African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Case Study

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AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS AND STATE LICENSING EXAMINATIONS IN METROPOLITAN ATLANTA: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Case Study

by

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The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act legislation has had a profound effect on teacher rolls, especially African-American teachers. More than any other racial or ethnic group, African-American teachers disproportionately fail state teacher licensure examinations. This results in removing them from the classroom, while simultaneously preventing new teachers from entering it. The problem shows no signs of relenting under the current mandates, so as the diversity of the nation’s study body continues to increase, the diversity of the teaching staff continues to shrink.

This combined, multi-case study addressed the unexplained reduction in the numbers of African-American teachers due to difficulty in passing state licensure exams. The focus area chosen was that of the Metropolitan Atlanta area, specifically urban, re-segregated schools, where the greatest numbers of African-American teachers are typically found. It was designed to examine the state teacher licensure testing experiences of veteran middle school teachers who completed questionnaires relative to that experience, to a group of elementary school teachers who participated in one-on-one
interviews. In doing so, the researcher sought to identify common themes among them which might provide further insight into this problem.

The study was a follow-up to on a longitudinal study that represented a joint effort between the National Education Association and the Educational Testing Service in seeking similar answers but targeted professors and students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This dissertation study was guided by three main research questions: (1) How well do colleges and universities prepare black teachers to pass state teacher licensure examinations? (2) How does stereotype threat influence the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure exams? (3) Is initial failure of a state teacher licensure exam a valid indicator of future observed teacher performance?

Stereotype threat was the theoretical framework through which this study was examined. This theory speaks to the stereotype pressures under which black people labor with regards to academic testing, particularly black teachers on state teacher licensing examinations. The matter requires extensive investigation and offers alternatives to testing in an effort to curtail the tide of black teachers systematically being removed from the nation’s classrooms.

Extensive research has determined that not only are the education experiences of students of color enriched by teachers of color, but white students benefit from their presence in the classroom as well. In an increasingly global, multicultural, and multiracial society, the white student body must become aware of and exposed to healthy images of professional people of color early in their lives. This will prepare them to effectively work alongside people of color in the future.
Numerous efforts by federal, state, and local governments across the country are targeted at recruiting teachers of color. However, until significant strides are made to stop the disproportionate loss of black teachers from classrooms, the time, money, and effort expended in recruiting them will continue to be wasted. The disproportionate number of black teachers in the teaching field must be effectively addressed to benefit the students they serve, and ultimately the nation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely want to thank the members of my dissertation committee. I would especially like to thank two people in particular who have been there from day one and throughout a span of many years. Dr. James Crawford, my committee chair, has been the stalwart presence in my corner and the calming influence throughout this academic journey. I sincerely appreciate his innate ability to get things done even when it appeared less than possible to me. Dr. Teresa Jordan proved herself to be the maestro and ambassador extraordinaire, readily assisting in assembling and re-assembling my committee, without fail, as the need has dictated over the years.

My sincere appreciation also goes out to my other two committee members, Dr. Linda Quinn and Dr. Gene Hall. Again, the perfect complement to any committee as Dr. Quinn possessed a knack for putting me at ease, while Dr. Hall kept me honest and on my toes. I wish I had the opportunity to work with them both earlier in this journey, but am glad I had the opportunity to do so before concluding my program nonetheless.

Also, I want to thank Dr. Marjorie Conner, a lifesaver who just floated in during my desperate, waning hours to review my work and provide me with invaluable feedback, suddenly making completion doable. Dr. Edith Rusch is someone else I would like to recognize and thank. She was yet another who took the helm at some point along the way, and introduced me to the theory and study that became the bedrock of my mine.

I would also be remiss not to mention Dr. Bernadine Brunson, at the time a principal and friend in the Clark County School District, who freely offered her assistance and sat down with me for many days and hours early in this effort. Yet, I am
eternally grateful to the participants in my research, especially the five ladies I interviewed. I cannot thank them enough for opening both their hearts and minds to me, and providing me with the insight to do this study. They did so not only to help me, but in the hope of helping the generation of black teachers to follow them as well.

Lastly, but most of all, I want to thank my wife of 15 years, who has seen me working on this endeavor the better part of them. Without her love and support, none of this would have been possible. Thank you.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is therefore dedicated to my wife, Jestine, for her love and steadfast support during this extensive endeavor. The wind beneath my wings, she was probably as much, if not more, resolute that I would finish as I was. She and I both know the special place and inspiration for seeing this effort through to its completion; so it was a labor of love.

To my mother Emily as well, who instilled in me a love of learning very early in my life. She insisted that I stay the course from grade school until now, and reminded me often of the old adage, with a twist, that “my mind was a terrible thing to waste.”
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I told her I’d even pay for it because you have a passion to work for the kids and you’d be an excellent educator, but she said, ‘I’m going back to New York ... I’m through!’”

- Ramona Evans
Elementary Teacher Interviewee
Speaking about her black student teacher who failed the GACE five times

“Even on your worst day, you are some child’s best hope” (Bell, 2004, p. 7).
This underscores the critical role and significant impact that quality teachers bring to classrooms; the part they play in student academic achievement cannot be overemphasized. Contradictory evidence exists regarding what factors most impact student success. Some education researchers champion the idea that a child’s family or environment is the ultimate determinant of student success, while other researchers insist it is teachers who make the greatest difference (Hilliard, 2004; Rice, 2003; Izumi & Evers, 2002; McEwan, 2002). Sanders and Rivers (as cited in Bennett, 2002) demonstrate:

That nothing is as important to learning as the quality of a student’s teacher. The difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is so great that fifth-grade students who have poor teachers in grades three through five score roughly 50 percentile points below similar groups of students who are fortunate enough to have effective teachers. (p. ix)
Likewise, Rice (2003) believes that teacher quality not only matters but is, in fact, the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. Unfortunately, while quality teachers are a key factor in student success, it may be that the need for high caliber teachers surpasses the number of teachers available to fill that role (Bradley & Loadman, 2005).

This study addresses the unexplained reduction in African American teaching candidates passing state licensure exams. The need for African American teachers is greater now more than ever; however, they are experiencing an unexplained degree of difficulty obtaining teaching licenses. News headlines from Grand Rapids, Michigan, report a “clash” between the teachers and the Grand Rapids Public School System superintendent, Bernard Taylor. Newspaper and television sources report that a rift between the teachers’ union and the superintendent emerged after a statement the superintendent made to that district’s business community (Andersen, 2006).

Superintendent Taylor told the business community that the students of Grand Rapids did not feel valued because the teachers and staff were afraid of them, owing to cultural disconnect. Taylor defended his statement by saying that, in a district where most of the teachers were white and most of the students were not, this disconnect could be to blame for the discipline problems and the lack of student achievement. When asked to recant his statement, he refused to apologize and stood firmly behind his beliefs.

There have been volumes written about the achievement gap between black students and white students. The concern now is that the “enormous gains made in closing that gap between 1970 and 1988 have given way to a widening of it in the course of the last decade” (Haycock, 2001, p. 34). There are those who advocate that one reason
for black students’ poor achievement is not only a shortage of good teachers, but rather a shortage of good, black teachers that can serve as both educator and role model to black students (Holmes Group, 1986; Bradley & Loadman, 2005). The potential significance of this binary role raises the following question: are there differences between what black teachers have to offer black students versus what white teachers have to offer black students? The answer to that question in the affirmative may certainly underscore a need for more black teachers to come into – and remain in – the academic classroom. The fact that just the opposite seems to be occurring, is a phenomenon to be addressed within this study.

The landmark case of Brown v. (Topeka) Board of Education (1954) was cited as ending segregation in United States schools. However, owing to housing and other political situations, Orfield and Eaton (1996) explained that desegregation efforts are being quietly dismantled and the effects of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) are quietly being reversed. The political situation of which Orfield and Eaton (1996) spoke involve factors such as affirmative action, housing, and the voter rights acts.

The United States Supreme Court heard a case which could possibly be as influential as Brown v. Board of Education (1954). In it, the plaintiffs (black and white parents) objected to a Louisville, Kentucky, school district’s efforts to desegregate schools by balancing racial representation within them. The defendants claimed that a diverse student body is necessary to teach children positive prosocial skills in preparation for life beyond school. Conversely, the plaintiffs asserted that their children should be allowed and able to attend neighborhood schools without any type of quotas or restrictions in place. Presently, the district has set aside a certain number of seats at
schools for students who are not a dominant part of the racial makeup in neighborhoods where the schools are located, (*Parents v. Seattle*, 2007; *Meredith v. Jefferson County*, 2006).

Subsequent landmark cases since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) have been predicated on the belief that the nation has fulfilled its obligation regarding the equal education of its black youth (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Arguments surrounding this fulfillment coupled with the reemergence of segregated schools and federal mandates provide the backdrop for this study. Given this context, this study seeks to explore the relationship between teacher status and race as well as the disproportionate number of black teachers failing state licensure exams.

**Statement of the Problem**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2011 (NCLB), drafted and instituted by the administration of President George W. Bush, has had a profound effect on teacher roles, especially African American teachers (Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006). As the follow-on legislation to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, one of its primary functions was to address the problem of low academic achievement among lower-income students in United States public schools. However, while attempting to solve an achievement problem, it may have created a staffing problem.

Extensive research has cited the need for teachers of color to serve as role models, as well as educators, in teaching children of color (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Sexton, 2010). This is especially important in re-segregated schools, which are particularly hard to staff. Further complicating this problem is the requirement, under NCLB, that all teachers in
federally-recognized, low-income schools attain a status referred to as Highly Qualified by 2005, and in all schools by 2006 (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001). This requirement has resulted in the removal of African American teachers from classrooms and the students with the greatest need are losing the teachers they need most (Irvine 1990; Bennett, et al., 2006). This study investigated the relationship between black teachers’ inability to pass state licensing requirements and their removal from the classroom. These licensing requirements include standardized tests, on which African American teachers have tended to underperform. This underperformance has resulted in a disproportionate number of black teachers’ representation in classrooms across the country.

Purpose

Research indicates that black teachers positively impact black students and that a need currently exists for such an arrangement. With dwindling numbers of black teachers resulting from current federal legislation, the purpose of this study is to examine the low pass rates of black teachers on teacher licensure exams. Black teachers have lower pass rates than their peers of other races, which have resulted in preventing teacher candidates from entering the field and removing those currently in it.

Research Questions

1. According to teacher perception, how well do colleges and universities prepare black teachers to pass state teacher licensure examinations?
2. How does stereotype threat influence the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations?
3. Is initial failure of a state teacher licensure examination a valid indicator of future observed teacher performance?

**Conceptual Framework**

This study was framed using stereotype threat theory, which is rooted in a firm understanding of one’s identity. Before one can conform, or feel threatened to conform, to a certain stereotype, he or she must first embrace an original identity that places him or her within a given group. Without first being grounded in a certain stereotype, a shift to another would not have the potential to be perceived as a threat.

Stereotype threat is a term coined by Steele (2010), the provost of Columbia University, and his associates. The theory “…sheds new light on how pervasive stereotypes can actually influence behavior and performance, and how these stereotypes, left unexamined, perpetuate themselves” (West, Papay & Fullerton, 2012, p. 422). Further details of the tenets of stereotype threat theory will be discussed in the literature review. The summary by West, Papay, and Fullerton (2012) clearly depicts what the theory conveys and why it is appropriate as a framework by which to analyze the problem under study. A theoretical construct can provide a lens for viewing a phenomenon; however, it does not explicitly lay out the reasons why a phenomenon exists. Stereotype threat theory can provide a lens for viewing the prevention and disproportionate removal of teachers from the field but it cannot explain why. If the fault does not lie with NCLB legislation then it must lie someplace else. Perhaps teachers’ failure on state licensure exams can be explained by their perceptions of themselves. They may subscribe to the belief that they possess an innate inability to pass the exam,
much like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Steele’s (2010) work discusses such a possibility and supplies the theoretical framework for this study.

Sources of Data

Data for this study was obtained from a large school district in the greater Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area. Two schools were selected as case studies and are referred to by the pseudonyms Baxter Elementary and Madison Middle. Teacher selection criteria included no less than three years of prior teaching experience when the study began. This is an important consideration in accordance with an evaluation factor that will be discussed later in this study. Lastly, demographic data for these schools meet the criteria to qualify them as re-segregated schools, as defined below.

Definition of Terms

1. Re-segregated Schools – The release of school districts from court supervision of their desegregation efforts (known as granting "unitary" status). The result has been that many urban school districts are moving toward increasing re-segregation of their schools as students return to neighborhood schools (Orfield and Eaton, 1996).

2. Highly Qualified Teacher – A teacher who meets the requirements as explicitly set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act, Public Law 107-110, Section 9101(23). Teachers must (a) Hold at least a bachelor’s degree, (b) Have obtained full state certification as a teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination and hold a license to teach in such state, and (c) Demonstrate competence in all the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, based on a high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (NCLB, 2001).
3. **Black/African American** - A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as Black, African American, or Negro (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

4. **White** - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as White or report entries such as German, Iranian, Irish, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

5. **Teacher** – An individual contracted with a school district on the teachers’ salary schedule and charged with the responsibility of providing instruction at a school.

6. **Title 1/High Need Schools** – A school that typically has around 40% or more of its students that come from families that qualify under the United States Census definitions as low income (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

**Assumptions**

This study makes two key assumptions. First, the locus of data is teacher reported and it is assumed that the information provided by the respondents is true. Second, it is assumed that standardized testing was done in accordance with the prescribed standards set forth by each state. As such, only each teacher’s first scores received will be used, rather than the retests that occur following initial failure.

**Limitations**

Inherent limitations exist within this study. First, questions posed on the questionnaire cannot control for teachers’ response to years of academic preparation before entering college, nor the point at which respondents may have decided to take the test (freshman versus senior year). Likewise, it does not take into consideration their
years of experience and familiarity with tested subject matter (as is tested in the Praxis II exam).

**Delimitations**

A school district from the Atlanta, Georgia, metropolitan area was chosen because it fits the profile of an urban district. It also possesses a multitude of schools that meet the re-segregation criteria. Re-segregated schools were another delimiting factor, and were chosen because of their significant increase in recent years, as well as for the prevalence of black teachers found teaching in them (Welner, 2006).

Race was also a critical delimiting factor of the study. Though there are teachers of varying races to be found in any school district, the focus for this study was on teachers who identified themselves as black. Black teachers are the ones who have been found to score lowest of any race on state teacher licensure examinations. As a result, they are the ones most often removed from teaching positions in their respective schools.

**Significance of the Study**

In the decades since slavery was abolished and black people were allowed to be educated, American society has been grappling with the issue of inferior education for black children (Kozol, 1991). Whether in the form of court cases or state and federal legislation, equal education for black children has been the specter that haunts the American public education system. Title I of the ESEA of 1965 sought to provide much needed financial support to schools with a high percentage of low-income students. These funds were designed to provide requisite equipment, supplies, and expertise to public schools that state funds and locally-generated tax revenues were unable to provide.
Though Title I funds are still available to schools today, the “gap” that existed between the achievement of black students and white students has persisted. In seeking alternative remedies to this gap, President George W. Bush created legislation to address these shortcomings when he first took office. These efforts resulted in the reauthorization of ESEA under the title of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. One aspect of this federal legislation was the mandate that all public schools who desire to receive federal funds must have teachers who meet a Highly Qualified status standard by the year 2006. Teachers in Title I eligible schools were held to an even more stringent standard with the mandate that the same requirement be met by the year 2005 (NCLB, 2001).

