, being in another classroom different from my friends, but I got used

#### Getting used to it

Tommy soon would discover that after he was placed into a middle school self-contained classroom, there would be fewer opportunities where he could interact with general education peers, or participate with them in a curriculum setting. At this stage in Tommy's academic process, not only would his classroom be reassigned, he would also be taught a different curriculum. Ultimately, Tommy's life would be forever changed by a fork in the road and separated from his middle school peers. When someone is not in control of their destiny and is not regarded in any of the decision making, as decisions are made for them, a pattern of "getting used to it" emerges. This pattern prohibits the individual from interjecting their feelings and ultimately silences the individual's voice. This leaves room for internal forces to overrule any chance for rational decision making as there is no one to challenge what cannot be heard.

Researcher: How did you get used to it?

Tommy Strong: Cause when you in the classroom with like, in the special ed classroom with all the other kids, they not really, kind of, some of 'em like you but most of 'em, you've got some like nerdy, so. They weren't really on my level at the time. But as I got used to it, help other people with their work and they helping me with my work, so, that's how I got used to it.

## Social inadequacy

Experiencing a continuum of hurt feelings and being left out socially caused all of the participants to not feel included and socially inadequate.

## Tommy Strong

Researcher: Ok. So when you looked out and saw the other kids in the general ed classroom how did that make you feel?

Tommy Strong: It kinda hurted me a little bit because I wanted to be with them, you know what I'm sayin', they was outside playin' basketball and all that, and sometimes like I couldn't go like, where they was at, at that time. Cause I had a different classroom, I had a special ed classroom, so, we had a different time to go outside than the other kids.

Researcher: How does it feel to want to go and be with somebody and can't get there?

Tommy Strong: Ew, it's a irritatin' feelin', [laugh] it's a irritatin' feelin'. I'm telling you. Because you be wanting to go, but you know if you go you gonna get in trouble or get suspended or somethin' so you gotta follow your first mind by stayin' where your class at at that time.

Researcher: Ok. Describe your self-contained classroom.

Tommy Strong: Ohh, you had, like I say, weren't people in there like me, that looked like me, it was like nerdy people. You know what I'm sayin', people with glasses, some people got their tight pants on with the shirt tucked too deep in their pants, it was all



types of stuff went in my classroom. But I ain't let it bother me. I ain't let it get to me.

Researcher: So you saw yourself being different than they were?

Tommy Strong: Yeah, I kind of saw, cause I ain't, me I was like kind of like saggy and baggy, so, when I saw them got they shirts tucked in. It weren't nothin' wrong with it, it just was kind of little bit too tucked in. [laughing]

#### Adapting without a choice

Researcher: Ok, so now that you have some information about self-contained, mainstream and resource support which one would you have chosen in middle school?

Tommy Strong: Umm, in the middle school? I'd say the resource because comin' to get you out of class two, three hours out of the day ain't bad cause you, sometimes your friends don't even know where you goin'. You know what I'm sayin', somebody just comin' to grab you out of the classroom, like 'come on', your friends don't really, you know what I'm sayin', be worried about where you goin' at that time, you know what I'm sayin', they'd be thinkin' you in trouble or somethin'. So I kind of deal with the resource better.

#### Rejection becomes an internal conflict

Researcher: How is that important to you?

Tommy Strong: It's important because you don't want nobody makin' fun of you goin' to a special ed classroom. It don't make you feel

good. Sometimes it make your stomach hurt knowing that somebody about to make fun of you when you walkin' out the classroom, so.

The struggle to choose positive influences or negative influences

Researcher: Describe the characteristics of a good friend.

Tommy Strong: Characteristics of a good friend, a good friend will tell you 'come on bro, let's go to class, don't be late for class, let's graduate, we gotta do this, we gotta graduate on time' you know what I'm sayin', bad friends teach you all the bad things - come on let's go do this, let's go do that, and you know it ain't right but your head, you just gonna follow 'em, like, I'm just gonna go for it, cause they gonna make fun of me or somethin'. Or they gonna call me a punk or somethin', but you don't want that. Sometimes you just gotta be called that punk and just walk away.

Opportunity to become a wise leader

Researcher: Is leadership important to you?

Tommy Strong: It's very important. It's very important because if you don't have the right leader somebody could lead you the wrong way, you could be dead or in jail. You don't want that.

Peer relationships and the Discontinuity Theory

Philip G. Zimbardo (2004) authored the article, Discontinuity Theory: Cognitive and social searches for rationality and normality—May lead to madness. Zimbardo's theory focuses on the fundamental understanding that,

“The central dynamic of this approach is the motivation triggered by perception of a discontinuity, which is defined as a violation of expectation in any domain of functioning highly valued by the self. Such discontinuities may arise from the experience of failures, deficits, or transformations in intellectual, social, sexual, sensory, physical, or career domains. The motivation to understand the cause of a discontinuity, and to appear rational to one’s self and others, generates a cognitive search process, while the motivation to appear normal, to be like others generates a social search process.”

As Tommy, Peter and Curt search for identity through their peers, a pattern of negative social behaviors emerge. There is a constant decision making effort to choose positive versus negative influences. Seemingly tough attitudes, riotous living and boisterous displays of conflict dominate within many urban school environments. Since there is more energy and attention spent on managing students who participate in such behaviors. Students who do not have a positive role model to follow may often gravitate to conflict seekers. Outward attention seeking behaviors displayed by some students reinforces to some others that the student is to be idolized as a force to be reckoned with. Therefore, the student who is always in trouble can quickly become the most popular student. In some male circle of friends, it is important to seek respect by becoming the Alpha male. The Alpha male theory in context relates to how within the animal kingdom the male dominates and rules over the female, claiming his territory and daring any other male to break through the set barrier. This is especially important to Tommy because he believes that he is already

Researcher: Describe peers to you... how important are peers to you?  
You know peers are what? . . . how would you describe your

friends in middle school?

Tommy Strong: I'd say in middle school I had some friends that like, be doin' the wrong thing and be tellin' you like it's the right thing to do but actually it's the wrong thing, so, sometimes, you can't just listen to your friends, you got to use the sense God gave you. You got to go with your backbone sometimes, too. I don't know, you gotta, you gotta, your friends will get you in trouble a lot, so you can't even be sometimes involved with your friends like that.

Characteristics of a good friend

Researcher: Describe the characteristics of a good friend.

Tommy Strong: Characteristics of a good friend, a good friend will tell you 'come on bro, let's go to class, don't be late for class, let's graduate, we gotta do this, we gotta graduate on time' you know what I'm sayin', bad friends teach you all the bad things - come on let's go do this, let's go do that, and you know it ain't right but your head, you just gonna follow 'em, like, I'm just gonna go for it, cause they gonna make fun of me or somethin'. Or they gonna call me a punk or somethin', but you don't want that. Sometimes you just gotta be called that punk and just walk away.

Becoming socially wiser while also becoming a leader

Researcher: Ok, so, would you define or say you understand that concept better now or more when you were in the sixth grade?

Tommy Strong: I wasn't really following my mind I was like following other people, so. I say now I know a, a lot more now because, you know what I'm sayin', I got my head on straight and I'm about to graduate in June so that shows you that I'm there. I'm trying to be a leader.

Researcher: [How] is leadership important to you?

Tommy Strong: I t's very important. It's very important because if you don't have the right leader somebody could lead you the wrong way, you could be dead or in jail. You don't want that.

The statement "you could be dead or in jail" reflects Tommy, Peter and Curt's fear of ending up that way. Tommy and Peter already know what death is like from two stand points—the death of Tommy's father and the murder of both Tommy and Peter's friend Meech. Curt spent time in jail so he understands the fear of being put there again.

#### Not understanding or knowing how to move forward

The relationship between mind and matter is powerful. David Bohm, a physicist, introduces "Thought as a System." Thought as a system occurs as human beings collectively use their private reflections of their personal identity elaborate upon the connection between the mind and matter to define the unknown (Bohnm, 2005). Tommy Strong demonstrates a definite struggle with how his mind thinks and his connection to what is actually taking place. For example, The death of Tommy's father continues to resonate in his mind today, as if he has news he has just received today. His inability to separate the past from what he is currently experiencing signals a pattern of denial and an inability to move forward. This is not to suggest that Tommy should forget what has happened to his father or to minimize the devastating impact that his

father's death caused in his family, but there are two significant concerns. The first concern is that Tommy's father typically was only present in his life when there was a need for financial support.

According to Bohm, (2005) "The manner in which feeling and thought interpenetrate one another is central to [his] view of the functioning of consciousness." In Tommy's mind, he believes that as his father's son, he is directly responsible for providing support to his family. He knows that education is supposed to be a tool to accomplish this goal, yet he cannot seem to figure how exactly the process will work for him and what he needs to really do to make it happen.

#### Becoming a risk taker, means taking a risk

In some African American households, children are not taught to be risk-takers. Instead, they are taught just the opposite. Taking risks involves delving into the unknown, or stepping outside of the box. The major concern with taking risks is the uncertainty of losing what is already gained and the fear of losing it. It does not matter if the outcome is guaranteed to be positive or successful. It is reckoned like the timeless adage, "one bird in the hand is better than two in the tree."

Retracing the steps of middle school, Tommy as well as the other participant's perception of middle school is a very naïve one. In his ideal, it appears to be a big game or a joke. It is very apparent they shares insight into various situations, they do not see themselves as being personally present in the immediate situation and therefore, school is not taken serious.

Although he talks about leading and helping others, for Tommy, it is safe for him to continue dwelling around people who are familiar to him and to not dare think about how that could change for the better. Tommy's voice can be heard loudly as he states:

Tommy Strong: See when I was in middle school, it was like a big game, a big joke. I wasn't 18, 19, I didn't know what was coming my way at the time, I was still young. But now as I know so much that's goin' on in the world you gotta be all your stuff, you gotta be on it. You gotta be on it.