From the federal level to the school-district level, extensive emphasis has been placed on recruiting and retaining quality teachers. States spend hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars annually on not only the physical recruiting effort, but in many cases, bonuses to teachers who agree to teach in their districts (Feldman, 1998). The federal government also pays for the licensing and the provision of $10,000 bonuses for military personnel who will agree to teach in “High Need” schools upon satisfying their military duty requirements (Troops-To-Teachers Program, 2003).

Presently, a consortium of South Carolina state universities are offering four-year complete scholarships to black males only, who will agree to teach in a Title I eligible or a “High Need” school for three years upon graduation. A similar program with a two year commitment to teach has been undertaken by the Prince Georges County School District in Maryland. Both programs represent a collaborative effort by local school districts, neighboring universities, and the federal government, that is largely funded in the form of grants (Chmelynsk, 2005). Whether it is a school district funded initiative,
federal or state subsidized, or consortium-based, the efforts are usually targeted in the
direction of high need and/or Title I schools. While most high need schools are Title I
funded, the terms are not interchangeable. These schools are traditionally the hardest to
staff and are disproportionately majority, minority or re-segregated schools (Diamond,
Randolph, & Spillone, 2004).

Though the demand for qualified licensed teachers may be substantial, there is a
strong preferential undercurrent for black male teachers; as advertised by the South
Carolina consortium. How many graduating seniors, black females or any race of either
gender, might have responded positively to such an advertisement? How many deserving
black students may go without otherwise qualified teachers but for a racial requirement?
The public outcry to aid a dire situation seems extensive, yet the effort to resolve the
situation may be too focused.

Many states and school districts target minority groups, especially blacks, to
recruit for these difficult-to-staff schools (Bradley & Loadman, 2005). Should they
spend millions of dollars annually to do so in this manner or could these precious funds
be better spent recruiting differently? While the answer to that question is outside the
scope of this study, the fact that such a targeted effort is well underway is germane to it.
As such, the focus of this study is to address what may be the problem, and consequently
the solution, with losing so many of the teachers that entities are spending millions of
dollars to recruit and retain.

Lastly, whether or not these entities are correct in targeting black teacher
prospects, are their efforts then being undermined by NCLB or is it actually something
else? Given the NCLB requirements that result in disproportionately removing black
teachers from the classroom and the challenge of recruiting and retaining black teachers, should this legislation be changed? Conversely, if the legislation is thought to be on sound footing, perhaps there is something else behind black teachers’ disproportionate struggles to meet the mandate.

This study was designed to answer questions that will assist local school districts, state funding entities, universities, and federal lawmakers to better understand how to recruit and retain those whom they think are most effective in teaching black students. Rather than allocating millions of dollars annually towards hiring a specific demographic group of teachers, only to see them exit in greater numbers, the results of this study may help to provide a better focus on how to ensure such investments yield the intended fruit. Ultimately, the children will benefit if the most effective teachers across the country are placed in high need classrooms where they are in great demand – regardless of the teacher’s color.

Summary

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. Chapter Two presents a review of the related literature concerning research and trends in the areas of re-segregation, implications of NCLB as it relates to teachers, and teacher standardized testing.

Chapter Three delineates the research design and methodology of the study. The instrument used to gather the data, the procedures followed, and the determination of the sample selected for the study is also discussed.
An analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings are presented in Chapter Four, followed by the summary, conclusions, and recommendations from the study in Chapter Five. The study concludes with a bibliography and appendices.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“As far as the writing was concerned, I knew my problem was basically writing the way I talk, so a lot of the grammatical errors I had not mastered even throughout college, so I don’t think that I was ready academically to be successful.”

- Joi Johnson
Elementary Teacher Interviewee

Background

Hailed as The Father of American Education, there was no cause closer to Horace Mann’s heart than that of educating the people (Cremin, 1957). Cremin (1957) explains that as the first U.S. Secretary of Education, Mann believed school was a birthright of every American child and should be available and equal for all; rich or poor. Germene to this study are two facets of education that Mann endorsed: social harmony and the great equalizer. He found social harmony to be his primary goal of the school and regarded a common school as the great equalizer (Cremin, 1957).

There has been much debate about how to make schools function effectively. Throughout history, the quality of education has been different between races and economic classes of American society (Caplan, 2007). To elaborate on these educational differences:

Among American’s kids growing up in poverty today, only half are likely to graduate from high school (the national average from public school is 70%). Among those who do, the average will perform at the eighth-grade level. Since
African American and Hispanic kids are three times more likely to be poor than Asians or Whites, these are problems of both race and class. (“Slate,” 2013)

Why would there be such differences amongst the varying groups of students if equal education is truly a birthright? How did we get here? More importantly, why should this matter deserve, or demand, so much attention?

In considering the idea of public education, DeJong-Lambert (2006) discussed how critical an effective education system is to the economic well-being and security of the country that controls it. He emphasized that a part of its effectiveness is predicated on the fact that such a system properly educates all rather than a privileged few. In a European education journal DeJong-Lambert (2006) recounted the impact on the world on a series of events in the United States, which involved a disparate system of education. The effects were far-reaching and long lasting (DeJong-Lambert, 2006).


Much has been written to underscore the relationship between education and international might. The much-touted A Nation at Risk report published in 1984 (The National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1984) refocused the nation’s attention on education. The report referred back to the Sputnik I launch as the first
alerting of American society to the plight of its education system. Yet, it took the rhetoric a bit further.

*A Nation at Risk* painted a picture of an American education system so dysfunctional that it made the now infamous statement, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (NCEE, 1984, p. 5). This sentiment speaks to the degree of impact a country’s education system can have on its general well-being.

Former United States Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, wrote an essay around the central theme that American teachers should be competent and should represent the demographics of America. In it he points out:

Quality education when denied to individual citizens denies a better future for our nation as a whole. Members of a strong democracy should be thoughtful and knowledgeable citizens who have the skills and desire to be engaged in their communities and the economy…. We should provide all people with the tools to make the most of their lives, to solve their own problems, and to build strong futures for themselves and, ultimately, their communities. (Riley, 1998, p. 18)

He linked public education for all with the health of a nation. Even national leaders recognize the significance of an education system that reaches and teaches all students (Obama, 2006). Obama (2006) wrote:

We know that global competition—not to mention any genuine commitment to the values of equal opportunity and upward mobility—requires us to revamp our educational system from top to bottom, replenish our teaching corps, buckle down
on math and science instruction, and rescue inner city students from illiteracy. (p. 22)

This understanding of the constituency is critical to educational reform legislation.

Obama’s (2006) words echoed Mann’s (as cited in Cremin, 1957) definition of the purpose of education. The very well-being of the United States as an independent, democratic, superpower nation hinges on the effective education of all of its youth (National Defense Education Act, 1958). A vital piece of legislation that pre-dated the release of A Nation At Risk by 26 years, the National Defense Education Act was drafted in response to the “wake-up call” the Russian Sputnik gave the United States (DeJong-Lambert, 2006, p. 77). It illustrated the intersection of the struggle for equality and the perception of the quality of the education system; which gave birth to the civil rights movement in the United States (DeJong-Lambert, 2006).

To more clearly illustrate the connection, consider the words spoken by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt after returning from a trip to the Soviet Union. Roosevelt (as cited in DeJong-Lambert, 2006) explained that the only thing the foreign news was covering during her entire trip was the coverage of Little Rock. Roosevelt went on to say that, “It is sad, not for any one group among our citizens, but because it has done us so much harm in the world” (as cited in DeJong-Lambert, 2006, p. 69). Likewise, in speaking about the Little Rock Nine Roosevelt states “… the president of the Institute of International Education wrote from Warsaw that nothing in recent memory had done more to lower U.S. prestige than events in Little Rock” (as cited in DeJong-Lambert, 2006, p. 72).
These sentiments explained why the launching of the Russian Sputnik I was so well-timed. While children in the United States were being denied access to adequate education, the Russians were displaying their technological capabilities. As DeJong-Lambert (2006) pointed out, “The question referred to education and technological superiority, and it could not have been asked at a worse time” (p. 72). Life magazine weighed in by asking the question in an article entitled, “Why Did the U.S. Lose the Race?” The story that immediately followed was, “Voices of Conscience Speak in Little Rock” (DeJong-Lambert, 2006; Booker, 2013).

Political leaders during that time promised the American people that Khrushchev’s (as cited in DeJong-Lambert, 2006) claim, “We will bury you,” was an empty threat (p. 72). All of these events spelled out to the world that Russia really was in a position to work towards attaining world domination either in war or by proof of greater military power. This dominance was attributed to what was perceived as an inferior education system in the United States because of a segment of the population that was excluded from obtaining a quality education (DeJong-Lambert, 2006). Progressing from the Sputnik days to 1984, when the Commission declared, “We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge” (NCEE, 1984, p. 5).

These various writings seem to suggest agreement failure on the part of the United States education system to do what it was designed to do. This much was confirmed as the commission further remarked, “Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them” (NCEE, 1984, p. 5).
The commission went on to explain that the destiny of the United States is no longer as assured as it once seemed, given it is a part of a global village among many well-educated competitors (NCEE, 1984). One quote in particular made this point:

If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all – old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. (NCEE, 1984, p. 7)

Lastly, before advancing forward another 20 years to review the most current state, a more comprehensive review is taken of the basis for the assessment levied by A Nation at Risk. What follows are a few representative indicators of the risk the Commission reported that are germane to this study:

1. International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.

2. Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simple tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.

3. Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation.

4. Average student achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
5. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent (NCEE, 1984, p. 8-9).

The Commission summarized the risks and highlighted the difficult position in which the United States now finds itself. It wrote:

> Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents. (NCEE, 1984, p. 13)

*A Nation Reformed?* is the follow-up book to *A Nation At Risk*. It was designed to measure the success of efforts to reform education in the United States two decades after the initial report. Though written by a collection of noted educators, their common purpose was to elucidate a central theme to inspire and motivate the country towards greater educational improvement (Gordon, 2003).

Gordon (2003) details something that A Nation at Risk could not do; gauge the nation’s reaction to the news about the condition of education in the United States. Fuhrman (2003) added, “Business elites in particular were taken by its arguments about the importance of education’s role in the national economy and by the specter of lost competitiveness due to educational weaknesses” (p. 8). This was apparently the type of revelation that garnered extensive, national attention and broad-scale corrective actions were taken almost immediately.

Restructuring was one effort undertaken and was referred to as a bottom-up approach. However, this movement did not generate the results the proponents desired.
In fact, “student performance remained relatively flat” (Fuhrman, 2003, p. 9). Fuhrman (2003) further discussed the barrage of reforms that have come about since the publishing of A Nation at Risk, and points out that while many attaining some degree of success, most have not worked very well.

This introduces an area about which Elmore (2003) has written extensively. He noted that while there have been a number of isolated pockets of success in a number of reform models, “There is simply no way to solve the problem of large-scale improvement in educational performance without connecting policy and practice more directly and powerfully” (Elmore, 2003, p. 28). Elmore (2003) pointed out that such a connection had been avoided ever since the writing of A Nation at Risk.

To many, including our political leaders, the natural response to this challenge was embracing the concept of greater accountability as the mechanism by which to make such a connection (NCLB, 2001). Though to some, the legislation may have been little more than politicians’ desire to pacify constituents. Educators, including Elmore (2003), recognized the new challenges it brought about. Elmore (2003) focused on the faulty logic inherent in this idea. First, he made the observation that, “It is difficult to imagine schools succeeding on a large scale in responding to performance-based accountability without some deliberate theory of improvement” (Elmore, 2003, p. 34). He advocated that you cannot fix the problem of increasing academic performance by simply raising the standard by which it is measured.

Elmore (2003) noted the paradox of administrators and teachers first identifying student shortcomings, and then setting about to teach them to correct the problem. This, Elmore (2003) intimated, suggests that teachers were somehow withholding the level of
instruction necessary to raise student performance in the first place. He pointed out that, “There is no other way to enhance capacity, as it is defined above, than by deliberately investing in the knowledge and skill of teachers (and students) to do the work of learning” (Elmore, 2003, p. 34). Seizing upon that idea and echoing similar sentiments, Grossman and Williston (2003) wrote:

Twenty years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the field of teaching stands at a crossroads. In one direction lies the course charted by organizations that have worked to raise the standards of the teaching profession, organizations such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future…. In the other direction lies the stark reality of the numbers of uncertified and out-of-field teachers who are increasingly staffing our nation’s schools, the calls for dismantling professional education for teachers, and the troubling reliance on scripted curriculum as a substitute for teachers’ professional knowledge and judgment. (p. 69)

In that brief passage, Grossman and Williston (2003) captured Elmore’s (2003) concerns and addressed the underlying thrust of this study’s purpose. Grossman and Williston (2003) further explained, “At a time when research has begun to demonstrate the critical influence of teachers on student learning, thousands of underprepared teachers are entering the classroom” (p. 69). There is, however, another dimension that must be mentioned to aptly underscore the previously mentioned criticality of the quality teacher shortage.

Howard (2003) related that at the turn of the millennium there are still a large group of Americans that comprises half of the African American population that are not
equipped to take full advantage of the social activism that resulted in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. He refers to this group as “those left behind” (Howard, 2003, p. 81). Howard (2003) went on to say that *A Nation at Risk* has not proven to be the catalyst all thought it would be, most notably in the cities. This is also where, coincidentally, the re-segregated schools are emerging and are most prevalent.

Scores posted by African American fourth graders on four administrations of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are what Howard (2003) pointed to as the most vivid evidence of the continuing failure of public education. The test was administered by the U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Howard, 2003) to random groups of students in all fifty states between 1992 and 2000 and report:

…the number of African American fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency increased from 9% to 12%—meaning that in 2000, fully 88% failed to achieve the level of reading capability required to fully decode the increasingly complex material they will encounter in their textbooks. (p. 82)

Howard (2003) further shared that sixty-three percent scored “below basic,” which was the lowest category.

In summarizing what many have seemingly also found, Howard (2003) pointed out that it is the urban centers where the problems of public education are most pronounced and where the highest number of children is at risk. “Bad public schools destroy the only hope for those left behind. Twenty years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, we had a right to expect something better” (Howard, 2003, p. 82). Howard (2003) emphasized the urban centers as the most pronounced place where the highest number of children is at risk. Not coincidentally, this is also where the
The reemergence of re-segregated schools is occurring in staggering numbers. This is where the greatest number of African American teachers can be found.

Consider then the implications of removing these urban teachers for failure on state licensure exams, under NCLB legislation guidelines. With whom are the students left? If inner-city schools lose their teachers, will there be an unprecedented migration of white teachers into these schools? If formerly fully-qualified licensed teachers have suddenly become unlicensed teachers that must now be removed, who will replace them? Long-term substitutes are typically the answer to fill voids created by vacant teaching positions.

This revelation becomes all the more sobering when reflecting on the statement made in *A Nation at Risk* by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. The Commission noted, “We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge” (NCEE, 1984, p. 5). If that was true then, where does that place the United States now? To underscore the relevancy of this question and to obtain answers, a panel was formed by a United States president.

Plucked from the headlines of a major United States newspaper, the title reads, “Math Education System is Broken, Bush Panel Says” (Math Education System, 2008). The article went on to cite the words of the panel chairman and former president of the University of Texas at Austin. He discussed the changes the United States needed to make in its math curriculum for it to stay competitive in a growing global economy. Yet, the most salient point he made aligns perfectly with the arguments made back at the launch of Sputnik I and made again, twenty years later, in *A Nation at Risk*. Faulkner, Freeman, and Izzard (2012) stated, “And it’s not just a question of economic
competitiveness. In the end, it’s a question of whether, as a nation, we have enough technical prowess to assure our own security” (p. A13).

This section concludes by revisiting an earlier quote made by Grossman and Williston (2003), and serves as a vehicle for addressing this perceived lack of progress. The statement that he made again was, “At a time when research has begun to demonstrate the critical influence of teachers on student learning, thousands of under-prepared teachers are entering the classroom” (Grossman & Willston, 2003, p. 69). A more in-depth discussion on this influence follows.

**Teacher Impact on Student Achievement**

Education theorists have posited that many variables affect student academic achievement, such as poverty, income level (Payne, 1996), or their environment in general, which includes family relationships (Tileston, 2000). In fact, the environment is so important that no other techniques employed in a school or classroom would be effective unless enrichment and support (from the environment) was first addressed (Tileston, 2000). While an abundance of literature supports this notion, contradictory literature exists. Tileston (2000) counters:

> While we cannot control the students’ environments outside the classroom, we have tremendous control over their environment for seven hours each day. We have the power to create positive or negative images about education, to develop an enriched environment, and to become the catalysts for active learning. (p. 1)

It may seem a foregone conclusion that classroom teachers would be the most significant factor impacting student achievement. Indeed, one writer flatly stated that teachers are
the most significant factor weighing on student achievement (Rice, 2003). Sanders and Rivers (as cited in Bennett, 2002) demonstrate:

That nothing is as important to learning as the quality of a student’s teacher. The difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is so great that fifth-grade students who have poor teachers in grades three through five score roughly 50 percentile points below similar groups of students who are fortunate enough to have effective teachers. (p. ix)

According to Carbo (1995):

Considerable evidence also supports another critical conclusion: that the differences in achievement observed between poor, immigrant, and minority students and students of mainstream backgrounds are not the result in differences in their ability to learn. Rather, they are differences caused by the quality of instruction that young people receive in school. (p. 6)

The following section will further expand upon teachers’ impact on student achievement. While many federal programs are already in place to compensate for children’s environments (e.g., welfare, counseling, health-related, and even school lunch), the most recent legislation designed to impact student achievement addresses teachers (NCLB, 2001). As detailed in Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary’s Annual Report on Teacher Quality, then Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, made the explicit statement that, “In order to leave no child behind, we need a highly qualified teacher in every classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. viii). Aside from listing quality teachers, there was no mention of other supporting factors to assist students.
Secretary Paige later noted in the same report that research identified teachers, especially quality teachers, to be a key determinant of student success. He repeated that statement a year later in his second annual report but also added the phrase, “—perhaps the key component” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 2). This phrase referenced the work of numerous educational writers. This statement cannot be without merit.

Stronge and Hindman (2003) also discussed the value of teachers in their account of two teachers. The authors illustrated a hiring dilemma at a high school who was seeking to hire a science teacher. Both teachers were similarly qualified, and the question was asked, somewhat rhetorically, does it really matter anyway? Cawelti (as cited in Stronge & Hindman, 2003) reported that a host of variables influence student achievement such as school-related factors, district funding, class size, and curriculum. Yet, Stronge and Hindman (2003) found that the teacher is the single most influential school-based factor impacting student achievement.

Stronge and Hindman (2003) illustrate the cumulative impact of teachers on students. Wright, Horn, and Sanders (as cited in Stronge & Hindman, 2003) report:

Students placed with highly effective teachers for three years in a row, beginning in third grade, scored 52 percentile points higher, 96th versus 44th percentile, on Tennessee’s state mathematics assessment than did students with comparable achievement histories who had three low-performing teachers in a row. (p. 49)

Mendro (as cited in Stronge & Hindman, 2003) found the opposite to be true. The negative influence an ineffective teacher has may require up to three years to fully remediate. One pervasive theme emerges: teacher characteristics have a greater positive
impact on student achievement than teacher techniques (Palmer, 1998; Whitaker, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002).

Whitaker (2004) stressed that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement and emphasizes that it is people, not programs which make the difference. He went on to emphasize that, while programs can encourage or support improvement within a school, no program alone can inherently bring about the success of a school. He concluded, “There are really two ways to improve a school significantly: 1) Get better teachers or 2) Improve the teachers in the school” (Whitaker, 2004, p. 9). Consistent with existing literature emphasis is placed on the teachers.

Hanushek (as cited in Moulthrop, Calegari, & Eggers, 2005) is an economist who wrote that, “The difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year” (p. 8). He cited studies in Dallas that used standardized tests in math and reading. Much like earlier cases reported, students who had effective teachers in the third, fourth, and fifth grades scored in or near the top quartile. However, those with ineffective teachers for the same time period usually landed in the bottom quartile.

Referencing a number of studies, Wong (2004) reiterated the impact of teachers on student achievement. He pointed out that research has increasingly confirmed that both teacher and teacher quality are the most powerful predictors of student success. Specifically, he noted that, “Improving student achievement boils down to the teacher. What the teacher knows and can do in the classroom is the most important factor resulting in student achievement” (Wong, 2004, p. 41). Regarding the quality aspect of a teacher, Wong (2004) was very emphatic about the degree to which a teacher matters.
Arlington (as cited in Wong, 2004) explained that “Effective teachers manage to produce better achievement regardless of which curriculum materials, pedagogical approach, or reading program is selected” (p. 41). Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (as cited in Wong, 2004) support this claim by noting how striking the teacher effect is on student achievement.

In addition to impacting student achievement, teachers also prepare students to become good citizens. Teachers are given the enormous challenge of preparing students to find their place, fit into, and function successfully within society. Palmer (1998) explained that, “Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11). Irvine (1990) told the story of a nine year old African American boy whom she asked what he wanted to be when he became an adult. He was instructed to close his eyes and after 15 seconds he promptly exclaimed, “Lady, I don’t see nothing and I don’t have no dreams” (Irvine, 1990, p. 121). Not surprisingly, the writer was taken aback by the student’s response but used it to help explain the expansive range of roles teachers are asked to fulfill. She acknowledged it to be a daunting task, but one that teachers must undertake.

In addition to having a direct affect on student achievement, teachers also have an indirect affect on their preparation for life. Aptly preparing students for society is predicated on teachers first establishing positive teacher-student relationships. Brophy and Good (1986) state that embracing societal preparation as a secondary goal for teaching is more demanding of teachers and does not yield returns. They went on to say that, “More importantly, positive teacher-student relationships, in which teachers use the
skills described in this section, are associated with more positive student responses to
school and with increased academic achievement” (Brophy & Good, 1986, p. 29).

Germane to the central theme of this study is the expectation that teachers bring
about academic excellence in their students. Teachers are unquestionably the most
significant factor affecting student achievement. How does their influence change among
various races? Current literature is saturated with recognized disparities in achievement
between black and white students. This phenomenon has come to be referred to as the
achievement gap by every entity from the mainstream media and the federal government,
to the layperson and educators. If it does exist, why have those who are responsible for
student achievement, teachers, allowed this to happen? What is being done to correct it?

The achievement gap, in its present form, has been attributed to multiple
variables. Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) explained that the increased achievement gap
could be traced back to the inequitable distribution of inexperienced teachers and the
racial concentrations of schools, specifically, in grades three through eight. Orfield (as
cited in Kozol, 2005) states:

The achievement gap between black and white children, which narrowed for three
decades up until the late years of the 1980s – the period, in which school
segregation steadily decreased – started to widen once more in the early 1990s…. From that point on, the gap continued to widen or remained essentially
unchanged, and while there was seeming diminution of the gap for fourth grade
children between 1999 and 2002, these gains dissolved when students entered
middle school. (p. 280)
Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) reported the dismal news that the racial achievement gap, once narrowed, has reopened once more. They shared that the gap we see today is actually worse than it was fifteen years ago. Closing in the 1970s and 1980s, the gap began to widen again around 1988 and continues to grow. Countless others report similar findings, which beg the question of how researchers are drawing these conclusions. How is it that the nation can be aware of a gap but do nothing in an attempt to close it?

While a comprehensive review of the achievement gap is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth reviewing as it relates to the disproportionate removal of black teachers from the classroom as is occurring under NCLB. Current demographics of America’s teachers do not represent the populations they teach. There is a growing disparity between the black student population and black teachers and the issue of academic achievement for all comes squarely into focus.

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) first alerted educators to the disparity in test scores between black and white students in the 1970s (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). The tests were administered to students aged nine, thirteen, and seventeen. The NAEP is regarded as the best evidence for measuring what students are learning. Regarded as “the nation’s report card,” the test was created in 1969 by Congress (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 12). The writers went on to report:

The NAEP results consistently show a frightening gap between the basic academic skills of the average African American or Latino student and those of the typical white or Asian American. By twelfth grade, on average, black
students are four years behind those who are white or Asian American.

(Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 12)

It is sufficed to say that there was a significant gap then and there is still a substantial one now (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001).

To illustrate this point, consider the NAEP math scores from 1996. The average proficiency for white thirteen-year-olds was approximately the same level achieved by black seventeen-year-olds. For students in grades 4, 8, and 12, gaps between black students and their white counterparts ranged from 0.8 to 1.1 standard deviations. Similar outcomes were reported for the NELS longitudinal studies. Though many tests have been conducted over the years, the results still report the same story; there exists a definite gap between black and white students in academic achievement (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). Though 39% of white students taking the fourth-grade reading exam in 2003 scored at the proficient level or higher on the NAEP, only 12% of black students did so (Kozol, 2005).

Questions circulate regarding reasons for this disparity. Tests have been proffered to be the problem, including many recently implemented state standardized tests (Noguera, 2003). Kozol (2005) identified the schools in Berkley, California as being very progressive and supportive regarding the diversified education experience. However, even in Berkley, definite disparities are noted in academic achievement. Noguera (as cited in Kozol, 2005) reported:

At every school in the district, student achievement on most standardized tests follows a bimodal pattern with respect to the distribution of student scores…. The majority of white students score at or above the 80th percentile on most norm-
references tests, while the scores of black (and Latino) students generally hover between the 30th and 40th percentiles. (p. 60)

Berkeley, is not an anomaly with regards to scores on state standardized exams, they actually are more representative of the norm (Noguera, 2006). If their scores truly do represent the majority of the country, the results will continue to be dismal. According to Kozol (2005) the “… number of standardized exams has more than doubled since enactment of No Child Left Behind” (p.381). The problem will, therefore, threaten to become even more pervasive.

Standardized exams are consistently cited as unfair for students of color. Meier (1995) stated, “No phenomenon poses a greater threat to educational equity and ultimately to the quality of education in this country, than the escalating use of standardized achievement tests” (p. 175). She maintains that not only do standardized tests have a discriminatory effect on students of color, but they also jeopardize the educational experience of all children. As a result, she calls for abandoning such testing. It would seem on the surface that Meier (1995) makes a good point, yet the eradication of the testing may not be realistic. Therefore, the issue of the testing disparity still remains. Meier (1995) pointed out that research that has been conducted over a period of decades has documented biases in standardized tests. Specifically, the tests have tended to discriminate against both students of color and students from low income homes.

The notion of racial bias on the tests is a contributing factor to students of color not scoring well. While this is not a new concept, it may be a controversial one. Consider the earlier discussion of the schools in the Berkeley area. The writer described the community as very progressive with regards to embracing racial diversity in their schools.
and integration was no problem at all (Noguera, 2003). How then does that professed attitude mesh with the quote that follows? Noguera (2003) stated:

Given its long history of liberalism and its reputation for embracing progressive causes, one might expect that Berkeley citizens eventually would have become outraged at the persistence of such glaring disparities (in black, white, and Latino test scores)…. Yet, a careful analysis of the political dynamics that have shaped policy in Berkeley’s schools reveals that the community actually has tolerated a degree of racial inequality in student academic outcomes that any objective analysis would indicate is quite extreme. In fact, until recently, there was surprisingly little effort to address this problem. (p. 61)

Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) specify that the achievement gap is an educational crisis and leads to ongoing racial inequality in America. Hirsch (1988) reports that black students typically score 35 to 45 percentage points lower than their white counterparts. He continued saying:

The news hits like a series of bombshells as one suburban school district after another reveals that black children are significantly behind their white counterparts on standardized achievement tests … Whose fault is it that blacks tend to get lower scores? (Hirsch, 1988, p. 111)

The black-white testing disparity is often explained as a function of poor economic situations, particularly in urban districts, but that was not the case in either of the districts mentioned (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). That may explain the phrase, “The news hits like a series of bombshells …” which suggests it was an unexpected situation (Hirsch, 1988, p. 111).
This was a community that was considered culturally progressive in embracing integration and equality, even in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, when the disparity in the scores between black and white students was brought to the forefront, it was not questioned or investigated. It was looked upon as an expected or normal condition. While it was a seemingly acceptable notion to the dominant culture, it was less palatable to the minority culture (Noguera, 2006). Critical race theory (CRT) espouses the idea that measures have been undertaken specifically designed to maintain a status quo (Rollock & Gilborn, 2011).

The removal of black teachers from the classroom continually demonstrates to have an adverse impact black student achievement and perpetrates the achievement gap. Critical race theory espouses the tenets that:

A body of scholarship steeped in radical activism that seeks to explore and challenge the prevalence of racial inequality in society. It is based on the understanding that race and racism are the product of social thought and power relations; CRT theorists endeavor to expose the way in which racial inequality is maintained through the operation of structures and assumptions that appear normal and unremarkable. (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011, p.1)

Many CRT writers attribute black-white achievement gap issues to cultural disconnects between African American and public school culture. That is their reason for challenging the current structure of the public school system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Brown (2000) discussed the current system as a cultural disconnect at the personal level (between teachers and students) as well as at a systems-wide level.
The term, “involuntary minorities” refers to a subgroup of people who are a minority in a culture not based on their own choosing (Brown, 2000). Brown (2000) posited:

Without the voluntary aspect of their original incorporation, involuntary minorities differ from voluntary immigrants in their perceptions, interpretations, and responses to their situation. Unlike voluntary immigrants, involuntary minorities cannot refer to a native homeland to generate a positive comparative framework for their condition…. Involuntary minorities compare themselves to the dominant group and this comparison produces a negative interpretation of their situation. Their cultural interpretation leads to resentment. (pp. 417-418)

This becomes a critical consideration when fewer black teachers are available for black students. To explain further, Brown (2000) remarked:

A number of educational researchers have examined how cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students result in conflict, distrust, hostility, and school failures for many African American students. Some of these misunderstandings stem from black students’ perceptions that certain behaviors and understandings are characteristic of white Americans and hence inappropriate for them. (p.418)

This may speak to a student-teacher disconnect on a personal level as well as to institutional failings. Whether personal or institutional, involuntary minorities do not view their current condition as temporary and further regard the differences between themselves and the dominant group as ones that should be maintained rather than overcome. Involuntary minority students face choosing between academic success and
cultural identity. This may still result in the minority student not being accepted by the dominate group (Brown, 2000).

Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) wrote that:
Black culture has much to do with the racial gap in academic achievement. Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson argues in a similar vein that the explanation of the glaring racial gap in educational performance cannot be attributed to genetic differences between the races or to social-class differences…. In a nutshell, it is culture. (p. 120)

Noguera (2003) reported that even middle-class black students with privileged family status, do not perform as well academically as immigrant students, or as well as low-income white and Asian students on standardized tests.

Woodson (1933) discussed the academic challenges of the black middle class student, a group he referred to as “the talented tenth” (p. 6). Specifically, he pointed out that this group, more than any other, had the resources and potential to complete high school, finish college, go into professional careers, and then take on positions of leadership within the black community. Woodson (1933) promised that his focus was on the students’ “mis-education” and how it interfered with future success.

Contemporary critical theorists contend that this group is poorly educated and poorly equipped to provide economic, political, or moral leadership to disadvantaged blacks (Brooks & Newborn, 1994). “This educational process depresses and crushes ... the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples” (Brooks & Newborn, 1994, p. 6). This sentiment speaks to the theoretical construct, stereotype threat, which
frames this and attempts to explain why black teachers struggle with passing state standardized teacher examinations.

Brown (2000) wrote that traditional education programs fail to account for the unique social environment of African Americans, which is created by the dominant culture and is influenced by African American culture. Both factors contribute to the educational experience of blacks. The concept of immersion schools is rooted in the long-standing debate of separate versus integrated schools. Controversy regarding how black students are best served continues (Brown, 2000).

To review, quality education is the great equalizer but there are those who have not had equal access to education (Cremin, 1959). Once education segregation was declared unconstitutional and gave way to desegregation and integration, new problems arose including discrepancies (gaps) in academic achievement between black and white students (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Though a myriad of factors have been blamed for the gap, teachers are consistently reported to have the greatest impact on student achievement in general (Goe & Stickler, 2008). If this is in fact true, why do academic achievement discrepancies still persist between black and white students when taught by the same teachers in the same schools? Critical race theorists purport that racism is still prevalent in this country and efforts may be made to preserve the status quo between the races where the education of children is concerned (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Immersion schools, some designed to benefit black students, add to the controversy of a return to segregation. As far back as Du Bois (1935) the notion of schools to support African American education has existed. Du Bois (1935) argued that the “Negro child…could
not be ensured of an effective education in integrated schools” (p. 597) due to persistent
and pervasive racism.

**Segregated, Desegregated, and Re-segregated Schools**

To discuss the dimensions of segregation, desegregation and re-segregation, it is important to define these terms in relation to schools. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) reported even black students from middle class families do not fare as well academically as do their white counterparts. The researchers trace the causes back to historical racial oppression beginning with slavery, followed by disenfranchisement, succeeded by legally mandated segregation, and culminated in subordination under Jim Crow in the South and intense racial prejudice in the North. They pointed out that while blacks hungered to be educated, when finally permitted, they ended up in grossly inferior schools.

Irons (2002) told of a 150-year struggle against Jim Crow education resulting in re-segregation of public education in America. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 legalized the separate but equal doctrine that emerged as a part of Jim Crow laws following slavery. That particular case had nothing to do with education, but involved a black person, Homer Plessy, who sought to ride in a section of railroad cars reserved for white patrons (Irons, 2002). The judge in the case, Judge John Ferguson, ruled that, “The foul odors of blacks in close quarters made the law a reasonable exercise of the state’s police powers to protect the health, safety, welfare, and morals of the public” (Irons, 2002, p. 25). The ruling was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in May 1896.

In seeking a legal precedence for the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Chief Justice Brown found what he needed in the judicial opinions that turned back
challenges to Jim Crow schools in courts in eight states (Irons, 2002). Accordingly, though it has been said the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was applied to school segregation, it was actually the other way around! School segregation was already in existence (Irons, 2002).

Today, many in society view segregation as inherently wrong and advocate for the concept of integration. Verdun (2005) asserted:

The United States Supreme Court (The Court) decisions from the popular affirmative action battlegrounds of education, business and employment will be used to demonstrate how the law and attitudes of the American people support the perpetuation of a segregated and unequal society, while extolling the virtues of integration. (p. 68)

Yet, there was reportedly much wrong with segregation. The fundamental premise of segregation was predicated on the idea that African Americans were innately inferior to their white counterparts, and were, therefore described using subhuman references.

Welner (2006) enumerated up to six benefits integration provides to all races that segregation precluded. Explaining more fully the detriment of segregation, especially to the races of color, he wrote:

Of course, the most direct educational harm of segregation is felt by students of color, who tend to be enrolled in schools with fewer resources and lower expectations. Research concerning racial diversity has accordingly identified, specific to these children, numerous benefits of greater integration. In addition to these benefits for all students, researchers have articulated a societal benefit. (Welner, 2006, p. 352)
These benefits were exactly what Thurgood Marshall was fighting for as chief attorney for the black families, in challenging racist school practices for many years under segregation (Patterson, 2001). Paradoxically, there were some prominent Negroes who were so distressed at their discriminatory treatment in the non-segregated North that they questioned whether it was actually a good idea to mix their black children with those of the whites (Irons, 2002).

The novelist Baldwin was one such figure (Patterson, 2001). Baldwin (as cited in Patterson, 2001) phrased the question:

Given the Negrophobia of many whites, and the rage of many blacks, why strive to mix the races, especially in the schools? Might it have been better for reformers instead to demand an end to racial inequality, rather than of segregation? (p.8)

Coincidentally, Baldwin posed this question in 1953 – a year before the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision. This sentiment underscores fundamental resistance to segregation. Bell (2004) believed that the purpose for segregation was simply to subordinate minorities to the dominant white class, irrespective of any other prevailing factors such as class. However, Clotfelter (2004) said that education separation of the races in the South was less a factor than the unequal distribution and availability of resources. Many resources more were provided at public white schools than black.

Segregation still persisted in many places throughout the country. Kozol (1991) reports:

I had begun to teach in 1964 in Boston in a segregated school so crowded and so poor that it could not provide my fourth grade children with a classroom. We
shared an auditorium with another fourth-grade class, and the choir and a group that was rehearsing, starting in October, for a Christmas play that, somehow, never was produced. (p. 1)

Kozol was later fired for teaching his students poetry written by Robert Frost and Langston Hughes because it was not a part of the curriculum. Those conditions were not the standard at the time, as he later wrote:

I was soon recruited to teach in a suburban system west of Boston. The shock of going from one of the poorest schools to one of the wealthiest cannot be overstated. I now had 21 children in a cheerful building with a principal who welcomed innovation. (Kozol, 1991, p. 2)

Kozol (1991) later explained his shock and surprise at the number of schools that were still segregated 37 years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

The percepts provide the background for desegregation, despite the concerns expressed earlier by Baldwin (as cited in Meacham, 2000). Subordination and inequality were considered unconscionable by African Americans and they wanted them changed. This belief fueled a deliberate and successful desegregation campaign post-Brown v. Board of Education (1954). The following review will provide a more clear understanding of the perceived current movement towards re-segregation in United States schools.

Schofield and Hausman (2004) explained that the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) of Topeka decision was based on the constitutional principal of equal protection. The researchers also discussed a number of concerns expressed as a result of that ruling including how children would be affected by residential integration, community protest.
movements, and employment patterns for teachers. This treatment focuses exclusively on the impact on students and their academic achievement and relationships with those of other groups. Schofield and Hausman (2004) point out that desegregation is both a political and legal concept.

In one case study assessing the success of desegregation efforts in an urban high school, Chapman and Hoffman (2007) illustrated the varied challenges that students of color face. She reported that students of color did put forth the effort to do well on assignments, but were unwilling to write about personal situations that put them at an emotional risk. Instead, they opted to write down a false memory to complete the assignment. One student over-exaggerated a role in a play to earn additional points as a semester ended, while simultaneously appearing to not take what he was doing too seriously. That allowed him to maintain a “cool guy” image. Chapman and Hoffman (2007) summarized that, “The students’ avoidance of emotional risk was deeply connected to the racialized context of North High” (p. 310).

As Schofield and Hausman (2004) reported, the general expectation is that desegregation will boost the academic performance of minority students. This is predicated on the fact that access to superior facilities would make the greatest difference. Another idea involves the transference of a greater appreciation for middle-class values and achievement that is believed to characterize most white students. Yet, Madsen and Hollins (2000) pose a more disturbing view of the effects of desegregation. They reported:

Another unexpected consequence of desegregation was that African American students lost the linkage between their home culture and the schooling process.
The instructional approaches and curriculum content designed for European American students in segregated schools were maintained in the newly desegregated schools…. School practices were not modified to take into consideration the cultural and experiential backgrounds of African American students. (Madsen & Hollins, 2000, p. 6)

This position aligns with that posited by the previously discussed CRT writers and might explain why some of the assumed desegregation academic gains of black students have not materialized.

Orfield and Eaton (1996) have been outspoken critics of this re-segregation. A 1990 Supreme Court ruling signaled lower federal courts to relax their supervision of desegregation efforts (Olgetree, 2004). The ruling was based on the belief that school districts have attempted to comply in good faith. This ruling was partly decided in response to the difficulty in the practical application of desegregation. Cashin (2004) pointed out that:

The urban-suburban divide explains much of this class dichotomy. Urban schools are attended primarily by black and Latino students. The middle classes of all races have been moving to suburbs, leaving behind large numbers of minority poor students, especially in the school districts of America’s largest cities. (p. 219)

Forster (2006) echoed this sentiment with his own, “While many factors are at work, this (segregation) is mainly a result of residential segregation” (p. 8). Ogletree (2004) concurred and explained the impact on desegregation when he wrote:
The pace of desegregation has slowed since the middle of the 1970s, in part because of Supreme Court decisions that made it difficult to implement desegregation orders that would encompass both increasingly white suburban and increasingly minority inner-city school districts. (p. 259)

Segregation may be more prevalent than it appears due to political effort to veil the issue. As Verdun (2005) explains, the courts will not interfere with personal choices. He further related that differences in where white families versus minority families live can be ascribed by sheer economics. Regardless of how closely the classes may break along racial lines, the simple fact that white families can afford and consequently choose to live places where others may not be able to is just a fact. Verdun (2005) also pointed out that white families who chose to live in many of these communities devoid of minority families would be insulted by the accusation that their decisions were racially motivated. However, he did also mention that facially neutral choices are often cloaked racism.

The point Chapman and Hoffman (2007) made earlier, coupled with Verdun’s (2005) clarification of the more typical economic situation of white versus black students outline two major effects of segregation. One is the material and tangible effect in the form of diminished resources. The other is the psychological effects segregation has on the students. These reports and others provide a foundation for discussions of re-segregation. In discussing the post-Brown v. Board of Education (1954) move from segregation to desegregation, Verdun (2005) states:

School districts all over the country maintained their segregated schools until they were specifically ordered to do otherwise. Every step in the process had to be
litigated all the way to the highest court possible, and long delays were more common than immediate desegregation. (p. 72)

Consequently, it is not surprising that the grudging reluctance with which districts across the country integrated, would give way to a rapid return to segregated schools once the legal mandates were lifted. Verdun (2005) reported that today the public schools in Columbus, Ohio, are still segregated.

Cashin (2004) contended that public schools became more segregated in the 1990s. She wrote, “More so than our neighborhoods, our schools are bastions of race and class privilege on the one hand and race and class disadvantage on the other” (Cashin, 2004, p. 202). She further described America’s schools, today, as separate and unequal. Irons’ (2002) account laid out the same testimony.

In discussing the composition of the Washington D.C. schools Irons (2002) related:

The District’s schools have once again become segregated, by choice instead of by law.” He continued, “For the black children in Sousa and Shaw, the legal distinction between de jure and de facto segregation is irrelevant. They are stuck by their families’ poverty in Jim Crow schools, while black and white children in more affluent families attend private schools or live in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs that ring Washington. (p. 322)

In still another account arising from a U.S. Supreme Court case in DeKalb County, Georgia, the message of residential segregation, also known as de facto segregation, rang loud and clear. Patterson (2001) reported that, “Thanks to white flight and re-segregation, more than 50 percent of the black students in the county were
attending schools that were 90 percent or more black” (p. 198). County officials argued that phenomenon was driven not by public policy, but rather by private choice. As such, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, “Where re-segregation is a product not of state action but of private choices, it does not have constitutional implications” (Patterson, 2001, p. 198).

The title of another Kozol (2005) book underscored the seemingly epidemic proportions the segregation and re-segregation issue has become. In his book entitled *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, Kozol (2005) pointed out how segregated the nation’s largest inner-city schools have become. The cities of Chicago, Washington D.C., St. Louis, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and New York City, to name a few, have minority populations that range from 78% to 95% of their total student body populations.

Clotfelter’s (2004) book with another telling title, *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation*, made the observation that, “The Supreme Court’s growing reluctance to require racial balance has been blamed for the re-segregation noted by observers of public schools. “He went on to state that, “It is not too much to suggest that some observers believe the era of school desegregation may be drawing to a close” (Clotfelter, 2004, p. 4).

Clotfelter (2004) later went on to cite the work of Myrdal in explaining the negative effects of segregation to both black and white students. He noted that, while the impact on black students are more obvious in terms of access to more resources and quality teachers, he quoted Myrdal (as cited in Clotfelter, 2004) in saying that, “Whether they know it or not, white people are dwarfing their minds to a certain extent by avoiding
contacts with colored people” (p. 5). Still, the greater detriment of segregation was to that of black students.

Orfield and Eaton (1996), described the huge obstacle desegregation has faced in de facto segregation that has accelerated the march towards re-segregation. He wrote that, “Segregated urban school systems are built on a base of housing segregation” (Orfield & Eaton, 1996, p. 294). Orfield and Eaton (1996) also indicated that the march towards re-segregation will not only continue over time, but will become even more widespread. He summarized it this way, “Three-fourths of the nation’s residents and more than 80 percent of minority students live in metropolitan areas…. As long as the spread of residential segregation continues, the schools will constantly face choices among further segregation …” (p. 292).