In this instance, the participant's voice is most important as it provides a clear understanding and detailed insight into the immediate situation as it is being experienced. Tommy's world as he perceives it can be analyzed, but it should not be interpreted through an outsider without considering that reality can sometimes only exist in the mind of the owner of it.

Jawanza Kunjufu (2002) directly associates effective teaching to learning outcomes. Kunjufu states, "The harmful effects of a poor teacher can linger well into the future, and a string of bad teachers can leave students at a huge academic disadvantage (Kunjufu (2002) Black Students, Middle Class Teachers, p49)."

As Tommy speaks on various questions that are being asked, he begins to realize and is thankful to have an opportunity to openly express his thoughts without ridicule. In many public schools, teachers are the primary source of talk, discussions, and the use of voice. The teacher is thought of as a guide who leads the stage of the thinking process of her students. Right or wrong on an issue or topic, whatever the teacher states, declares, suggests, or supports is taken to be the truth. A student who would dare state opposite of the teacher's viewpoint is very often reprimanded, scolded or ridiculed. If a student declares something to be true before the teacher has an opportunity to present the information first, the student's information could be interpreted through the teacher to the other students in the classroom, as the child has

not been properly informed. As a result, students are reluctant to express ideas or to provide information for fear of public humiliation. So, instead of speaking out, students are taught that they should sit and listen. This approach to learning promotes delayed responses, stifles creative minds and does not support any effort to exercise the basic democratic right, that is the right to freedom of speech. Perhaps this teaching practice is not deliberate in as much as it has just been the expected norm for too many years. In Gregory Zvric's (1997) dissertation he makes the notation in figure 4:6:

The Teacher's Role in Fostering Exploratory Conversations		
Teacher Role	Implications for Learner	Implications for African American Males in Special Education
1. How can the teacher empower learners to make their thinking public?	Learners can grow by taking responsibility for their own learning.	African American males in special education have to feel comfortable and trust that the teacher is listening.
2. How can the teacher empower learners to ask questions?	Learners can only grow by exploring what they do not know.	African American males in special education need to know that their voice will be taken serious and counted.
3. How can the teacher empower learners to revise their thinking?	Learners can grow by entertaining alternate perspectives.	African American males in special education may only revise their thinking after they have been assured that the first draft was not ridiculed.
4. How can the teacher empower learners to view writing as a tool for expressing personal interpretations?	Learners can grow by using writing to tell their own story.	African American males in special education who have a difficult time with expressing themselves via written communication may only generate new thoughts by engaging in oral expression as they are being gently coached throughout the process.
5. How can the teacher empower learners to view writing and talking as generative enterprises?	Learners can generate new thoughts by engaging in the process.	African American males in special education may require additional supplemental aids as support for reinforcement of writing and talking as generative enterprises.

(Figure 4:6, Adapted from Zvric,1997)

In Tommy's case this becomes a difficult barrier to break free from, even when given the opportunity to speak freely. What Tommy has not come to understand is how far reaching his voice through his lived experiences, has the ability to carry him. Tommy has only touched the surface and does not fully understand the total impact.



In the African American culture, voice is being redefined and propelled forward to cross over attitudes and perceptions that were once held captive and only expressed as a thought. Thoughts that are held captive are oppressed. Therefore, “. . . in gaining our self-respect, manhood, dignity and freedom helps all people everywhere who are fighting against oppression (Breitman, 1967).”

As Tommy Strong, Peter Sanchez, and Curt Jackson seek out and realize that they have a voice, they will discover the rich culture and heritage of a people with one voice who are armed with the knowledge of the past, [who] can with confidence charter a course [for] the future (Malcolm X and Revolutionary Black Nationalism, in *We Shall Overcome: The Second Reconstruction, 1954-1975*, p.441).” Overcoming is a major concern within the African American community and is associated with only social advancement for some and for others it may include both social and economic advancement.

When Tommy speaks about escaping from his present situation he sees himself as living in a ghetto or the “hood.” His idea of escape leads them to a suburb where they imagine it to be free of crime, and increased advantages. Excluding the fact that the formal definition of the original ghettos was a demographic area where there is predominantly one race of people. A ghetto may or may not have issues or concerns about economic disadvantage or a concern for safety. What this young man has not fully processed is, ghetto is a thought before it ever becomes a place. As Tommy further explains, a more accurate term used today to describe the “ghetto” is “hood.”

Researcher:            Make it out of the hood. What is making it out of the hood?  
    Tell me what path that takes you to. From where to where?

Tommy Strong:        Take me to a better place like I ain't even got to move, I love

Detroit, I like, at least get my momma in the suburbs or somethin', I ain't gonna say I don't wanna move my momma in the suburbs, probably good little, one nobody be, you know, where it's quiet, everybody could get along. My momma's a church lady, so you know what I'm sayin', where the church people be at. Somewhere in that area. Where she ain't gotta worry about, goin' outside, somebody snatchin' her purse or somethin'.

Tommy recognizes that the streets of Detroit are not safe and that there is violence and danger. The survival skills and experiential knowledge of the streets that Tommy has managed to acquire over time has, in his mind prepared him to remain in Detroit. However, Tommy wants to move mother out of Detroit and into the suburbs. This is likened to taking your most prized possession and tucking it safely away from any immediate danger. Ultimately, he imagines his mother being someplace quiet, where everyone gets along. This place is where she does not have unnecessary worry about becoming a victim of a crime.

#### A struggle in the mind between fact and fantasy

The mind sometimes travels where the body will never be present. Tommy's loyalty to Detroit will not allow him to travel too far. For Tommy and Peter, the streets of Detroit could be all that they will ever know.

Researcher: Do you see yourself ever leaving Detroit?

Tommy Strong: Goin' to school but I'm coming back, if I do go far out.

In Tommy's mind he sees himself getting out of the "hood" with a ticket to play basketball for Michigan State University. Tommy believes that he will "make it big" as a

basketball player. When asked how he intends to get noticed by a basketball scout to showcase his talents on the basketball court—

Researcher: How do you see yourself leaving, you say going to school?

What school would you go to?

Tommy Strong: Probably Michigan State.

Researcher: How do you see yourself being found by a scout?

Tommy Strong: If I keep, you know what I'm sayin', being persistent, goin' to school, keep goin' to school, play hard, when you play hard, do your best, try your hardest, score, be a team player, I mean, a scout they'll see you, they'll look, they'll see you.

Researcher: Do you play in areas where scouts come and look?

Tommy Strong: No, I ain't never really played in the area, where the scouts will be at. But I'm takin' it day by day, you know what I'm sayin', a lot of things been going on, so. I'm gonna make it, it's just takin' me a little more time that I thought.

Throughout this conversation, Tommy is totally unaware that the likelihood of him becoming a drafted college basketball player for a major college or university team is a missed opportunity. This reality is an emerging theme that now begins to resonate throughout the remainder of this research study and interview sessions. Unfortunately, life as Tommy once knew it; the hope that ignited somewhere in middle school about “making it big” has literally passed him by. After Tommy started high school and allowed negative influences and his adverse behavior to interfere with his academic progress, each poor decision lessened his chances to be scouted to play at Michigan

State or any other major college/university. Further, his ultimate decision to drop out of high school immediately stifled any other possible opportunity.

Dropping out of high school did not involve a lot of planning on Tommy's part. He basically describes it as:

Researcher: When you decided to drop out of regular high school, what happened, give about three events that took place before your decision finally happened.

Tommy Strong: Umm, I started messin' with girls, like even more. Then, basically, friends, I mean you get that wrong friend that keep talkin' like 'man it's over, I ain't goin' to school today, it's over' and you be like, you get caught up in it and you find yourself, in the, in that little, I can't even call it a name . . . you find yourself failing and, you droppin' out and stuff like that. Start thinkin' different.

Tommy validates his success by how many girls he can engage with. Unknowingly, Tommy's purpose is substantiated by the quantity of girls rather than the quality.

Researcher: When you are thinking about dropping out of school, how are leaving behind your class work, your class schedule as we talked about earlier, and making that decision that you won't be doing math anymore, you won't be doing English anymore, you won't be going to gym anymore, you won't be doing your schedule any longer. How do walk away from that?

Tommy Strong: First off, that don't even be on your mind. Like, you just, in

your head, you be like, bump school, you don't even really think of a major subject like I'm leaving this behind or nothin'. You just caught up in the fun and the hype, everybody probably say that the night before school started everybody tryin' to go to the club or somethin'. And you, you, you'd be like I know I got school tomorrow but I'm definitely goin' to this club. And then you wake up in the mornin', you get in 2:00 in the morning and probably don't go to bed till 4:30 5:00 and then you know you got school at 7:00 or 8:00. And you can't get up for school and then you start being like 'man I ain't goin' to school tomorrow' and after, you keep sayin' that, it's over. You ain't goin' to school no more. You find yourself on the couch, watching TV.

Based upon Tommy's description of how he dropped out of school it is not so much a conscious decision to stop doing schoolwork for classes, but more like a slippery slope that starts with skipping one day, and then the next, and the next, until he found himself not going to school at all anymore.

#### Destiny in place of the present

After the discussion of dropping out of high school, another theme that began to emerge is destiny in place of the present. Expectations that are held by teachers are one of the major influences in a child's life but it is extremely important. Peter explains the events in middle school and transitioning into high school that lead up to him dropping out of high school:

Researcher: Ok. So now that's when you got into middle school. So now we're back into the eighth grade and you have explained that it's your last year of middle school. You're excited about the new setting and the new setting is going to be?

Peter Sanchez: High school.

Researcher: Alright. We're there. So talk about high school. Here you are just coming out of eighth grade. Let me ask you this – were you prepared? How were you prepared to leave the eighth grade and get ready to go into the ninth grade? What types of conversation did you have with your teacher or your parents?

Peter Sanchez: Teachers pretty much told me that um, the work wasn't going to be too much different than what we did in eighth grade. It's just probably going to be a little bit harder. So they said all you gotta do is like take in as much information as you can last year of middle school. Then take that into high school and kinda like balance it out.