The Need and Shortage of Black Teachers

Armed with the stark reality of the reemergence of urban segregated schools and the students that attend them, this study considered the ramifications of the ever-increasing likelihood that most black students will be educated (primarily) in a segregated school environment. Despite the ongoing efforts to change this over the long term, helping students experience success within such a situation seems to be necessary in the near term. This need justifies qualifying the segregated school setting in the context of this study.

Recall the aforementioned research and the preeminent role that critical teachers play in students’ academic achievement. This is especially so for students in high-need schools, most of who are poor and happen to be black. The National Partnership for
Teaching in At-Risk Schools had this understanding as its focus and spoke to it in their report, *Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: A National Imperative* (2005):

Many Americans assume that the achievement gaps among our nation’s students are the inevitable result of poverty, poor family structure, and social problems. And indeed, these are daunting factors and challenges…. But research suggests that if our poorest children are given a succession of motivated, well prepared, and experienced teachers, the gaps in achievement between these children and their more affluent peers can be narrowed – if not completely closed. (p. 1)

Therefore, moving forward and considering the full scope of the literature bearing on this study, the question must be asked which teachers are more likely to be found in such an environment, and how effective would they be with the students there? Much of the research pointed towards the fact that African American teachers are more often present in these schools, and experience a higher level of success than their white counterparts in inner-city, segregated schools (Ruenzel, 1998).

In fact, he began his article entitled “War of Attrition” with the following statements: “Ben Schmookler is what nearly every urban school district desperately needs. He’s young, he’s a dedicated teacher, and he’s African American. But how long will he stick around?” (Ruenzel, 1998, p. 1). Kirby, Berends, and Naftel (1999) expounded on this fact. They wrote, “Across the nation, high-risk and high-minority districts are largely staffed by minority teachers” (Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999, p. 48). They continued later in reporting on their operationalization of at-risk districts, “However, if we examine the distribution of teachers by race/ethnicity and by where they
are teaching, we find that minority teachers are teaching disproportionately in high-risk districts” (Kirby, et al., 1999, p. 52).

Indeed, Ruenzel (1999) alluded to a fact that many researchers have already embraced, that attrition is probably as large of a problem, if not a larger problem, than recruiting teachers. The combined effect of both issues, contributes to a recognized teacher shortage across the country, but especially in urban school districts (Nelson, 2004). Nelson (2004) wrote, “Even the casual observer quickly notices that the teaching vacancies most often posted in the newspaper or on county office of education web sites are in high-need, low-performing schools, rather than in high-performing schools” (p. 475).

Echoing the attrition point, Nelson (2004) went on to say that, “Among the many reasons contributing to the unequal distribution of qualified teachers is the low retention rate of teachers in high-needs schools” (p. 475). These assertions beg at least a couple of questions must be answered. The first is whether or not the black teacher shortage in these high-need schools is really as prolific as is claimed, and the second is whether the presence of more black teachers really makes a difference to these students? The question of the black teacher shortage will be explored first, followed by a discussion on the potential impact, if any, of these black teachers on their students.

In her article, *Getting More Men and Blacks into Teaching*, Chmelynsk (2005) noted that overall, nine percent of teachers are male and black males represent only 2.4 percent of the nation’s 3 million public school teachers. This disproportionality is most prevalent in the elementary grades. Continuing to write not only of black teachers, but especially black *male* teachers, she reported:
All students need to see black males in authority, roles of responsibility, academic roles showing there are manifestations of black maleness other than athletics, entertainment, or, unfortunately, crime. Call Me MISTER is a leadership program where students in it are change agents in the community, and they are trying to empower students to become change agents also. (Chmelynsk, 2005, p. 42)

This rationale is one of the major arguments made in support of the need for more black teachers, especially in the inner-city classrooms where the majority of the nation’s black students can be found.

Wilder (2000) also discussed the extensive problem of the African American teacher shortage as recognized by the education field. She remarked:

Educational reformers concerned with public schools and academic researchers from colleges of teacher education have called for both a culturally informed and a culturally diverse teaching profession…. These groups have drawn national attention to the African American teacher shortage by providing demographic and empirical data illustrating the racial imbalance within the teaching profession.

(Wilder, 2000, p. 206)

She further reported that students she encounters often lament that they seldom encounter teachers that look like them or can identify with them. Though slightly different as this involves relating to someone who understands their issues, this is similar to the previous discussion on black (male) role models.

Wilder (2000) later pointed out that, though black students make up 16 percent of the public school population, black teachers make up only 8 percent of the public school teaching pool. Collier (2002) agreed and reported that:
The number of African Americans within the teaching force has failed to keep pace with the growing level of diversity clearly present in classrooms across the nation. This trend towards an increasing African American student population and a decreasing African American teaching force continues to grow. (p. 49)

Coincidentally, Garibaldi (1988) reported approximately the same low numbers more than 20 years earlier. By way of background, he explained that teaching was actually the most popular profession among black people at one time, especially in southern states. That changed, however, in the late 1960s. In fact, Garibaldi (1988) reported that, at one point, the number of black professionals was actually over-representative of their number in society, hovering at about 12 percent. He observed that the 1980 estimates of black teachers ranged between 7.6% and 8.6%. The problem is, as Collier (2002) pointed out, the percentages of African American students continue to grow, creating an ever-widening gap between them and the number of black teachers.

Spelman (1988) likewise explained, “Minority teachers in America are decreasing in numbers at a time when they are sorely needed” (p. 58). More importantly, “The number of minority teachers in the United States is declining while the minority public school population is increasing” (Spelman, 1988, p. 58). As previously pointed out, the increasing number of minority students is important because it exacerbates the shortage and even negates the argument that the status quo is being maintained. This fact points to a problem on the rise rather than a problem on the decline.

It is again, important to note that the character of the African American teacher decline reflects that of the career field in general. The shortage is driven by attrition, as
well as by fewer of black teachers entering the profession. Goodwin (2004) conveyed the severity of the situation in her statement:

Clearly, the shortage of minority teachers, particularly African American teachers, is a problem too serious to be ignored and too large to be solved by one or two isolated agencies. It requires the combined energies and creativity of many groups. (p. 29)

The creation of such entities, which are typically founded based on research and hard data, would lend more credence to a widespread belief in a black teacher shortage. Goodwin (2004) reported on such an organization; “The Consortium on Teacher Quality and Supply combined the energies of several organizations to respond to the shortage of minority teachers…. The Consortium completed a proposal to increase the number and quality of African American teachers in January 1988” (p. 29). The increasing awareness of this problem seemed to feed upon itself. As researchers continue to illustrate the extent of this shortage and groups form to address it, the focus has generated further research.

In the past decade, Bennett, McWhorter, and Kuykendall (2006) reported that several demographic trends, coinciding with those previously mentioned, dictate a need for more teachers of color. Specifically, with respect to black teachers, they report only six percent comprising the current teaching force compared to a 39% minority student population, though not exclusively black. According to the researcher, there is actually an inverse relationship between the number of black students and black teachers – the number of black students continues to increase while the number of black teachers
continues to decrease (Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006). They also reported that black males still have the lowest graduation rate among all minorities with just 43%.

While the research by Bennett, McWhorter, and Kuykendal (2006) spoke to the growing disparity across the broad spectrum of schools, Mitchell (1998) pointed out a mirroring discrepancy in urban schools, the segregated, or rather re-segregated, environments discussed earlier. In particular, she mentioned the nationwide shrinking of the African American teaching force and the simultaneous growth of the African American student body since the 1960s. The U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Mitchell, 1998) reported, “In central city schools, almost 30 percent of the students are African American, but only 15 percent of the teachers are” (p. 105). Bradley and Loadman (2005) placed that number at 13% nine years later.

Literature continues to support that there is a shortage of black teachers in inner-city schools; however, a nationwide shortage does not necessarily exist. Given that a disproportionate number of black teachers are found in inner-city schools, there is the possibility that these schools could be well staffed by black teachers (Kirby, et al., 1999). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1997) echo Bradley’s and Loadman’s (2005) findings when it question concerning what types of teachers does American need:

Thus, the answer to the question posed above is driven by the fact that across the nation, high-risk and high-minority districts are largely staffed by minority teachers…. The under-representation of minorities in teaching is likely to become worse over time because the proportion of minorities in teaching is declining. (Kirby, et. al., 1999, p. 48)
The significance of this teacher shortage is most evident in inner-city, segregated schools where the need for black teachers is highest, yet the supply is the lowest. The shortage of African American teachers is a reality; however, whether this documented shortage is actually a problem is yet to be determined. If in fact it is a problem, why aren’t there more black teachers in the classroom? Riley (1998) summarized his position by stating that America’s, “teaching force should be excellent, but excellence is not enough. If we are to be responsive to the special demands and great opportunities of our nation’s pluralistic makeup, we should develop a teaching force that is diverse, as well” (p. 19).

Riley’s (1998) explanation for his position echoed findings concerning black teachers serving as role models for black students. Memory, Coleman, and Watkins (2003) cited a host of researchers who proclaimed that diversity in the teaching force was not an option, but rather a necessity. Is this notion simply about what may seem to be the right thing to do, or is there true merit for the drive to grow a more diverse teaching force? Now that a shortage of black teachers has been established, literature will be reviewed to determine if black students actually stand to benefit from having black teachers in their classrooms.

**Black Teachers’ Benefit to Black Students**

Black teachers are positive role models for black students. This is the most prolific reason that an increase in black teachers is currently being advocated for. However, the presence of black teachers in the classroom may be designed for more than just the black students, as the Call Me MISTER Program will attest. MISTER stands for Men Instructing Students Towards Effective Role Models and leaves few guesses about
the purpose for which the program is designed. Chmelynsk (2005) explained that the program began in 1999 to fill a void of black male teachers in public elementary schools in the state of South Carolina. At the time, the state had only 150 black male teachers with less than 1% of them teaching in public elementary schools. Chmelynsk (2005) reports “The program seeks to recruit, train, certify, and secure employment for 200 black males as elementary teachers in South Carolina’s public schools” (p. 42).

Similar programs have been undertaken in other states, but a unique characteristic underlies the Call Me MISTER program. This latent purpose is explained as:

Call Me MISTER is not aimed just at providing role models for black boys…. As a black male and a former elementary teacher here in South Carolina, I know the value of having a black male in the classroom that can counter people’s stereotypes of the black male population. (Chmelynsk, 2005, p. 42)

Lynn and Adams (2002) expand upon this by explaining that contradictions exist in the schooling of young black men in urban schools. They state that skilled individuals can use “CRT to tease out the inherent contradictions in schooling for African American males” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 90). This rationale does not intuitively address the argument that black teachers serve as role models; however, the rationale expressed is very relevant to a deeper understanding of the broader discussion regarding the need for black teachers in the classroom.

In fact, this view encapsulates not only black teachers, but black people in general (Madsen & Hollins, 2000). Madsen and Hollins (2000) attest that, “Desegregation had many unexpected consequences for the African American community. One unexpected consequence was that African American teachers were not
readily accepted in newly desegregated schools… European American communities questioned their competence” (p. 6). African American teachers consistently feel as if they have something to prove, as evidenced by the Call Me MISTER program. However, maybe the black teachers’ failings on state teacher examinations are proving otherwise.

Many of the issues that underscore the discussion of advocating for an increase in black teachers for black students actually involve marginalizing the voice of African Americans (Morris, 2001). Such was the case during desegregation, when the protests of black teachers were ignored. Morris (2001) related that, “Many realized that black children would encounter modified and covert acts of racism in schools that were integrated in student population only, but not in teacher personnel, curricula, and power arrangement,” (p. 479).

Baldwin (as cited in Meacham, 2000) thought differently about the idea of the black voice being suppressed. He shared how the black teacher would be less apt to marginalize the essence of the black child. Baldwin (as cited in Meacham, 2000) wrote:

> It is not the black child’s language that is in question, it is not his language that is despised: It is his experience. A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essentially, is that the child repudiate his experience, and all that gives him sustenance, and enter a limbo in which he will no longer be black, and in which he knows that he can never become white. Black people have lost too many black children that way. (p. 572)

Baldwin seems to imply that black teachers would better benefit black students’ learning through motivation. This would be done by instilling within them a sense of pride in their

Researchers (Chambers, 1994; Dorsey, 1995) have identified it as a key factor in explaining the resilience of at-risk students and the high achievement of students in academic and other settings. Some minority teachers are especially effective because they utilize student background and knowledge to the classroom to make learning more meaningful and applicable to their lives (Foster, 1995; Irvine, 1990; Michael-Bandele, 1993). Mitchell (1998) explained the teaching approach that utilizes this knowledge is referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy.

Morris (2001) remarked, “Black educators have always had the pulse of the African American community because, historically, they have been intimately connected with black families and communities” (p. 579). The writer illustrates one of the reasons that black teachers are important to black students; their deep familial connections rooted in a shared culture.

A study conducted at Pennsylvania State University (Smith, Herdman, & Wenning, 2003) on racial-ethnic pride spoke to this supposition in more detail. Smith, Herdman, and Wenning (2003) found that African American students in the fourth grade, with higher levels of racial-ethnic pride performed better on standardized reading and math tests. She also found a correlation between the levels of racial-ethnic that the teachers and parents possessed and student achievement. Specifically, she reported:

Children, whose teachers exhibited higher levels of racial-ethnic trust and perceived fewer barriers due to race ethnicity, showed more trust and optimism.

The study contradicts the notion that ‘racelessness’ in school children is not
necessary for success. We found that family, school and community are all important factors related to children’s healthy racial-ethnic attitudes, and that these attitudes are correlated with their academic achievement. (Smith, Herdman, & Wenning, 2003, p. 16)

Smith’s (2003) argument supports the previously mentioned sense of pride black teachers can instill in black children. Objective research data supports these claims. Wilder (2000) cited a number of research studies in which, “Empirical and theoretical literature supports the contention that African American teachers are often more successful than middle-class white teachers in connecting the cultural lives of African American students to knowledge and in reducing discipline problems” (p. 209).

Other important factors Wilder (2000) shared in discussing African American teachers was that they have higher expectations for their black students than did white teachers and absenteeism of black students noticeable decrease when they had black teachers. Lastly, she pointed out the social and emotional involvement of black students was greater with black than white teachers. She stated a negative impact of the black teacher shortage to be, “that few African American students have the chance to cultivate relationships with those teachers who, the literature suggests, may have more positive effects on them and their academic achievement” (Wilder, 2000, p. 210).

Gursky (2002) relates the academic impact of minority students taught by a same minority teacher. Obtaining data from a landmark study done in Tennessee called Project STAR, he was able to show that “… exposure to an own-race teacher did generate substantive gains in student achievement for both black and white students” (Gursky, 2002, p. 32). More importantly he concluded, “… a year with a same-race teacher
increased students’ math and reading scores by about 4 percentile points” (Gursky, 2002, p. 32).

Half of children in our nation’s schools could receive 12 years of education without ever facing a teacher of their own ethnic and cultural background (Collier, 2002). Collier (2002) asked, “How does the absence of minority teachers affect the teaching and learning of America’s schoolchildren?” (p. 49). The absence of minority teachers decreases student achievement due to the tremendous influence minority teachers have (Brophy, 1983; Evertson, 1986; Collier, 2002) This finding is based on similarities in teacher-student ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as a higher level of equity, student performance, and expectations.