Researcher: Ok. Did it balance for you?

Peter Sanchez: Uuh, it worked good. And then, like, towards the end you know, I started skipping class, hanging around the wrong crowd and then eventually I got into a fight and got expelled for the whole rest of the semester. So, I mean, the beginning of the semester was good – A, B student. Going to class. Doing everything I need to do and then. The next semester

came, I just started doing what I needed, wanted, instead of what I needed to do.

Researcher: So you started hanging out by the second semester right?

Peter Sanchez: Mmm hmm.

Researcher: Before you left the eighth grade how did they explain to you about career goals or career paths or life skills?

Peter Sanchez: I mean they told me like, if it's something that you good at then don't never give up. You know what I'm saying. Gotta just push hard, learn more about it, you know what I'm saying. Do research and stuff like that. They said if it's something that you wanna do don't think that you can't be, you just gotta put your all into int.

Researcher: Do you know what transition skills are?

Peter Sanchez: Um, like, you, I don't know. Explain that to me.

Researcher: Transition skills are preparing you for the next level.

Peter Sanchez: Oh yeah, like transition, like you transitioning from middle school to high school?

Researcher: Right. Exactly. So how did they transition you in terms of preparation?

Peter Sanchez: Um, just letting me know how it was gonna be.

Researcher: Ok. So now you've transitioned from eighth grade and we're back in high school again. So now describe the first day of high school.

Peter Sanchez: Uh, aww man. I'm about to go and you know, just I mean. Look at the set and see how it is. I can't wait to get in there and see the girls. See what new teachers I'm a have. I mean. Maybe if I might gonna see somebody I know from middle school. And things like that.

Researcher: How important was it for you to look at the setting?

Peter Sanchez: Just to know that the surrounding you were in. Like, alright, it's the teachers good. Do they know how to teach well? Is the um, my peers, my students, I mean my classmates – is they friendly or is they like, kinda like the mean type and stuff like that.

Researcher: Ok. And you mentioned girls.

Peter Sanchez: Mmm hmm.

Researcher: What about the girls?

Peter Sanchez: Just, you know, we boys. You know. Just getting into high school, you know, we gonna like to flirt with the women and stuff like that.

Researcher: Ok. So how easily is that receptive?

Peter Sanchez: I mean, long as you going to a female and you know what I'm saying. Greetin her with respect and not disrespecting her then she eventually make friends with you.

Researcher: So how many times did you have that happen for you?

Peter Sanchez: I mean, I was basically cool with everybody. Everybody, you know what I'm saying, liked me. I was funny. Not hard to get



along with so everybody pretty much liked me. Cause I was easy to get along with. If you was cool I was cool with you basically.

Researcher: Male or female?

Peter Sanchez: Uh huh.

Peter is concerned about one thing in particular—meeting and greeting. Socialization in high school is key to students from many different aspects. Equally important is acceptance by peers, mainly the opposite sex. This is one key to the overall adjustment period during transitioning from one school setting to the next, especially from middle school to high school. What Peter neglects to bring out in the discussion is whether he has transitioned out of special education at his new high school.

The next question opens the discussion for him to express his attitude toward multiple new teachers versus having had only one primary teacher throughout his self-contained middle school program while placed in special education.

Researcher: New teachers. Now you had this one teacher all the time you were in middle school, right? Now you're getting ready to have new teachers.

Peter Sanchez: I got my new schedule I was so confused. I'm like, aww man, where is this classroom at? Gaga – I had classes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. I had to go from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor all the way down to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. It's like 2 or 3 flights of stairs a piece just to get to the next floor. I think bout it took me like 2 weeks to really know my schedule and know where the classrooms was without having to use my schedule.

Researcher: Was there anyone there to support you with that process? Was there someone, when you got to high school how did they say to these new 9<sup>th</sup> graders, here is your schedule, here are your classes, here are your teachers. Tell me how that happened. How did you know, and where did you know to go get a schedule?

Peter Sanchez: Um, it's like when I first got there to enroll I think I didn't enroll the ending of the semester. I was going, you know what I'm saying, I was graduating from 8<sup>th</sup> grade so I was like, at the end of the semester I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I went in and enrolled in high school. And I went to Northern. And um they just told me that after I enrolled and signed up and everything, they told me when it was the first day of school to come to the office to get a copy of my schedule. But I didn't get my schedule the first day of school. I got it like a week before school started.

Researcher: Ok. So you said it took you about 2 weeks to know your schedule.

Peter Sanchez: To know my schedule by heart and know where the classes was.

Researcher: How could that have been made simpler for you?

Peter Sanchez: If my classes was close together or all on the same floor.

Researcher: So having your classes closer?

Peter Sanchez: Mmm hmm.

Not only are Peter's classes not together, and difficult to manage, he is starting to encounter some other problems. As a result, the newness of being enrolled in high school, and the once blissful experience is starting to wane. The next question that is asked of Peter is about his ability to manage everything:

Researcher: How do you manage that [meaning high school]?

Peter Sanchez: Mmm, I knew eventually when I got into 12<sup>th</sup> grade long as I took care of everything I need to take care of I was gonna have a shorter schedule but unfortunately not because of the problems I was going with towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Researcher: Ok. What type of problems were you going thru at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade?

Peter Sanchez: Um, not going to class. Skipping.

Researcher: How did this happen?

Peter Sanchez: Um, I don't know. Just me being me in my ways. Just sayin that uh I going to class saying I wasn't going to go to class one day then sayin I was gonna go the next day. Eventually I just wound up not going to class all together. Then I go, I show up late or I go and walk out cause they be what I find it boring. Stuff like that.

Researcher: Ok. So you're managing your schedule, you're hanging out, right?

Peter Sanchez: Yup.

When students are controlled in environments and not given expectations for accountability, freedom provides hindrances that go unmanaged. Based upon the aforementioned responses given by Peter, he has somehow migrated to hanging around some of the same like personalities that he struggled with in middle school—only this time there are magnified. These negative influences are repeated, but at a greater capacity as stated below:

Researcher: You're walking out of class. You've come from having to be in a classroom all the time, every day you go to school, right?

Peter Sanchez: Basically in high school I'd say it was too much freedom cause being in middle school you couldn't just get up and walk out of class. You couldn't leave on your lunch hour to go out and go get lunch and then come back. It was just like high school was way more freedom than middle school. Leave out of school whenever you want to without nobody tellin you you can't leave w'out.

Researcher: So how did you manage that? Thinking about middle school – let's go back a little bit to middle school. You're saying high school – too much freedom. So middle school – is there a lot of freedom in middle school? Was there for you?

Peter Sanchez: Not really. Like, when you wanted to leave out the classroom you had to ask the teacher for a pass. And if you's leaving out the building you had to like, the office had to be notified. Like a parent had to be coming or you had to have a note

saying you's being excused cause you had to leave early for a doctor's appointment or something like that.

Researcher: Ok. So describing both settings, thinking about too much freedom, would you consider this not enough freedom, too much freedom, or no freedom for middle school?

Peter Sanchez: I mean, it was freedom. Just on like, to a certain, it's like to a certain line. It's gotta certain line to it like, like, like I said, like I said if you leave out the classroom you had to have a pass. Which is fair so they can know where your whereabouts is. You not just getting up and sayin I'm about to go home after this hour and just walk out the building without nobody saying where you going, or you got somebody comin to pick you up?

Researcher: How could you have been prepared coming from a setting with a small amount of freedom, getting ready to go into a setting that has too much freedom as you described?

Peter Sanchez: I mean the experience of people tellin me how it was like my older brothers was always tellin me like, high school is fun, you know. You get to do this, you get to leave out on your lunch hour. You got basketball team, you got cross country, you got swimming team, volleyball team, basketball, football. You got all types of things to do. He said it was, he said it was a big experience for him.

When students who have a learning disability are segregated via placement into a self-contained classroom away from their peers, privileges and opportunities are not necessarily the same. Peter describes an exciting opportunity to participate in different types of sports in high school, yet at the same time the information was only translated by a family member and not the learning institution, the teacher or even a guidance counselor. The role of the guidance counselor is to oversee all of the academic challenges and opportunities for all students regardless of disability.

Researcher: How did your brother prepare you for this change?

Peter Sanchez: I mean, he just let me know, like when you gonna go in there do what you need to do. You know what I'm sayin, and pretty much stay to yourself. Make friends with who you gonna make friends with but make sure you pick your friends wisely cause some people say they you friends then they turn your back on you in the end.

Researcher: So getting back to too much freedom in high school. How is too much freedom?

Peter Sanchez: I mean you ain't have nobody really on you like that.

Researcher: How would you have wanted someone to be on you?

Peter Sanchez: Like if I walked out the class the teacher come out the class and say you gonna come back in class, or ask me to leave. You gotta have a pass and stuff like that.

Researcher: What would've been your response had that happened?

Peter Sanchez: I prolly woulda came back in the classroom.

- Researcher: Ok. So in some ways do you feel like you were maybe looking for that? Or wanting that? And you didn't get it? Or did you in some way feel like you wanted the challenge of it?
- Peter Sanchez: No, it was just me doin what I wanna do.
- Researcher: So you just say it was you? Ok. That's fair. Alright. So you talk about too much freedom – we talked about that. Permission and passes. What does permission do for your in terms of, if someone says you don't need my permission, how do you respond? Versus someone saying you need my permission.
- Peter Sanchez: Someone sayin that you need their permission basically sayin like...
- Researcher: Which works best for you?
- Peter Sanchez: Uh, sayin that I don't need permission which basically give you free will to do what you wanna do. Like, like, if like, say my mom had a car. And she tell me I don't need permission to see her car so that mean whenever I see her keys layin around I know I can just pickem up and leave and get in her car and drive off. Versus her tellin me that I need permission. You know what I'm sayin. If she tell me I need permission. That mean I gotta ask her. I gotta ask her before I take the keys and leave. I gotta say Ma can I see your car for a couple hours before I just take the car and go.
- Researcher: Which do you prefer? Which works best for you?