Collier (2002) expounded that teachers demonstrate behaviors that resembled family ties or kinship. “They identified with, connected to, and exhibited solid support for, their students” (Collier, 2002, p.50). Part of this support would take the form of guidance and building self-esteem in a world that is still fraught with racism (Spelman, 1988). Like the familial concept, preparing black students in a social context to deal with racism teachers believe they will encounter very necessary.

Lynn (1999) posited an even more direct illustration of the African American teacher’s approach that. She cited Foster’s (1995) pedagogy as characteristic of teachers with regards to black students (Lynn, 1999). Reiterating both the familial and racism aspects she explained:

They express feelings of kinship and connectedness by relating to the students their experiences in overcoming obstacles such as racism. Moreover, a number of these teachers maintain a sense of cohesion with their students by living within or
in close proximity to the students’ home communities. This also manifests itself in the way that the teachers treat their students – often referring to them as their own. (Lynn, 1999, p. 607)

Lynn (1999) concluded by explaining how they incorporate yet another factor previously discussed and not to be overlooked, which is that of including an African-centered pedagogy. In later studies the researcher “utilizes CRT to illuminate the emancipatory ideals of black teachers in urban schools” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 90).

Yet, as important as the pedagogy is, Quiocho and Rios (2000) maintained that there is nothing about being a member of a minority group that ensures effectiveness in the classroom. Their focus is on the fact that the teacher’s experiences are the most valuable. They opined, “It is their shared social and cultural experiences, as well as the cultural mediation skills they have developed for connecting between school and home, that strengthen their potential for effectiveness in teaching (minority students)” (Quiocho & Rios, 2000, p. 488).

One of the major challenges facing black students is the navigation of a European-centered curriculum in the public school setting. Bennett, McWhorter, and Kuykendall (2006) pointed out that part of the reason African American and other students of color do not fare well academically is because they lack of role models, but because they lack what they term as “cultural mediators” to help bridge the gap in their understanding of an otherwise adversarial curriculum” (p. 537). They further point out the vicious cycle created by their lack of academic success. Fewer students of color graduating result in fewer attending college to become educators, and so forth. They
asserted that the homogeneity of the predominantly white teaching force will remain so, unless there is intervention.

Patin and Gordon (2002) expounded on the critical idea and need for a cultural mediation of sorts in a review of a study entitled The Color of Teaching. The study brought together the collective thought of more than 200 veteran teachers of color in a number of major cities across the United States, coupled with 50 interviews of prospective teachers of color. Findings suggest that a major challenge of teaching black students in urban schools related to a theory known as expectancy theory.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) developed the first concept of expectancy theory. While it has been refined throughout the years, its core premise remains the same (Rubie-Davies, 2007). When teachers hold expectations of particular students, they interact with them in differing ways to the extent that their expectations become fulfilled. Whether these expectations are erroneous or not, it tends to have a self-fulfilling prophecy effect. That was especially the case with white teachers working with black students in urban districts.

Specifically, applying this to the Color of Teaching study, the identified cadre reflected on how “African American teachers, who know of the high standard that black youth were held to in the South prior to desegregation, struggle with their sense of hopelessness and irrelevance of education in the lives of many young people today” (Patin & Gordon, 2002, p. 123). Kwanjufu (2002) spoke to a greater extent about white teacher expectancy of black students and the impact on academic achievement. A closer look at Rubie-Davies’ (2007) work and studies she conducted would be very telling.
relative to the discussion about how black teachers tend to interact with black students, and the expectations they have of them based on shared cultural understandings.

One cannot say that white teachers do not or cannot care for black students. That is not the case at all. Nor is it the case that white teachers cannot become culturally competent with regards to relating to their black students. In fact, Harmon (2000) pointed out that part of being culturally competent entails acquiring knowledge of the minority students’ histories and understanding their cultural beliefs. That is something any teacher can certainly do if he or she is willing to put forth the effort. Harmon (2000) went on to stress that, “They are also comfortable with the differences between themselves and their students” (p. 69).

In many cases, this may seem to too great a task, especially in schools whose demographics are changing and the white teachers have to make the adjustment to accommodate for a growing number of black students. Looking again at Harmon’s (2000) writing, it entailed a study of gifted black students bussed to a neighboring white, suburban school. The black students in the study complained that:

They won’t teach me! How are we supposed to get it [do well]! Since all the teachers, when we would do our work…[pause, eyes swelled with tears] They expected you to never get anything right or to be the best. It was like they purposely did not want us to succeed. They didn’t give us any help (Jamaal, 5th grader). (Harmon, 2000, p. 71)

It is another example of low teacher expectations, apparent even to the children.

Former United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley (1998), put forth that: Diversity in teaching helps send a very powerful message – that a good education
can be the road to success for everyone. By their shining example, teachers of color help fight the tyranny of low expectations – the pernicious voices that whisper into young ears, “You can’t do it. Don’t even try”. (p. 20)

His claim, therefore, is that black teachers are more than just mentors or role models, but also an *embodiment* of high expectations for black students. Yet, despite his belief in the necessity for these teachers, he later pointed out that, “Despite the importance of diversity in the teaching force, more than 40% of our nation’s public schools do not have a single person of color on their faculty. That gap is only growing worse” (Riley, 1998, p. 21).

Disproportionate failure on teacher tests further fuels the problem.

**NCLB Impact on African American Teachers**

Armed with a better understanding of the arguments for increasing the number of black teachers in the teaching force, it is now appropriate to determine why the numbers are so paltry. A number of reasons have been proffered to explain this shortage. One is the decline in college attendance and completion rates of African American students and another is a decline of interest in the teaching field among African American students (Goodwin, 2004). Additional explanations include low salaries and limited upward mobility (Wilder, 2000), the desegregation of schools Madsen & Hollins, 2000), and a lack of respect by administration (Patin & Gordon, 2002).

Desegregation had an initial effect on decrease of black teachers, as they were deemed not as qualified as their white counterparts to teach in integrated classrooms (Madsen & Hollins, 2000). In the span of a decade from the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, the number of black teachers and black administrators combined dwindled from 82,000 to 40,000 (Collier, 2002). A lack of status, respect, and
support by administration has also been reported as other reasons for the persistent lack of black teachers (Patin & Gordon, 2002). While multiple reasons impact the low number of black teachers, the ones most relevant at this point fall into the realm of state standards. Specifically high-stakes testing and certifications as those mandated under NCLB. The following section presents an analysis of the interrelationship between the NCLB test requirements and the present shortage of black teachers.

While there are a number of factors impacting the black teacher shortage, the certification NCLB mandates are the only involuntary contributing factor. This factor is not due to choice or the avoidance of teaching because of the perceived lack of respect for teachers. These are factors impacting decisions on the part of black students. Once the decision has been make to enter the teaching career field, the testing requirements under NCLB then become a reality. At this point, a brief background leading up to the testing requirements under NCLB will be provided. This will assist to aid in determining their value, or lack thereof.

The Case for the NCLB Act

The creation of the ESEA and its companion United States code titles (e.g., the Title One reading program) represented a breakthrough in the nation’s efforts to provide quality education to all children (Meier & Wood, 2004). More specifically, “For the first time as a nation we acknowledged that access alone was not enough…. some children, given the condition of their childhood, would require more help if access to schooling was to be translated into success at school” (Meier & Wood, 2004, p. viii). Borman (2002) expounded further by stating, “The two long-standing goals of Title 1 of the
Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 are to improve schooling in high-poverty contexts and to advance the equality of education outcomes” (p. 49).

Orfield and Kornhaber (2001) explained that the presence of an achievement gap justified the interventions provided by the creation of the ESEA. As Meier and Wood (2004) explained it, though Brown v. Board of Education (1954) provided for equal access based on race, the value of Brown was diminished due to family economic conditions that were also a hindrance. Compelling research evidence, in the form of long-term trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), indicated tremendous progress in closing the achievement gap of the low income in the 1970s and 1980s (Borman, 2002). This paved the way for a reauthorization in 2002 for what is now known as the No Child Left Behind Act (Borman, 2002). “In January 2002, as part of President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, Title 1 received the largest funding increase in history, pushing the total annual expenditures to more than $10 billion,” (Borman, 2002, p. 50). However, the legislation was definitely not without its critics. The focus of NCLB was of strong accountability.

Controversially, the primary instrument of choice for measuring success and meeting imposed standards is the use of standardized tests for both students and teachers (Peterson & West, 2003; NCLB, 2001). This choice of measurement is only one condition that is problematic about NCLB (Hess, 2003; Kane & Staiger, 2003; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). For purpose of this study, the standardized teacher certification testing is the primary focus. The literature highlighted the impact of certification testing under NCLB has had on present and aspiring African American
teachers. One goal of NCLB was to ensure the presence of what it termed “Highly Qualified” teachers.

It would help to understand why students’ standardized test performance was the catalyst for requiring teacher testing. Concerning NCLB, Peterson and West (2003) reported, “Under its terms, every state, to receive federal aid, must put into place a set of standards together with a detailed testing plan designed to make sure the standards are being met” (p. 2). Though the testing spoken of here referred to student rather than teacher testing, it was still a mechanism for measuring the quality of a teacher (and his or her instruction), based on student scores.

The research cited in “Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary’s Annual Report on Teacher Quality” (2002) summarized the justification for Highly Qualified teachers. The simplified rationale it expressed for this requirement was that, “Because of the vital role that teachers play in the lives of our children, the No Child Left Behind Act requires that all teachers in core academic subjects be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year” (“Highly Qualified”, 2002, p. vii). Value-added study results, such as that done in Tennessee, Boston, and Dallas accounted for the implementation of that legislation. In effect, students’ learning gains or academic achievement, as measured by aggregate standardized test scores, determine whether a teacher is “good” or “bad” (“Highly Qualified”, 2002, p. 7).

This accountability model is the bedrock of NCLB. Tommy Thompson, the former governor of Wisconsin, was very dissatisfied with high school graduations and characterized them as a hollow indicator of learning (Brown, 2008). As such, the governor set out to ensure both students and educators were held accountable for what
was being taught, with two goals in mind: politics and policy. He initiated this standards-based education quest in the 1980s, long before the introduction of the NCLB Act. The politics goal reflected a response to the community that demanded more evidence of student academic success for the inordinate amounts of money spent on education. By contrast, the policy aspect focused on standardizing the expectations to be met.

Indicating some degree of agreement, Fusarelli (2003) pointed out that, “A growing body of research suggests that systemic reform initiatives, such as standards-based instructional and accountability frameworks, have a positive effect on student achievement” (p. 76). More specifically, he was referring to the emphasis that teachers and principals alike are forced to make on the academic performance of traditionally underserved student populations.

Be that as it may, Easley (2005) maintained that the limits of standardized tests as a measure of student achievement must be considered. English and Steffy (as cited in Easley, 2005) write, “If ever there was a misguided policy initiative, it is that somehow high-stakes testing can drive quality into the public schools by ratcheting up the consequences for not doing well on them” (p. 77).

Nevertheless, these positions more represented the losing side of the accountability argument rather than the winning. The creation of NCLB was predicated legislators’ belief that results are crucial. Watson (2002) conveyed this point as part of his explanation of the difference between learning outcomes and inputs. Otter (as cited by Watson, 2002) subscribes to the belief that the measurement of learning outcomes, rather than the traditional description of input (for example teachers), bodes as a more valid
approach to determine the level of learning. It was these outcomes that ultimately earned the bipartisan support for NCLB.

**NCLB and Teacher Testing Requirements**

With regards to the teacher testing, other guidelines for certification became factors. Under NCLB, states were to ensure that every teacher in high-need schools met the requirements for being Highly Qualified by the year 2005, and in every state public school by the year 2006 (NCLB, 2001). Highly Qualified, per NCLB, Public Law 107-110, is defined as:

a. For any public elementary school or secondary school teacher (presently) teaching in a state, the teacher has obtained full state certification as a teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such state. Also, the teacher must not have had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis.

b. For any public elementary school teacher who is new to the profession, the teacher must hold a bachelor’s degree and has demonstrated, by passing a rigorous state test, subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum.

c. For any public middle or secondary school teacher who is new to the profession, the teacher must hold a bachelor’s degree and has demonstrated a high level of competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches by passing a rigorous state academic subject test in each of the academic subjects the teacher teaches. (p. 81)
The common element is the prospective and existing teachers must pass a rigorous state exam. According to Dodson (2007), recruiting efforts must respond to the identified shortage of prospective black teachers into the field. One issue she pointed out focused on some of the perceived cultural bias that may be present in the test. Even more far-reaching than the concerns of black students is the uncertainty surrounding the actual reliability of these tests to predict a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom (Dodson, 2007).

The review follows with the concerns that addressed test predictability of performance, cultural relevance, and the expected consequences of maintaining these testing standards in their present form. Dodson (2007) certainly was not alone in the positions she represented. Goldhaber and Brewer (2001) expressed dissatisfaction with a recent student on teacher certification. They asked the question of whether teacher certification matters with regard to its impact on student academic achievement. Their student found that imposing strict certification standards does not necessarily lead to an increase in student achievement (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2001). They continued by stating that, “Such policies may lead to an improved quality of teachers, however, it is also possible these standards restrict the supply of qualified individuals by discouraging them from trying to become teachers … These results leave important questions unanswered” (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2001, p. 80).

Spelman (1988) asked a very similar question with regard to tests administered for certification in a number of different states. Pointing out tests used in North and South Carolina, Florida, Texas, and California, Spelman (1988) asked whether or not the tests are valid measures that can be used to ascertain a person’s ability to teach. She
found that, “There is no factual evidence that any of the tests used or any presently available to measure pre-service or in-service teachers have predictive validity or that they can differentiate between competent and incompetent teachers or teaching candidates” (Spelman, 1988, p. 59). These claims are supported by existing literature (Gifford, 1986; Pugach & Raths, 1983; Whitehurst, Witty & Wiggins, 1986).