- Peter Sanchez: Not permission. No permission.
- Researcher: Ok. And you believe that works best for you?
- Peter Sanchez: Mmm hmm.
- Researcher: Ok. Alright. Let me ask you a question about the car cause I'm thinking the keys laying there on the table. I'm pretending like I'm a mom. My keys are laying on the table and all of a sudden I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, I've gotta run to the grocery store.". So I go cause I know I put my keys on the table. I look to grab the keys and the keys are goin. Now I'm the mother and I'm thinking, did I give my child the keys or did my child take the keys?
- Peter Sanchez: That's when you come in. She go call, she gonna think about it and be like my son proly got my keys. Then she gonna call and say cause she told you you don't need no permission. You can just take my car whenever you want to. Just let me know that you got it. You know, I'm not ask you to ask me, just let me know you got my car before you just take off with it.
- Researcher: Ok. Alright. That's a good answer. Now let's look at it another way. I put my keys there, I've given my son permission, right? And I am in a hurry because his sister, my daughter, calls and says, "Mom I need you to come now." And you've got my car. What do I do?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm, call me and tell me to get back as quick as I can.



- Researcher: Ok. She needs me right now.
- Peter Sanchez: Or I say that I go take care of what she need. If, you know what I'm sayin, if I can do that.
- Researcher: So how would you say working together with permission benefits everybody?
- Peter Sanchez: I mean if everybody work together with permission that'd be a good thing. Some people like, they wanna go do they own little thing and stuff like that. You say, alright, you got 2 sons and you tell em they can get the car and then this brother wanna go do that and then this brother wanna do that. Then it start a big feud cause one can't do, what they wanna do.
- Researcher: How is permission setup in your house?
- Peter Sanchez: Um, I mean basically like, if you if you younger like when I was younger, my daddy used to always tell me, you know what I'm sayin, if you need something you come ask me and I make it for you. If you need something out the fridgerator come ask me and I make it for you. But when we got older stuff like that we can just really do by ourself. The only thing we need permission for was if like you wanted to go to parties or spend the night over a friend house for the weekend. Stuff like that. Like if we was going out.
- Researcher: Ok. So now going back to high school. You're in your 9<sup>th</sup> grade. And this is that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester where you've got all this freedom. You're saying you don't know how to handle it,

right? Because Peter is doing what Peter wants to do. How do we get to the point of understanding how to meet Peter's needs?

Peter Sanchez: Um, I basically say that if I wanna make it thru high school then I need to get myself together now because the longer that I sit around and goof around and not do what I need to do, I'm a keep falling further behind and then I see myself not having the chance to graduate from high school and have to get a GED.

Researcher: So, as a teacher how do I recognize Peter in this situation? With all this freedom coming from an environment where he had to ask permission, now he's in an environment where he doesn't need permission for many things as you say. As a teacher, how do I see you in this situation? How do I recognize this child?

Peter Sanchez: Basically like okay, they had you first semester. You wasn't like that. You was A, B student. And you had all your work done. Did all your homework. And then come this semester you foolin around doin what you wanna do. Basically sayin that I know he can do it, he just don't want to.

Researcher: How do I help Peter?

Peter Sanchez: Um, I guess by, like, having, having like a one on one talk with me like after class or after school or sometin like that. And you just talk to me about like, ok, you know what I'm

sayin. You not doin nuthin but fallin behind and you know what I'm sayin. Just encouraging me and letting me know that I need to come to class. And tellin me the different reasons why I need to be in class and not skip and stuff like that.

Researcher: How is Peter going to respond?

Peter Sanchez: I mean if a teacher, I mean, if the teacher ever did that then I probably sit there and talk to em. And it probably woulda changed the way I thought about school at the time.

Advice listened to is not advice taken

Researcher: How many times did teachers come up to you and say, "Peter, I'm noticing that your grades are dropping." How many times did teachers come up to you and say that to you?

Peter Sanchez: Um, my Algebra teacher used to be on me because I had her husband in middle school as a Phys Ed teacher. So when I first got there I kinda already knew who she was and she used to be on me like, you were really slacking. She used to tell me I'm really slacking. My grades are going lower and lower. I went from A/B student to a D and F student. And she said that she know I can do better and she just said I needed to get it together if I planned on making it thru high school.

Researcher: Ok. So now you said to me that the teacher should do this. They should recognize and look for a Peter in this situation. Lot of freedom. Grades slipping. To try to encourage them to get back on track. Right, that's what you said?

Peter Sanchez: Umm hmm.

Wanting to, but not understanding how

Peter's algebra teacher was the voice in the wilderness, crying out to him saying this is the way, walk into it. Peter is fortunate to have a teacher who has relative meaning and who has some foreknowledge of his academic history. The teacher is attempting to challenge his negative display of behavior and the choices he is making. Unfortunately for Peter, this clarion call was not enough to stop the sequence of events that are to follow and will impact the rest of his life permanently. If the rigor of the curriculum was too much, Peter could have reached out to the hand that was reaching for him, but without having ever had the experience and the opportunity to voice his thoughts in the past, perhaps he does not know how to communicate his immediate needs. Peter offers some advice to middle school students:

Peter Sanchez: Basically sayin that gather all the information you can from 8<sup>th</sup> grade and use it to the fullest when you get in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Try not to fall into the wrong crowd and skip school and not go to class and stuff like that. Just try to stay on the right path cause it's gonna be, it's gonna be like so big that it's so easy to fall off to the wrong track. So the best thing is to stay focused and keep a clear mind. And learn as much as you can.

Many of the same schooling events, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions that Peter revealed in the interview sessions were synonymous to Tommy, and Curt. To precisely capture and reveal the similarities as revealed in the data analysis, following are the predominant themes that emerged as displayed in comparison chart.

Based upon the outcome of education as displayed by Tommy, Peter and Curt, a high school diploma was not looked upon as something that was obtainable. Insight into the likelihood of attaining to receiving a high school diploma causes one to examine if being educated is for jobs or personal development and self-worth. The end result is the education base line for what it takes to become a productive citizen in the United States. In some ways, none of the participant's goal to finish high school is recognizable because the main purpose had not become a self-reality. The system's position and goal to educate the participants failed to help either of them to achieve his basic goals. Basically, self-contained special education classrooms where students have a learning disability seem to foster an environment of dependency.

#### Emotional and academic failure exists, before physical exit emerges

As students are placed in a self-contained special education middle school classroom, the entire educational process has already been altered and interrupted. Sometimes the goal of the student does not mesh with the goals and expectations of the educational system. The system's expectation is that this is the best placement for the participants. The participant's perspective is that there is no value or trust in the system based on the reality that they are unable to express their basic wants and needs in a manner that is intelligible. None of their outward demonstrations of needing support worked. Ultimately the academic system that was developed to provide freedom has

failed these three young men, causing them to be placed in some form of mental or physical bondage.

William Glasser (2001) believes that children do not fail school schools fail children. In his book, Choice Theory in the Classroom, Glasser (2001) explains that teachers have the responsibility of teaching students how not to fail. He believes that teachers need to see themselves as a “modern manager.” The teacher as a modern manager, “direct their students and use their power to reward or punish them to try to get them to follow this direction (p.87).” Glasser also believes that “if teachers can accept the new role of manager that [I] will lead more students to work harder in school (p. 94).” From this model, evolves the Learning Team Model. The focus now is placed on the entire group and not just one student as is in Tommy’s situation. Figure 4:4 shows an example of how Glasser’s theory may not have been applied in either of the participant’s schooling.

<b>Identifying events prior to dropping out</b>		
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curtis Jackson</b>	<b>Tommy Strong</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Started failing classes</b></li> <li>• Started smoking cigarettes</li> <li>• “Messing” with girls more</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Embarrassed by teacher when called on in front of other students</b></li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Fighting in home</li> <li>• Witnessed people getting hurt</li> <li>• Surrounded by negative situations &amp; people (gang bangers, homelessness, drunks)</li> <li>• Difficulty reading</li> <li>• Difficulty w/basic math</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Failed 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and retained</b></li> <li>• Father’s death</li> <li>• Meech’s death</li> <li>• Placed in a self-contained classroom in middle school</li> <li>• Being teased by general education students</li> <li>• No longer popular in school</li> </ul>

Figure 4:7

Further exploration and analysis of the feelings of all three participants revealed that certain safeguards were missing that may have prevented the males from dropping out of school. For example, all of the males experienced academic challenges that resulted in failing a major subject area and then the entire school year. As set forth in Figure 4:7, after a while, each failure was met with no less than a feeling of seeking acceptance. To the participants, acceptance was first sought from teachers and then peers. The expectation for success is what each of the participants were left wanting.

Each failure by the participant to obtain the teacher's approval became the one obstacle that seemed to linger. As a result, none of the participants were properly prepared with the necessary life skills and the understanding of what it might take to survive independent of a high school diploma. Based upon each of the accounts of the participant's feelings below, if only administrators, teachers and even peers were able to recognize that the participants were already dropped out socially and mentally before any obvious signs of the physical exit. Consequently, that is what ultimately happened to each of the African American males who participated in this study. Each of them was on the brink of ultimately failing school and no one recognized the signs or were equipped with strategies to counter the decision. It would seem that once these feelings started, once again there was no one support person, system or check point installed to counter the decision that is about to be made.