Trubowitz (2007) emphasized the importance of accountability on student achievement, by acknowledging the fallibility of teacher testing. He remarked that standardized tests are not a predictor of teacher ability but are a step towards increasing teacher accountability (Trubowitz, 2007). Flippo (1986) identified the similar flaws with teacher testing. Flippo (1986) noted that researchers have questioned the validity of such tests and asked if the quality of teachers can really be improved by certification testing. Flippo (1986) then acknowledged:

When the data and the circumstances surrounding the issues are better understood, it becomes evident that rising test scores indicate no more than that more persons are able to pass the test. The rising scores do not indicate that the quality of teacher certification applicants has improved. (p. 5)

Neil (2004) explained that under an accountability model, multiple forms of evidence must be considered, both qualitative and quantitative in nature. He stated, “No academic decision about a student, a teacher, an administrator, a school, or a district should be made solely on one type of evidence, such as standardized test scores” (Neil, 2004, p. 107). He also made the point that several tests do not constitute multiple examples of evidence. Sewlyn (2007) echoed Neil’s sentiments concerning the worth of these standardized tests for teachers. He reported that:
The increased focus on testing to determine who can teach (despite a lack of research supporting this policy) is both pushing out and alienating potential teachers whose strengths and interests don’t show up on tests or who don’t believe that this is the best way to save public schools. (Sewlyn, 2007, p. 124)

Citing empirical evidence, Bennett, McWhorter, and Kuykendall’s (2006) findings add to the literature. It has been acknowledged that raising student academic achievement is of paramount importance, but emphasized teacher standardized testing is not the method by which to accomplish (Mikitovics & Cehan, 2002; Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006). They wrote that:

The many well-documented problems associated with each (standardized test and Pre-Professional Skills Test) would seem to indicate these tests, in their past and current forms, are not the answer…. Specifically concerning the Praxis I, research has identified psychometric and measurement concerns related to concurrent validity, predictive validity, and consequential validity. (Bennett, et al., 2006 p. 541)

Darling-Hammond’s (1989) substantiates this discussion with similar findings resulting from a study on the effectiveness of testing to measure teaching ability. She shared that:

In a simulation using data about the predictive validity of the National Teacher Examination (NTE) as a measure of later teaching performance and an assumed cut-score that would eliminate 10 percent of all candidates, Haney et al. found that 80 percent of the rejections would be false, as compared to about 10 percent of acceptances. Compounding those results across a staged battery of tests for
acceptance to teaching would produce a substantial number of false negatives, 

particularly for minority candidates. (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 12)

Attention will now turn to the culminating issue of this study: the impact of these standardized tests on prospective and current teachers. Also, a discussion of black teacher representation in the teaching force will also be explored in the context of the possibility that cultural bias is present within these examinations.

State Teacher Testing Impact on African American Teachers

As a starting point, consider Flippo and Canniff’s (2003) assertions that Massachusetts Department of Education licensure tests have had a significantly adverse affect on minorities in teacher education programs. They contended that this problem will persist and result in a gradual, but steady, decline in minority teachers as veterans retire. These minority populations will continue to grow as the white population begins to decline. Massachusetts presented an interesting case because it was slow to adopt certification testing until 1998; a considerable amount of time after others states. These tests served as “gate keepers” that weed out minorities. One study that pointed out these facts was undertaken for the NEA and Council of Great City Schools and found that blacks and Latinos were excluded from teaching due to their performance on these competency tests (Schaeffer & Bass, 1996).

Actually, these tests have created controversy in two ways. One has been the concerns in using them as a sole means of teacher licensure (Flippo, 2003). The other involves questions of validity. In fact, validity tests have failed in many places across the country and their use has resulted in not only lawsuits but disenfranchisement (Flippo, 2003). Smith (2000) reported that teacher certification tests have validity issues
(predictive, concurrent, construct, and content), indefensible methods for obtaining cut-off scores, are racially biased and are not research based.

The latter item may be of most importance because if they are not research based, the issue of validity is increased, especially given their impact on African American teachers. Smith (2000) pointed out that the representation of African American teachers showed the greatest decline in the national teaching force in the 1990s. Authorities found that in the decades from the 1980s to 2000, the culprit remains standardized scores for teacher education and licensing.

The results of a series of tests (Smith, 2000) conducted from the late 1970s until 1991 also found that African American teachers are not only disproportionately removed from the classroom compared to white teachers, but among all other minority groups as well. Smith (2000) concluded then as he began, by stating that, “Teacher tests constitute a major barrier to the entry of minorities into the teaching profession” (p. 38).

In a later case study, Smith (2000) examined Florida’s teacher testing requirements. They found the same results, calling competency testing a powerful deterrent for teacher supply generally and minorities in particular. In fact, Florida’s system requires such testing for education students as well as teachers, eliminating disproportionate numbers of minorities at different points along the way.

For admission to a Florida state teacher education program, students must attain minimum scores. The test is not so much the problem as the disparity in the scoring. While 29% of the white students scored below 17 on the ACT, 75% of the black students did so (as compared to 38% of Hispanic and 41% of all other ethnic groups). Yet, upon closer review of how actual teachers fared, the findings were just as dismal. Only 37% of
black teachers passed the Florida Teacher Competency Exam in the seven years prior to 1988.

Two students in particular seemed to have captured the situation perfectly. Smith (2000) wrote that:

At each point of testing, disproportionate numbers of minorities are eliminated from the pipeline. The plight of the minority student who wishes to be a teacher can be illustrated most dramatically by the black student….In the end, the flow of the teacher education pipeline in Florida for the black student narrows tragically to a ‘bare trickle’. (p. 52)

The same story was repeated across the country in other states. Wakefield (2006) wrote about the plight of yet another black prospective teacher in an article aptly entitled, “Taking Hope Out of Teaching.” He commented about how the test factor is keeping teachers out of the classroom at a time when they are needed most. In citing a particular case he sought to portray a capable, teacher candidate named Hope. Wakefield (2006) disclosed that she missed two of 543 days in high school and graduated in the top third of her class with a 3.8 grade point average. Her list of school and community activities was substantial; National Honor Society, Community Leadership Club, Student Council, volunteer tutor, varsity cheerleader, track, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, homecoming court, remedial math tutor, and 288 hours of community service. She was also president of her class during her junior and senior years in high school.

Hope spent 90 minutes each day helping in kindergarten and third-grade classrooms. She said she also wanted to become a teacher. However, she could not qualify for the Georgia HOPE scholarship because her SAT score was not high enough.
As a result, she attended community college and did well enough to get into a top-ranked childhood education program, concluding her junior year with a 3.33 grade point average.

After four failed Praxis attempts, 16 psychological exams, and a disability determination, she was granted a waiver. She passed the Praxis II and received “near-perfect” reviews from her professor and supervising teacher. Hope accepted a position as a kindergarten teacher in the elementary school where she had volunteered as a high school student.

The point of Hope’s story was to put a face on the countless numbers of students and teachers, usually minority and most often African American, deterred from teaching professions because of test requirements. Wakefield (2006) went on to cite the American Psychological Association that wrote, “Avoid using a single test score as the sole determinant of decisions about test takers. Interpret test scores in conjunction with other information about candidates” (p. 82). He concluded by pointing out these tests further perpetuate historic inequities, this time with black teachers in the classrooms.

Texas teacher exams generate the same type of results and prove to be a harder barrier for minorities, especially blacks (Kirby, et al., 1999). Compared to over 90% of white candidates, only 66% of African American students passed (compared to 76% of Hispanics). Yet, the Texas Board of Education wants a teacher workforce reflecting the state’s racial and ethnic composition.

These examples underscore the extent of the problem with regards to the effect of teacher testing on the numbers of black teachers. This section concludes with a nationally statistic from ETS. It reported a “distressing gap” in passing rates on its Praxis exam required by most states for teacher certification. It said, quite simply, “Passing
rates nationwide for white candidates were 82 percent versus 46 percent for African Americans” (Tyler, 2011, p. 29).

**African American Standardized Teacher Test Failures: Stereotype Threat**

Despite the mounting evidence of teacher standardized test validity concerns and their inability to predict success in the classroom, these tests continue to be the instrument of choice for granting teacher licensure. Smith (2000) pointed out that the representation of African American teachers showed the greatest decline in the national teaching force in the 1990s. Authorities found that in the decades from the 1980s to 2000, the culprit remains standardized scores for teacher education and licensing. Given this fact, steps must be taken in another direction to address the disproportionate failures of African American teachers and teacher candidates, unless and until the tests are eliminated. Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory may help to clarify and offer possible solutions to the problem.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“I never passed it. It took me about four times and I gave up. So yes, I think my background had something to do with it; I think exposure had a lot to do with it, so yes I do think.”

- Emily Shell
Elementary Teacher Interviewee

Introduction

Chapter Three presents a description of the methodology used in this study. It begins with a review of the purpose for the study and the research questions, and then the research design and site selection criteria are presented. The population sample is subsequently identified, followed by a discussion of how the research instruments were constructed. It concludes by delineating the data gathering procedures, means by which the data were interpreted (data analysis), and lastly the limitations.

School districts, along with local, state, and federal governments spend millions of dollars annually to subsidize programs to attract minority teachers, especially African Americans, into the nation’s classrooms. However, there is evidence to support the fact that federal mandates for highly qualified teachers under NCLB systematically contribute to removing black teachers from the classroom at a rate disproportionate to their numbers nationwide (Nettles, Scatton, Steinberg, & Tyler, 2011). This study follows up on the findings of a major study undertaken in a joint effort between the National Education Association (NEA) and the Education Testing Service (ETS) (see Table 1). Of particular relevance and in support of this joint study, a story was broadcasted on a local news channel in Atlanta reporting that 70 teachers had failed the certification test. Of those 70
failures, 60 teachers failed more than 10 times and one teacher failed 18 times (Tyler, 2011). Statistical evidence points to the fact that most of them were black.

To help explain this disproportionality, Table 1 provides differences in pass rates for various race/ethnicities across multiple domains. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the low pass rates of black teachers – lower in every category – on state teacher licensure exams. A clear picture of the problem, however, may not be understood by viewing the failure rates in isolation.
Table 1

*Differences in pass rates on Praxis by race and ethnicity below that of White test takers*

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry: Content Knowledge</td>
<td>-38.2%</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-2.3%</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Science: Content Knowledge</td>
<td>-49.1%</td>
<td>-14.4%</td>
<td>-6.3%</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Science</td>
<td>-34.9%</td>
<td>-14.3%</td>
<td>-4.6%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pedagogy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades K-6</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>-25.1%</td>
<td>-13.0%</td>
<td>-12.8%</td>
<td>-15.5%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<td>-28.3%</td>
<td>-18.4%</td>
<td>-10.1%</td>
<td>-12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Insufficient sample size*
Research Questions

1. According to teacher perception, how well do colleges and universities prepare black teachers to pass state teacher licensure examinations?

2. How does stereotype threat influence the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations?

3. Is initial failure of a state teacher licensure examination a valid indicator of future observed teacher performance?

Selection of Subjects

The unit of analysis for this study was the collective body of Metropolitan Atlanta area teachers. One of the 23 school districts that comprise the metropolitan area was chosen from which to conduct a teacher case study. The teacher population within two schools was selected as the subjects from which to gather the data for the study. One was a middle school (which will be known as Madison Middle), and the other an elementary school (which will be referred to as Baxter Elementary).

Madison Middle School has a population of 325 students in grades 6-8, and 98% of the students are black/non-Hispanic, 2% Hispanic, and 90% economically disadvantaged. The teaching staff is somewhat reflective of those numbers with 32 teachers of whom 3 are white, 1 is Hispanic, 1 is Asian, and 3 are other.

Baxter Elementary School’s demographics are similar, but it has a population of 635 students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth. Racially, 100% of the students at Baxter are black/non-Hispanic and 84% of the students are economically disadvantaged. There are 38 teachers at Baxter Elementary, of whom five are white.
Purposeful Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select two schools that had been re-segregated: Baxter Elementary school and Madison Middle school. Re-segregated schools were earlier defined as schools that had been granted unitary status and had many of their students returning to neighborhood schools (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Usually, these re-segregated schools reflect pronounced racial imbalances.

The percentages of black students for each school selected reflect such a racial imbalance: 98% for Madison Middle and 100% for Baxter Elementary. This study utilized purposeful sampling because according to Patton (as cited in Creswell, 1990): “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those form which one can learn a great deal about issues of central important to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). Patton (as cited in Creswell, 1990) further shared that the goal is not focused on a representative sample based on size, but rather the detail the sample contains that can provide answers to research questions. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the racial breakdown of each school selected.
Table 2

*Student ethnicity (Madison Middle)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or Native Alaskan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroups</th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>District average</th>
<th>State average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficient</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Ethnicity data adapted from NCES, 2008-2009
*Note:* Subgroups data adapted from GA Dept. of Education, 2006-2007
Table 3

_Student ethnicity (Baxter Elementary)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or Native Alaskan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroups</th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>District average</th>
<th>State average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficient</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Ethnicity data adapted from NCES, 2008-2009
Note: Subgroup data adapted from GA Dept. of Education, 2006-2007*

**Participants**

From the sample population, there were a total of 28 participants in this study.

Twenty-three licensed teachers at Madison Middle responded to an online questionnaire. The teachers were not selected in any particular way, they represent the number of teachers at the school who were willing to complete and submit the questionnaire. The respondents represent a cross section of race, gender, and academic specialties at the school.
The other five participants were teachers at Baxter Elementary, but they were purposively selected because they had failed their initial Praxis or Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE) examination attempt. In order to satisfy the additional requirements of the study, all five of the teachers were black. However, partially because of the small number of males at the school, none of the men questioned reported failing the state licensure exam on their first attempt. As such, all of the teachers interviewed were females.

Data Collection

Initial data collection consisted of questionnaires Madison Middle teachers completed online using a link provided to the Qualtrics website. The information was stored in the system’s database for later retrieval. The interviews of the Baxter Elementary teachers were done individually at an agreed-upon location. The same questions presented in the questionnaire were put forth in the interviews, but were supplemented by additional questions. Also, whereas the Madison Middle teachers were asked to simply report the ratings they obtained on their annual evaluations, interviewees were invited to provide any documentation they wished to illustrate (vice verify) their level of success as classroom teachers (Yin, 2009). Such documentation, in addition to annual evaluations, might include certificates of achievement, awards, additional licensure endorsements, or anything they felt was noteworthy in documenting their success as teachers. This information could help contradict what failing scores on the initial state licensure examination might have portended. Documents relating to study approval, informed consent, and questions posed can be found in Appendices A-H.
### Interview Protocols

Interviews for the Baxter Elementary teachers, while consisting of the questionnaire items, also contained follow-up questions to provide clarification and understanding, depending on the answers the respondents provided. Though the time limit was advertised as 60-90 minutes, the researcher did not place a time limit upon the respondents if they had more they wanted to share. Conversely, they were free to terminate the interviews if they grew tired before the researcher ended them.

The interviews were recorded with the knowledge and consent of the respondents. Once their responses were transcribed, they were provided to the subject to verify their correctness. Changes were made as necessary. In accordance with Yin (2009) the type of interviews conducted would be classified as a focused interview because they consisted of specific questions relative to the case study protocol, and were not designed to be lengthy. Rather, they were in the form of conversations between the researcher and the respondents. This approach was to ensure both of Yin’s (2009) requirements were met: 1) satisfying the needs of the line of inquiry and 2) ensuring the questions came across as friendly and nonthreatening.