<b>Feelings about middle school special education prior to dropping out of high school</b>		
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>	<b>Tommy Strong</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanted to fit in with "popular" kids</li> <li>• Wanted to be the center of attention in 5th grade</li> <li>• Class clown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling that no one cared played a major role in his decision to drop out of high school</li> <li>• No one cares, so he</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one cares</li> <li>• What is the use of continuing on</li> <li>• "Forget it, it aint even worth it!"</li> </ul>

	<p>could do whatever he wanted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one showed any love by asking what was going on in his life</li> </ul>	
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Figure 4:8

After struggling academically in elementary school, Tommy, Peter and Curt did not anticipate attending middle school with thoughts of ever totally dropping out of school. The overall expectation of the middle school teacher was to fill in whatever academic gap that was missing. Since two of the three was placed in special education before coming to middle school, the emerging theme was for the middle school teacher to reinforce and build upon any knowledge that had been acquired in elementary school. Consistent with that was to provide patience and to go above and beyond the call of duty with medium aggression in an effort to prepare students for high school (see Figure 4:9).

<b>Three expectations of middle school teachers</b>		
<b>Peter Sanchez</b>	<b>Curt Jackson</b>	<b>Tommy Strong</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expected middle school teachers to be <b>helpful</b>.</li> <li>2. Expected middle school teachers to have <b>patience</b>.</li> <li>3. Expected middle school teachers to <b>plan field trips</b>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expected middle school teachers should be <b>loyal</b>.</li> <li>2. Expected middle teachers should <b>teach the basics well</b>.</li> <li>3. Expected middle teachers should <b>go above and beyond</b>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expected middle school teachers should <b>prepare students for high school</b>.</li> <li>2. Expected middle teachers should <b>teach with medium aggression</b>.</li> </ol>

Figure 4:9

For Peter and Tommy, entrance into middle school was a smooth transition because neither of them could recall any reluctant attitude or concern. For Curt, his worst middle school experience was when he “was embarrassed to read in front of the



class.” He felt extremely embarrassed and hurt by the experience. This was mainly due to certain girls who were present in the classroom at the time. Later, Curt identified girls negatively during his continuing middle school experience.

#### The emerging female nurturing dependency system

All of the participants have the common thread of female dominancy. Each of the males witnessed a male hostile environment. Tommy’s parents did not get along and separated, leaving Tommy to be raised by his mother. Peter’s mother abandoned him at an early age, leaving him to be raised by an aunt. Curt’s parents fought to the point that he wished for his parents to divorce, consequently he was raised by his mother.

Each of the participants had one female teacher in the self-contained placement. As a result, they found themselves being reared and or taught primarily by a dominant female. Thus, the nurturing dependency system is reinforced. Females dominate the field of education. As students in the classroom they dominate the academic setting achieving a higher rate of success compared to males. Socially and professionally, females dominate customer service oriented jobs, soaring to the top in a visible manner. In many instances the female is somewhat idolized. For example it is difficult for the African American male to find himself being taught by a male teacher. As a result, the male student starts in school seeking the approval of the opposite sex. Early on the woman becomes his proving ground and major support. Eventually, the connection that is associated with females lacks the capacity to build a long lasting relationship that is supported by love and not dependency. As the male learns to become dependent on the female teacher to provide academic knowledge support, the female student to lend academic task support and the female breadwinner to provide economic support, he

seems to rely on an outside reinforcement to ultimately survive. This dependent state becomes a pattern and a cycle that exists in the life of all too many African American males. The problem seems to always go unnoticed and unbroken. In the absence of the female, the penitentiary system replaces the woman's ability to provide support. As the male attempts to discover survival tools on his own he seems to only survive for as long as his skills will allow him to.

Tommy in his later years now expects for the woman to provide the ultimate security of pampering that enables him to feel superior. Yet, he does not understand the need to support the woman in order to validate her true worth. When the male drops out of school it becomes an instant demand to become a man.

#### A purpose driven life relative to manhood by title versus by choice

A boy is born but a man is made. Boys are eager to call themselves men prematurely. Age is really not a factor when critical decisions are not being made appropriately.

Tommy Strong's account of the purpose driven life and manhood:

Researcher: Ok. How do you know your purpose in life?

Tommy Strong: I don't even know my purpose yet, you know what I'm saying. But, like I say, day by day, you know what I'm sayin.; I'm tryin to find it so.

Researcher: What defines manhood for you?

Tommy Strong: Manhood. Um, I mean, a lot of stuff describe manhood for me. I mean, friendship, family, you know what I'm sayin. I don't know. The team, you know what I'm sayin. Stuff like that.

Researcher: How do you think manhood or womanhood is physical rather than spiritual or mental?

Tommy Strong: Um, I think like, can you ask me that question one more time?

Researcher: Sure. How do you think manhood or womanhood is physical rather than spiritual or mental?

Tommy Strong: I mean because manhood and womanhood should be strong, you know what I'm sayin. You gotta be a bond. Strong bond. You know what I'm saying. You couldn't let nobody come between that you know what I'm saying. So I feel like, I don't know. It's sometime spiritual but it's not. Somethin like that.

Peter Sanchez's account of the purpose driven life and manhood:

Researcher: Ok. Alright. How do you see your purpose in life?

Peter Sanchez: Uh, I see my purpose in life because you know people always tell me that they see you know, they don't see the streets in me. They see that I can go far cause you know I like to listen, I like to absorb information. And you know I'm respectful. Long as you don't disrespect me, I don't disrespect you. So...I'm respectful.

Researcher: Alright, well that's good. What defines manhood? Do you think manhood or womanhood is physical rather than spiritual and mental?

Peter Sanchez: Mmm, no. I think it's I would say it's spiritual and mental.

Researcher: Ok, and how is that?

Peter Sanchez: Because you sharing something and then you get a chance to learn each other.

Researcher: Ok, so you're sharing and learning.

Peter Sanchez: Uh huh.

Curt Jackson's account of the purpose driven life and manhood:

Researcher: How do you know your purpose in life?

Curt Jackson: Um, I don't know it completely. I have an idea. I have a dream in my heart.

Researcher: Ok. Alright. What defines manhood for you?

Curt Jackson: When you are responsible for your responsibilities that you cause. When you know that you have to take care of something, you don't and shouldn't procrastinate. You should always do it promptly. Always keep your word. Don't make no promises you can't keep. I learned about that.

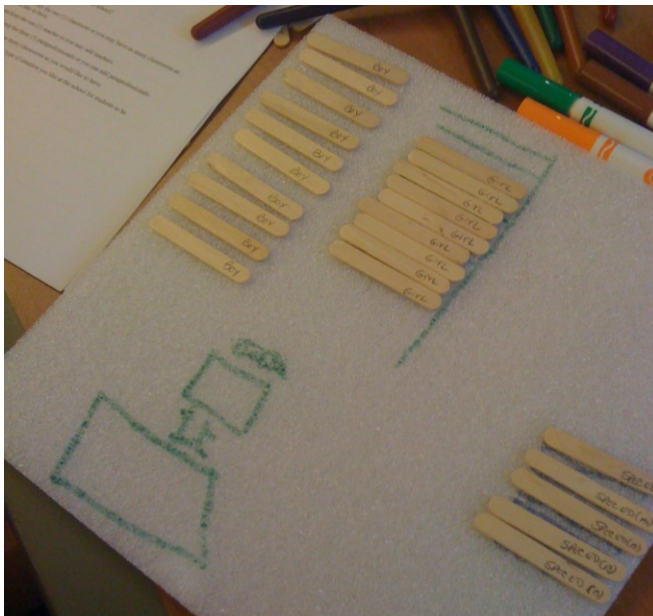
Researcher: Ok. How do you think manhood or womanhood is physical rather than spiritual and mental?

Curt Jackson: Because we both need each other and we both have the same power. Some has been developed, some hasn't.

After spending at least twenty years on Earth and at least sixteen years in an educational environment, not one of the participants was able to provide a clear statement as to what their purpose in life is. Manhood by Webster's definition is the state of being a man. Although the participants saw themselves as being adult,

manhood was somewhat an uncertainty. In time, they each felt that they could develop a clearer understanding.

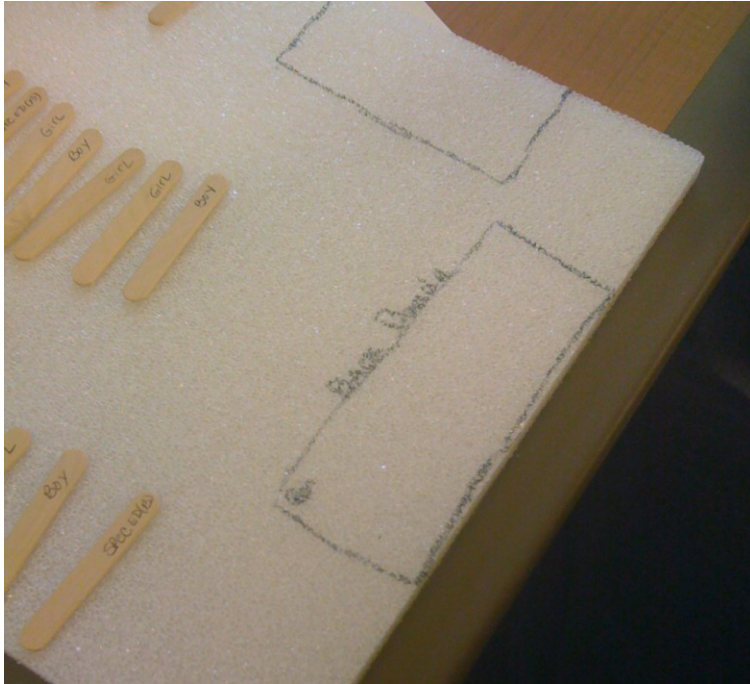
To conclude the field study, without any guidance, each of the participants was asked to participate in a focus group where individually and collectively they would introduce themselves and discuss their differences and likenesses pertaining to their experience in a self-contained special education classroom and what events led them to drop out of high school. Looking for patterns for inclusion versus segregation of special education students and general education students, the participants constructed a model to show the results for how a special program might look (See Figures 4:10; 4:11; 4:12 and 4:13).



Tommy Strong's model  
Figure 4:10



Peter Sanchez's model  
Figure 4:11



Curt Jackson's model  
Figure 4:12



All participant's model  
Figure 4:13

The individual models displayed a segregated classroom setting. The collaborative model showcased more of an inclusive model. The discussion surrounding the model also revealed that while being in a self-contained special education middle school classroom had some pros, there were more cons as it related to transitioning into high school. The sequence of behavior events is what ultimately led to each of them dropping out of high school and ultimately feeling like there was no point in continuing on. Ironically, in the case of these three young men, the notion to stay out of school quickly passed and each of them found their way re-enrolled into an alternative high school, as in the case of Tommy Strong and Peter Sanchez. Curt Jackson found himself receiving his G.E.D. and attending a community college for a short period of time.

## CHAPTER 5

*An optometrist asks the patient to tell about what is seen. The patient audibly expresses if the object is clear or not, and afterwards, several clicks of the lenses finally helps the patient is able to see what is before them. The final results of the test are corrective lenses.*

Where have we been?

The reality of perception is interpreted in many different ways. No two people will ever see things exactly alike. The attitude that develops from what is internalized becomes an action that may require attention. Looking back through this research study, a paradigm shift has occurred which involves socialization and belongingness. When a paradigm shift takes place, this means that one set of beliefs have been replaced by another set of beliefs. According to Fritjof Capra (1997) a paradigm shift is determined by what is occurring in the present state and then as lessons are learned, the knowledge that is then transferred through new experiences.

Change is inevitable and translates as something that is transforming from one state to the next. In the life of an individual, voluntary changes tend to be more adaptive than changes that are forced. Within each change there are transitions that evolve through different stages. The seven stages are: unconsciousness; awakening; reordering; translation; commitment; embodiment and integration (Buckley & Perkins, 1983). As the person transitions through each stage (Figure 5:1) they become fully integrated.



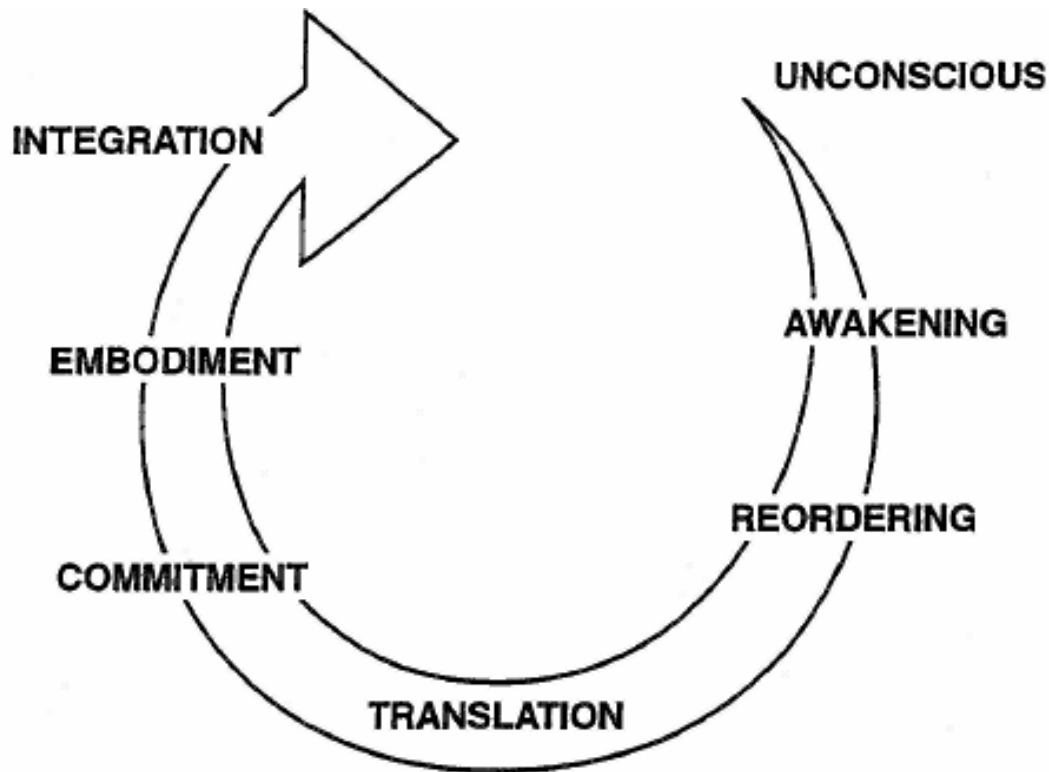


Figure 5:1

(Buckley & Perkins, January 1983 © *VISION/ACTION*)

The results can be a better understanding of the phenomenon that produces growth and positive development, or it can be “very confusing and filled with turmoil, pain, and destructive chaos” Buckley and Perkins (1983).

The role of democracy serves as a foundation for the structuring of education. One of its major purposes is the development of dignity and pride in people within the American society. Democracy seeks to provide an opportunity for equality that is obtainable.

The social journey through school is rapid, yet there are very deliberate instances that are played out over time. Before a student enters the school building for the first time, preconceived ideas and notions have been promoted.

### Reflecting on Tommy Strong

Tommy Strong never attended school he was told that he had to go to school, so that he could learn. It was stressed to him that school was not a place to play. Not much more was ever said about school besides it being required and non-negotiable and that it was to be taken seriously. Perhaps for Tommy if an explanation of some sort had been given for interpretation he could have been better prepared to face various challenges. It may have also been a more sustainable transition if it had been explained to Tommy how valuable his role was to be at school and that it was an opportunity for him to showcase his many gifts and talents in a positive manner.

At home, the primary training ground, before Tommy is enrolled in school, open ended conversations with him would check for understanding as he listened; taught how to appropriately respond to questions; express his opinions, and encouraged to share his fears and concerns—thus, the opportunity to discover the power of his voice as an active tool for communication would emerge. As the unconsciousness of Tommy's mind would have been invoked, Tommy may have internalized the concept for the expectations of school as would be requested of him by the teacher. Here is Tommy's account of his initial school experience:

Researcher: I want you talk about your first days of school. Were you in preschool or kindergarten first?

Tommy Strong: I think started off in kindergarten first. And when I really went to school, to be honest, I was excited but on the other hand I was like, still young, so I was still like joining the crowds, like really being bad, not really doing my work, so...

- Researcher: In kindergarten?
- Tommy Strong: Yeah, I was kinda bad in kindergarten. I think, yeah I got suspended a couple times in kindergarten. Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay.

#### Reflecting on Peter Sanchez

Peter Sanchez's initial schooling experience was somewhat different from Tommy's. Peter's account of his initial school experiences—

- Researcher: Describe your first day of school? Well, actually describe what was going on before you started preschool? What was everybody talking about? Here, Peter was getting ready to start school. You hadn't gone yet, right. What were they saying?
- Peter Sanchez: How they think I was gonna act on my first day.
- Researcher: They were wondering how you were going to act?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Ok. So family asking about that. What else?
- Peter Sanchez: Mmm, being excited it was my first day of school.
- Researcher: They were excited?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Ok. So family excited. Were you excited?
- Peter Sanchez: Mm hmm.
- Researcher: Why were you excited?

Peter Sanchez: Cause my older brothers talk about school, school, school. So I just wanted to try it and see how it was.

#### Reflecting on Curt Jackson

Curt Jackson's account of life just before the start of school was confusing and very chaotic. Curt describes his state of mind at the time as lonely, hurt and confused:

Researcher: Alright. Well hopefully talking with me over this session, you know, perhaps, you know, you will begin to see yourself and just sometimes just talking and discussing past things can open up your understanding and eyes to different things that have occurred in your life and maybe see yourself in a different light. Okay? Alright, so let's talk about the first days of school for you, okay? I want you to think back. I know you're 25, but I want to you think back, how you felt about being away from home for the first time and being separated from your parent or your caretaker. How did you feel?

Curt Jackson: I felt lonely. Hurt. Confused. I wanted to do something that I never did before but I didn't have the right support so I left home thinking that I could make it on my own. Dropped out of school. Made the wrong decisions. Dated the wrong females. Hung around the wrong crowd. I don't know. I'm just confused right now.

As Curt Jackson starts to answer the question about his past, the confusion is both overwhelming and conflicting. This is overwhelming to Curt because even at a young

age, Curt seemed to understand that his parents were supposed to have an intricate role in preparing him for the start of school. At the moment of being questioned during the research session, the conflict in Curt's mind existed as he recognizes that there was not any parent support. Later on in Curt's life, his response to the lack of parental support he was given as a child and throughout his schooling caused him to entertain the idea of wanting to leave home, and to indulge in fleshly activities. Curt now regrets having made those decisions.

After Curt is able to clear his mind of his summation of the hardship of family life before his educational experience, he is ready to answer the question about starting school for the first time:

Researcher: Okay, what about elementary school? Here you are, they've been talking to you at home about going to kindergarten. What is that like for you, thinking about it as a little five year old?

Curt Jackson: I was going to a big playground. And played with other kids that was different than I was or am. Um, I was just having fun.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. Having fun? Those were the good days right?

Curt Jackson: Yes it was.

Researcher: If we could only turn back to those days sometimes, right?

Curt Jackson: How I wish.

Through all of what Curt went through early on in his life, he recognized that there were some enjoyable moments that he could cherish.

In the absence of a solid home structure and foundation, or where high expectations for learning are not clear, it is important for teachers to build a relationship that is conducive to learning in a caring classroom community. The lack of community building in the classroom, or responsiveness to the individual needs of students by the teacher, tends to prevent a democratic educational concept where there is understanding and value in teaching the “whole child.” This is otherwise known as pro-social bonding at an early age. This approach to teaching increases positive connections among youth, their peers, and other students (Henderson and Milstein (2003).

#### Where are we today?

Hence, now enters the role of the teacher as advisor and the perception of that role that is held by the participants in this study. A teacher advisor is the person who provides a platform for learning—building relationships with students; resiliency; connectedness and democratic practices (Barker, Basite, and Olson, 2005).

#### Reflections on Research Question #1: Perception

Tommy, Peter and Curt’s perception of the teacher was not characterized as an advisor. In fact the teacher was seen as someone who had not necessarily convinced either of them of the exact purpose or capacity that each of them was to actually serve in the classroom. Tommy’s perception of the teacher’s role is to be a strong supporter of student learning and to provide a safe environment free from ridicule and biases. Curt’s perception of the teacher is:

Curt Jackson: Well, some was good. I thought sometimes, they had a problem. I thought that their, I thought that not only did I

have a problem, but they had a problem. You know they appear to come in the morning times looking pretty weird or crazy and that was kinda, you know, hard to perceive their attitude for that day. Cause you didn't know if they, you know, had a rough night or a good night. I mean, you just didn't know. Maybe they didn't eat breakfast. Maybe they didn't have their morning coffee or something. I mean, you don't know. I was always wondering in the back of my mind, if one of these teachers act foolish it be on the kids because special ed kids is really not easy to teach. It takes patience. It takes time. And I knew that was one of the challenges the teachers was going to have to face and deal with or else they would've never took that position.

To Tommy, it does not matter whether or not the teacher is male or female, however the teacher should also understand the individual needs of each student——

Researcher: African-American males, anybody, female, male, but I'm asking you as an African-American male, how important is it for the teacher to be male or female and teaching you. In terms of thinking about how people have said in the past that single family, children who come from single family homes should have one or the other? How important is that?

Tommy Strong: I don't think that's like important because if you got a good teacher that's a good role model to you, boy, male or female,

they good enough to be a role model and you look at 'em like a pops, not necessarily like pops pops but like an uncle to me or a father to me, if they get that and you let them bond with the student and the student probably won't come to class actin' the clown or nothin'. I don't know, I guess you gotta know your studens or somethin'. Get time, I know it's all about the learnin' and the education but I think you gotta take time off from the education for like a day and get to know everybody and see what's goin' on. See why they act like this, you know, get to know 'em. Before you even start to teach 'em. That way, when students start acting up you know what to do.

What is important to Tommy is that the teacher has good classroom management—

“Basically when the class start acting nuts, when you can't get your class under control, and I don't know, I guess you, awe this teacher is whacked, ah man, we gonna run all over this teacher, I don't know, it start off like that though.”

The teacher's ability to do the job effectively hinges upon the ability to manage the classroom:

“It's like that when they umm, class start actin' up, they can't get back control of the class, then you in the class, everybody skippin' in the classroom, you feel like that teacher ain't good, or ain't doin' their job right.”

Tommy also felt that a connectedness to the teacher through appropriate touch was extremely important.



When teacher support is lacking, the role and expectations of the administrator is just as valuable in the decision making process. For example,

Tommy Strong: I think the people like the principal and the teachers, I think some of them just came there just to punch in on a time clock and do they hours and then go home. I mean, I'm sorry but that's just how I feel and that's the attitude that I perceived from them. Um, they needed to change that because that's not, that's not cool, that's not acceptable. They have a commitment to us eight hours a day to give their full knowledge and understanding to, to us kids that we need that knowledge 'cause some of us slow and we need help. And when we, we leave school we go back into a jungle and we need the right information to deal with that jungle out there. And I feel they wasn't giving 100%.

Where are we now?

#### Attitudes and perceptions toward self-contained classrooms

In response to research question # 1, the attitudes of African American males who have a learning disability, toward self-contained special education middle school programs the research through interviewing the three participants, reveals that all of the participants believed that by being in a self-contained classroom in middle school this placement can influence ones attitude about school by making you not want to go as a result of the teasing.

## Reflections on Research Question #2:

The perceptions held by African American males who have a learning disability, of the self-contained special education program at the middle school level, who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom is answered consensually amongst the participants in the following manner,

Researcher: How might self-contained classrooms influence your attitude about school?

Tommy Strong: A self-contained classroom?

Researcher: Right, when you were in middle school in the self-contained classroom, how did that experience influence your attitude about school?

Tommy Strong: Self-contained classrooms to me was like, like I say you got a couple nerds, and all that stuff and then sometimes when you in the self-contained classroom and people see you they, start trying to like make fun of you or something' like that. So, being in the self-contained classroom you be like, ahh, you know what I'm sayin', I don't wanna go to school no more, if I get caught in this classroom somebody tease me and stuff like that, you don't want that, so, you know what I'm sayin', it stays in your attitude about school.

As these thoughts were shared about perception of self-contained middle school classrooms as being very influential regarding their overall perception about general education classrooms, Tommy's voice speaks for all of them. Although asked

individually, they all felt some of the kids in general education should have been in special education too.

Researcher: How might self-contained classrooms influence your attitude about special ed classrooms? I'm sorry, programs, all together.

Tommy Strong: I mean, my, my experience was like, it wasn't bad, it's just, you ain't wanna be seen in that classroom, you know, I was kind of like popular so me being in that classroom was like, what am I doing here, I mean, I supposed to be up on my game, and I popular, and back then I like, females don't like no, you know what I'm sayin', dumb guy, you know, so I'm like, what am I doin' in this classroom, that's basically how I felt.

#### Reflections on Research Question #3:

The last research question # 3, sought to discover the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who have a learning disability and participated in a self-contained special education middle school program, and how this setting might have influenced African American males to drop out of high school. There was conflicting belief systems that sparked a common theme—self-worth.

The participants did not really understand their responsibility in the classroom and their self-worth. As a result, hastily, each of the young men made decisions about their schooling that they lacked experience and insight into. Unfortunately, the decision

would affect them in some way for life. Peter describes the events leading to dropping out of high school—

Researcher: Ok. Why do students who seem to do well in school drop out?

Peter Sanchez: Prolly they have issues at home or something like that.

Researcher: What type of issues could someone have at home that would warrant them to think about dropping out?

Peter Sanchez: Um, prolly getting abused by their parents or somebody in they family that was close to them passed away.

Tommy is asked to provide six steps to preventing a student from dropping out of high school, but he is only able to define two steps. They are:

Researcher: What six steps would you like to see take place to help a person in regards to their decision to drop out of high school?

Tommy Strong: Six steps? I'd say be there for 'em. Umm, make sure you ask questions, ahh, never leave nobody in a dark corner no matter who they is, we got three more steps? Four? I don't know, I don't know about six steps, I'd say you just gotta be there for a person. Whenever they need you, you gotta be there.

Overwhelmingly he suggests that actively participating and anticipating the needs of someone you genuinely care about can be the ultimate prevention to making a life changing decision, i.e., dropping out of high school.

Researcher: So you say basically that the whole essence is be there for a person.

Tommy Strong: Basically, because if you feel like you got somebody that cared, might get different results.

### Summary

Amid all of the participants' talk, as they were encouraged to utilize their voice throughout each of the eight sessions, the fact is, all three of these young men did drop out of school. Seemingly, safe guards were either unreachable or nonexistent. Each participant had a different perspective relative to dropping out of high school synonymous to self-contained special education middle school classrooms. Exactly how or if self-contained middle school classrooms play an active role in the decision making process of African American males who choose to drop out of high school is still undetermined. Individually here are the participant's perceptions:

Peter answers the question concerning self-contained special education middle school classrooms relative to dropping out of high school—

Researcher: How do you think your experience in special ed impacted your decision to drop out of school?

Peter Sanchez: The only experience, I mean, I didn't really experience had nothing do it. That didn't really had nothing to do with me dropping out of high school. It was just, you know my grades.

Uniquely, Curt Jackson actually thought about dropping out of school in the sixth grade. Here is what Curt recalls as he is actively thinking about dropping out of school—

Curt Jackson: I'd go to the streets. Sell dope. Hang out. Party all night. Get high. Come back home. Go to bed.

Although Curt waited until high school to drop out, many of the same behaviors were present. In mostly all of his attempt to do well in school, he often referred back to the teacher's role and responsibility to students in the classroom.

Tommy Strong's situation is as follows:

Researcher: So now thinking about what you did not have, how important were these events moving toward you deciding to drop out of high school? How do you think those events that took place, that you should have had someone talk to you, to find out what was going on with you, how did that play a role, or not, in your decision to drop out of high school?

Tommy Strong: I mean it played a major role because nobody acted like they cared, you feel like you can do whatever you want to do, they tellin' you to stop, but I mean they ain't really tryin' to show no love to you. See what's goin' on in your life. Not even tryin' to at least ask. Knowing that, that make you feel like man, no one care about me. I can do whatever, I don't care no more. And that was a major part of why I dropped out.

Researcher: Is it a possibility that had you not been in special ed that you would not have dropped out?

Tommy Strong: I mean, if I would have been, if I wouldn't have been, I probably wouldn't have dropped out. You know, cause I probably wouldn't, if I'm slower than, reading, and everybody reading faster than me, and that cause somebody cause to make fun of me or something. While I'm trying to read out loud, and that cause you to be like, man, I ain't 'bout to go to school no more. Anything could have happened, but just thank God I did go there and enhance my reading by you know, my reading is a little bit better.

Based upon the research, what is apparent is that clearly teachers, peers and administrators play an important role in regards to the expectations and standards that they communicate to students. What else is known is how self-worth originates early in a child's life and is honed throughout schooling, thus the democratic process of education in America promotes and supports self-worth.

#### Perception of self-worth

The question is asked of Tommy, "If you were given the opportunity to work in a grocery store and there were all the different positions available in a grocery store, which position would you see yourself working in?" The answer:

Tommy strong: See I'm a man so I like to do some manly stuff, so, I probably did some stocking, or bagging up the bags, or stuff like that. Or, you know, cleaning up the floor, or something like that. Stuff like that. Cuttin' the meat. I'd do that, I'd do all that.

A question to Peter Sanchez about his college ambitions yields this response: Unknowingly to Tommy, stocking shelves, bagging merchandise, cleaning the floor are all jobs that do not require academic skills, i.e., reading, writing, mathematics. All that is required is simple, come to work everyday on time. There is little decision making, planning or influential tasks required to do the job.

Where are we going?

As a child grows and develops into an adult, each stage is critical to how valuable or not they see themselves functioning productively within society. In the absence of parental guidance toward success, the determination to succeed may have positive results as teachers, administrators and peer supports seek tangible ways to reinforce self-worth and realization throughout the academic process. Positive affirmations and continual monitoring throughout each stage and with each guided step, may also help to make it possible for fewer male students who are African American, who have a disability, to decide not to drop out of school.

Another perception held by the participants, is that there should be more than one teacher who teaches students who have a disability. Platooning seemed to be the most popular with the participants because they were concerned about having only one teacher with them and only providing their perspective of education. In other words, if they had participated within a platoon model perhaps they would have had more exposure to various teaching styles and more opportunities for someone to support their academic and positive behavior efforts. This perception supports a co-teaching model and cooperative learning where students are not grouped based upon ability.



An overshadowing attitude expressed by the participants was feeling as if something is wrong, while dealing with the conflict of being told that it is wrong to have a disability. Within each of the participants was a hostile attitude that emerged to defy any authority that would dare challenge where they belonged. There was a strong attitude of constant conflict between admitting that a self-contained special education middle school program was necessary, while not being able to fully accept that the purpose of the placement in special education was because of being diagnosed as having a learning disability. Overwhelming each of the participants felt that they should have been with their general education peers the majority of the time by right and not by privilege.

All of the participants were asked what capacity did they see themselves in if given the opportunity to choose any position in a supermarket. The suggested positions were, owner, manager or cashier. Tommy's response was to become the stock person because he loved to help people; Peter's response was to become the bagger because he was friendly; and Curt's choice was to be the cart retriever. Not one of the males chose to assume a leadership role in the market.

Overall, the attitudes and perceptions held by African American males who have a learning disability, who participated in a middle school self-contained special education program for three years were created through external sources. As indicated by the participants, perception is critical to the overall acceptance of how beneficial a program actually is.

#### Wondering Thoughts

I see the problem as stemming from what could be referred to as a defeatist

attitude not by anyone's choosing but by a default of a lack of knowledge and translation from within the family environment—unsupported in the academic environment. Before each of these African American males were born were parents who did not encourage them to utilize their voice as a tool to support their destiny to become great leaders in society. Instead just the opposite occurred. The only time that the male participants felt comfortable to use their voice was when they were being combative, insubordinate or in trouble. Thus, voicing their opinion was rare or non-existent.

Given placement of African American males who have a learning disability in a self-contained special education middle school program, a question that might be asked in a future research study is—

“How are the social behaviors of African American males who participated in self-contained middle school special education classroom similar to that of an African slave sold in America? How is it possible that there is a continuum of the same negative social experiences found in special education programs similar to that of a slave, and how does that impact and relate to feelings of inadequacy in a student who has a learning disability?

A last glance backward to clear the fog in the lens to see forward

When I entered the field to conduct this research with the participants I had one set of lens that showed a clear path to when I might expect to exit the field. I did not have any preconceived ideas or expectations because I wanted to become immersed into the life in which they live through how they would recall all of the explicit details to me through a lens I had never known before. The lenses that I would look through could only be decided upon after much discussion and clarity would later be determined.

Driving up to the research location, I eagerly anticipated happy young men who would be excited to participate in this research study. Instead, I was greeted by a group of young men whose heads were bowed down, with feet dragging down the hallway they walked without a purpose. There they all stood watching me and wondering as their eyes might ask, "Who is this stranger in our midst?" It was at that moment I realized why there were other young people, all African Americans—mostly males loitering outside of the building. People loiter when they have no place to go, or no purpose. Soon, I would be given permission to enter into a world where truly only the person who proved not to be the weakest link would remain. I could feel their pain, see the hurt and rejection, and silent cry for help. Without permission, they were unable to express their struggles or victories because their voice had not yet been heard. For the next eight meeting times, they would be able to use their voice to actually tell about the events of the life that they had become accustomed to living. This was nothing short of violence and homelessness.

Leaving the first four sessions, I found myself in tears and agony because I wanted so desperately to help. For the next four sessions, I would cry by myself as I walked to my car. Why? Because I cared! I wanted to restore the sparkle in their eyes that once existed; when they believed there was hope and purpose. I wanted to teach them how to use their voice to achieve their goals and to openly express their thoughts without fear.

Very quickly I would come to appreciate each research session, as I began to understand that nothing happens in isolation but is ordered. Timing is everything and certainly for me as the researcher and for the participants we would appreciate this

great work that was being done. Each session was like a therapy session to Tommy and Peter. For the first time without judgment, ridicule or disinterest, these two young men were able to relive the events that led up to the loss of their best friend Meech. He was a victim of the numbing pain that most metro cities like Detroit, know all too well—gun violence.

In a way being able to use their voice enabled them to be prepared to testify in court about what took place on that dreadful day. On many occasions, Tommy confirmed this when he said that he was glad to participate in each session because he was able to, “Get some things of my chest.”

Field research may be the only opportunity a person may have to utilize their voice in a powerful way that hopefully will serve as a purpose to change a system that may be devoid of this powerful tool.

As I think about this, given my heritage and my background, in many ways I see similarities and the plight of slavery in these young men. If the thought remains, I would ask the question, “When did American slavery begin” (Countryman, 1999). Then, I ask another question, when has American slavery stopped? Tommy and Peter have not yet recognized their self-worth, nor do they understand their value in society. While they are not physical slaves because slavery as it was once known has been legally abolished, however, I wonder if somehow they are being held captive mentally, as their only crime, if it were, was to seek a quality education.

**APPENDIX A**

**THE SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES HELD BY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALES WHO PARTICIPATED IN A SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION  
MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR THREE YEARS AND DROPPED OUT OF HIGH  
SCHOOL AFTER THE NINTH GRADE**

Former Student Interview Questions

**Sessions 1**

**Alias NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Start:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's: Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years attended Middle School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years attended High School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_

**AGENDA**

**Outline of Interview**

- I. Introduction
- II. Purpose of Interview
- III. Description of Research
- IV. Informed Consent & Sign Consent Form
- V. Interview Questions
- VI. Thank you for participating

**APPENDIX B**

**Research Study**

**Announcement**

A research study is being conducted to find out about the attitudes and perceptions of

African American males

who have a learning disability and participated in a

self-contained special education middle school classroom for

3-4 years and dropped out of high school after the ninth grade.

**To qualify for participation in this study you must meet *all* of the following criteria:**

African American

Male

Learning Disabled

Aged 18 to 25 years old

Participated in a Self-Contained Special Education Middle School Program

Dropped out of high school after the ninth grade

**If you are interested in participating,**

**Please contact:**

Sherrell Hobbs

(248) 974-8146

Transportation fees and time will be provided for.

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**ABSTRACT****THE SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES HELD BY AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES WHO PARTICIPATED IN A SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR THREE YEARS AND DROPPED OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AFTER THE NINTH GRADE**

by

**SHERRELL HOBBS****December 2010****Advisor:** Dr. Marshall Zumberg**Major:** Special Education**Degree:** Doctor of philosophy

There are two parts to socialization, informal and formal. In the United States, informal lessons of socialization come from a child's primary caretaker(s). Imagine a child growing up in this informal setting only to see the world from one perspective through that unique experience. Later the child goes into a formal school setting, to realize that the world is not one-dimensional and to learn socialization skills.

At the elementary school level, the general education curriculum requires children from kindergarten through third grade to participate in self-contained classrooms. At the middle and high school levels there are different teachers who are responsible for instruction in the four academic areas—English Language Arts (ELA), reading, mathematics and science. The exception is middle school students typically travel as one homeroom class to each teacher's classroom. While in high school, students have individual schedules with a different group of students in each classroom.

While inclusive teaching practices do exist in public education where African American males who have a disability are educated, there are still African American males who are placed in self-contained special education middle school classrooms in

2009. This research is important because it explores the attitudes and perceptions of African American males who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and if the experience had any influence on their decision to drop out of high school.

As a result of this study, by examining the specific needs and requirements revealed through a focus group of African American males who have a disability who participated in a self-contained special education middle school classroom and dropped out of high school; public school districts and special education school administrators are now in a better position to make “informed decisions” about how special education programs are designed and implemented for ALL students.

In the data analysis, as open-ended questions were examined, the answers to the questions were used to look within the individual’s responses and across to other participant’s responses in cross-reference to the content of each participants’ response throughout the data sets. Grouped categories of the information into various segments helped to discover ways that the content was alike and different. Critical in the use of this method to evaluate the data, many data sets were produced. The scope of each category was then categorized, grouped and named which yielded emerging patterns.

The sequence of behavior events is what ultimately led to each of them dropping out of high school and ultimately feeling like there was no point in continuing on.

### **Autobiographical Statement**

From business career to educator, my ultimate mission in life is to increase opportunities for others and to promote them to attain to greatness! Youth are the future of everyone and what I do for and to them is long-lasting. Therefore, as a principal, my ultimate goal is to set an academic standard that is inclusive and free of prejudices and biases—to promote school-wide positive behavior support that supports safety for all in a caring community that strives for excellence. Each day is a new day with different challenges, concerns and victories.

Education was not my first career choice. At the start of my work career, I worked in the field of publishing and advertising. Next, I received a Bachelors degree in Marketing, from Davenport University and worked as a marketing director for a non-profit institution. There, I managed people, promoted products and developed advertising campaigns. Indirectly I was influential in helping people to make purchasing decisions. It was the power of the influence that I recognized I wanted to influentially prepare youth for the workplace so that they too will realize their dreams.

The second degree I earned was a Masters of Art in Teaching degree from Wayne State University. I hold a professional teaching certificate from the State of Michigan to teach students who have a learning disability and I am certified as a K-12 school administrator. I am highly qualified to teach business administration and hold a Career and Technical Vocation license.

Now, my goal is to share my research findings for the improvement of special education programs as they directly impact African American males who have a learning disability.