Creswell (2002) would have further identified the interviews as unstructured, versus structured or semi-structured. Whereas structured interviews contain closed-ended questions and semi-structured interviews include both closed- and open-ended ones, this interview contained no close-ended questions. It did contain questions that required definitive answers from respondents. These questions targeted demographic and statistical information rather than measuring the respondents’ feelings or position on an issue, which usually utilizes an instrument similar to a Likert scale. Questions were not
asked rapidly and allowed for the respondent to explore their feelings on the questions presented. In addition to recording the interview, field notes were taken to capture information.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with five teachers from Baxter Elementary at the school site, at a time of the interviewees’ choosing. As mentioned earlier, the questions were taken from the same questionnaire the teachers at Madison Middle answered online. However, by asking the questions in the form of an interview at Baxter Elementary, the interviewer could pursue an additional line of questioning based on the answers respondents provided in the interview. Other questions were also answered and were designed to stimulate a dialogue between researcher and participant that might further detail underlying reasons for failing. This insight, perceived causal inferences and explanations, was one of the benefits Yin (2009) identified when conducting interviews.

The interviews were scheduled for 60-minute blocks, but only one lasted that long. One interview ran longer and the others ranged between 30 and 60 minutes. In the one that ran longer, the respondent was the driving force behind the extended time as she elected to expound in much detail on most of the questions. This was quite acceptable and not entirely unexpected as Creswell (2002) pointed out that these one-on-one interviews are the most time-consuming and costly, given they are done one at a time. It was Creswell’s (2009) nine-step guidance the researcher followed: “In all of the various forms of interviewing, there are several general steps involved in conducting interviews” (p. 207).
Steps one and two pertained to setting up the interview, and the researcher closely adhered to the remaining seven steps while conducting the interview. These seven steps included: 1) audio taping questions and responses, 2) taking brief notes during the interview, 3) conducting the interview in a quiet, conducive place, 4) obtaining the participant’s consent prior to beginning, 5) remaining flexible as the situation dictated (as respondents sometimes strayed from the line of questioning), 6) using additional probes, and 7) remaining courteous and professional even after the interview (Creswell, 2009).

**Documents**

No stipulations or limitations were placed on the type of documentation participants were allowed to provide as evidence of their achievement and successes as classroom teachers, except that they were suitable for reprinting or copying. The range of possibilities the researcher suggested included certificates of achievement, Teacher of the Year awards, performance evaluations (formal and informal), newspaper clippings for recognition, or even additional licensure endorsements (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2009). Endorsements were deemed as even more noteworthy given the implication that the respondent had not only eventually passed the state certification test, but had also gone on to pass other tests as well. The respondents were not only allowed to submit documents, but were actually encouraged to do so.

**Research Design**

It is appropriate to note that careful steps have been taken within this study to ensure the quality of the research design, as captured in four tests that Yin (2009) has identified in his writings. These, he reported, are four tests that are common to all social science methods and summarized in countless textbooks. They are issues of 1) construct
validity, 2) internal validity, 3) external validity, and 4) reliability. Yin (2009) constructed a table to identify case study tactics that may be included to address each of these areas.

This study addressed the issue of construct validity by utilizing multiple sources of evidence, allowing participants to review and comment on their transcribed interviews and establishing a chain of evidence. Such protocols provide ready accessibility of information should other researchers attempt to replicate the study. Yin’s (2009) discussion of triangulation tied into what he described as multiple sources of evidence, which enhances construct validity. Yin (2009) explained:

The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues. However, the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration emphasized repeatedly. (p. 115-116)

Creswell and Miller (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011) also listed triangulation as one of the, “procedures to help ensure the rigor and usefulness of a qualitative study” (p. 40).

The study also relied on pattern matching during the data analysis phase to address the issue of internal validity, and employed stereotype threat theory to shore up the argument for its external validity. Lastly, a case study database created by the use of the Qualtrics software also spoke to the issue of reliability (Yin, 2009). Another part of the research design was rooted in identifying the study questions, as well as a theoretical framework through which to interpret the study. Yin (2009) wrote:
Then, the complete research design will provide surprisingly strong guidance in determining what data to collect and the strategies for analyzing the data. For this reason, theory development prior to the collection of any case study data is an essential step in doing case studies. (p. 36)

In his stereotype threat theory, Steele’s (2010) explanation that, “So if something causes black and women college students to perform less well than you’d expect from their skills, it must be – the idea goes – these psychic deficiencies, deficiencies of confidence and expectation, self-sabotaging deficiencies” (p. 46). Such postulation would be informative when considered in light of a (failed) respondent’s answer to the last question on the questionnaire: *Did you think you would pass the test the first time? Why or why not?*

Yin (2009) and Creswell (1998) described three types of case studies: descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory. This study would be classified as a multiple-case explanatory design, given that the questions posed are “how” and “why”. From the literature, questions remain unanswered as to how black teachers are being prepared to teach and why they are underperforming on state licensure examinations relative to all other races.

Enhancing this study is the use of mixed methods (Yin, 2009). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (as cited in Yin, 2009), defined a mixed method case study as a “class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (p. 63). This study employed the use of Qualtrics software to generate statistical, quantitative data derived from the questionnaire answered by 23 teachers.
Lastly, Guba and Lincoln (2005) visited the issue of reflexivity where interviews are concerned. It involves reflecting critically on the self as researcher. They went on to explain the researcher represents not one but three voices in the context of conducting a study involving interviews: 1) a research-based self, 2) brought selves, and 3) a self created by the situation. They maintain the research constitutes both subject and self-discovery as well. However, an awareness of this fact helps to guard against bias.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher used Yin’s (2002) diagram as a guide and basic approach for analyzing the collected data (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Yin’s Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Adapted from Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.), by R. K. Yin, 2002, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing.*
Yin (2009) emphasized the most fundamental protocol for a case study involves starting with a theory from which to view the resultant data. Stereotype threat theory was the lens through which the case studies were selected, designed, and analyzed. This process began by administering the questionnaires to the 23 teachers at Madison Middle during the first phase of the study, followed by conducting interviews in the second phase of the study with the 5 teachers at Baxter Elementary.

Once the questionnaires and interviews were completed, the results for each case were examined. In the first case study involving the questionnaires, data were quantitative as well as qualitative, and were compiled using the Qualtrics software. Qualtrics contains an imbedded scoring system that assigned values to responses and calculated mean scores. Data were collected in both statistical and narrative form, as there were open-ended questions. Data were then linked to propositions and criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2009).

Descriptive statistics were used to explore relationships among various demographic and key themes of the responses, whereas open-ended responses provided qualitative insights that led to a more nuanced interpretation of the statistics. In addition, data collected from the respondents were summarized and organized into tables to provide clear, visual images. These tables provide specific categories of respondent answers and aided in subsequent levels of analysis. Of particular interest at this initial level of analysis are the teachers’ responses to one very significant item on the questionnaire: *What was your teacher evaluation rating in each of the six areas and overall for 2009/10/11?*
Not only does it provide the answer to one of the three questions under study, but the answer to this question was critical in determining the inherent value of the state licensure test. If respondents who failed initial licensure are still (perhaps overwhelmingly) performing consistently at or above the satisfactory level, as determined by observing state-licensed administrators, that could bring into question the necessity for such a test at all.

The analyses of the second study involving the interviews focused on emerging themes that became prevalent among the five teachers. Ryan and Bernard (as cited in Monroy, 2012), identified four tasks involved in the analysis of qualitative data: “1) discovering themes and subthemes, 2) winnowing themes to a manageable few, 3) building hierarchies of themes or code books, and 4) linking themes into theoretical models” (p. 85). This process was employed not only with the interview results, but also with the answers of the open-ended questions posed to the respondents in the first case study. In both cases, the Wordle software was used to provide greater prominence to most frequently appearing words (see Appendix I).

Once individual case analysis was complete, cross-case analysis took place. Results from both case studies were compared against another to determine if there was a consistent theme through both methods, and then analyzed within the context of stereotype threat theory. Lastly, overall results from this study were contrasted against the findings from the NEA/ETS study to identify common themes.

**Limitations**

There were a few inherent limitations in this study specific to the study design. Interviews were not conducted with teachers of other races that failed initial teacher
licensing exams. There may be common themes across races, but that exploration is beyond the scope of the study.

An additional limitation includes flexible screening of participants. Though the study requests educational background in the form of a grade-point average or honors program participation, that information is not used to screen out any respondents. The reasoning behind that decision is that two students might attend the same historically black college or university teacher preparation program but obtain two very different grade-point averages (e.g. 4.0 plus and 2.0). These factors may have impacted their performance on teacher state licensure examinations. All factors being equal, if grade-point averages were true indicators of knowledge, one would expect the 4.0-plus student to perform better than the 2.0 student.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology used to conduct this study. The design focused on black teachers in the Atlanta Metropolitan area to determine why black teachers are disproportionately failing state teacher licensure examinations. The study was undertaken as a case study that focused on teachers in two re-segregated schools; a middle school and an elementary school. The teachers in the middle school completed questionnaires while the elementary teachers took part in unstructured interviews. Quantitative and qualitative analytic methods were used to analyze the data. Data collected were examined within the theoretical framework of stereotype threat theory to determine how it explains black teachers’ underperformance.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

“We already know that they’re (black teachers) not going to do well, blah, blah, blah.”

- Nancy James
Elementary Teacher Interviewee

The purpose of this study was to better understand why there are a disproportionate number of black teachers failing state teacher licensure examinations across the United States by focusing on those in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. An additional emphasis was placed on this phenomenon in re-segregated schools because their teaching staffs are predominantly black, which would further exacerbate the effect of removing them from those classrooms. To determine whether the teachers have the same shared experience regardless of the levels on which they teach, teachers at two of the three public school levels were involved in the study; elementary school and middle school.

Middle school case study data were obtained using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods; specifically, online questionnaires and unstructured interviews. A total of 23 middle school teachers formed the core group of participants at Madison Middle School. Elementary school case study data were obtained through interview sessions with 5 female, black teachers. Qualitative methods were the predominant form of data collection at Baxter Elementary School. All participants were selected from a
larger sample of 23 school districts within the Metropolitan Atlanta area and both schools qualify as re-segregated schools.

**Questionnaire Respondents: Background Information**

The questionnaire participants were randomly selected as they were the ones who chose to complete the questionnaire. Specific data has been synthesized to graphically represent the distribution of respondents. Of the 23 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 18 were female and five were male; 21 were black and the other two were white. All of the teachers have taught for more than three years, which was a qualifying factor for the study. Of the 23 questionnaire participants, 10 teachers (43%) attended Historically Black College or University (HBCU), nine (39%) attended a state college or university, three (13%) attended a private university, and one (4%) was “other” (see Table 4).

### Table 4

*Type of college or university attended*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Type of College or University Attended</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Historically Black College or University (HBCU)</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Predominantly Black institution</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>State College</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Intensive/Extensive Research University</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prominent Private</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>[Diagram]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just fewer than half of the participants (48%) majored in some type of education program, and all but three (13%) possessed a minimum 3.0 high school grade point average to obtain entry (see Table 5).

Table 5

*High school grade point averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>High School Grade Point Averages (GPAs)</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0 - 2.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5 - 2.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0 - 3.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5 - 4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0+ (Honors Program)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following discussion includes four tables with response data from the 23 questionnaire participants. Subsequent discussion will focus on those who reported failing one of the three examinations on their first attempt. Given that no one reported being exempt from taking the Praxis I examination, which is a general knowledge test, Question 10 asked, “When did the teacher take the Praxis I?” (Students can earn exemption status based on certain scores obtained on the Scholastic Aptitude Test [SAT] or American College Testing [ACT] exam.) Answers to Question 10 could have implications on test performance depending on how much time had elapsed between when the student ceased to focus on general education studies (as in high school) versus more concentrated study.
As Table 6 illustrates, most of the participants (48%) tested in their first year of teaching or later, followed by 35% who tested while in college, and the fewest (17%) tested just after college graduation, but before they began teaching. Some states actually require teacher candidates to take the Praxis I at some early stage in their college career. This is to preclude the prospective teachers from investing too much time in pursuit of an education degree to teach; only to find out later they are unable to pass the state test.

Table 6

*Time period for testing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Time Period for Testing</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>While in college</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Just after college graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>First year of teaching or later</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the eight respondents who indicated they tested while in college, none were asked to disclose in what year they tested. There might well have been a difference between students who tested during their first year versus those who chose to test in their fourth.

The following three tables include data from the 23 respondents regarding Praxis I pass rates, Praxis II pass rates, and GACE pass rates (see Tables 7, 8, and 9). Discussion of pass and fail rates for each of the three exams will follow the tables.
Table 7

**Passed Praxis I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Passed Praxis I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

**Passed Praxis II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Passed Praxis II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

**Passed GACE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Passed GACE</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Taking the GACE for most of the teachers in the study was not required because it is the test that replaced the Praxis in Georgia, but most of the teachers in the study had passed the Praxis before the GACE went into effect.
The following is a discussion of the information presented in Table 7; specifically of those who identified themselves as failing the Praxis I. Of the 23 respondents in the study, 18 were female and 5 were male; all five who failed were females. Twenty-one of the 23 respondents were black and all of the teachers who failed were black. Three of the five who failed attended HBCUs and of those three, two had majored in education. Of the other two who failed, one attended a private school and the other a state university, but neither majored in education. All five had a high school grade point average (GPA) in the 3.0-3.49 range.

In response to Question 23, all five respondents said they do not believe the Praxis I results relates to their ability to teach. This finding is corroborated by the teachers’ annual evaluations if we assume that their raters were qualified to assess their performance. Responses to the final question, Question 24, indicate that the participants perform better in the classroom than they do on the tests and levels of preparation may be tied to the schools they attended.

The results provided thus far regarding those who did not pass are only for the Praxis I. The following narrative is an analysis of the teachers who failed the Praxis II and the GACE. Four respondents failed the Praxis II, and all four of them were black females. Three of the four who failed also failed the Praxis I and two of the three attended HBCUs. The other two attended state universities; one had a degree in education and the other did not. Again, the lowest GPA among the four was 3.0-3.49. Similarly, none of the four thought the test was reflective of their teaching abilities and none received a rating of less than Satisfactory on the annual teacher evaluations.
Of the three participants who took the GACE, one teacher failed. The teacher who failed was a black male who attended a state university that was not a HBCU. He majored in biochemistry and obtained a 3.0-3.49 GPA. He reported that he was comfortable with the content portion of the test, but was not ready for the writing portion of the examination and he believed fatigue was a (major) factor. He also shared that he did not believe his university prepared him well enough to pass the licensure examination, though he was nonetheless able to pass on his second attempt.

**Introduction to Questionnaire Respondents**

Cumulative data shows there were a total of 10 tests failed across the three examinations. There were five failures on the Praxis I, four failures on the Praxis II, and one failure on the GACE. While there were a total of 10 failures, only seven of the 23 participants failed tests. Three respondents failed both the Praxis I and Praxis II, two failed only the Praxis I, one failed only the Praxis II, and one failed only the GACE.

**Single-test Failures**

Further scrutiny will be placed on single and repeat test failures. The focus lies initially on the four who failed only one examination, as the details may disclose that they were perhaps “outliers”. The first two, who failed the Praxis I only, were black females who attended a public HBCU and a private university. One majored in Early Childhood Education and the other in accounting. The high school GPA was between 3.0 – 3.49 for both teachers. One took the examination while in college (her sophomore year) and the other took it during her first year of teaching.

The teacher from the private university (Clark-Atlanta University) who took the test while in college thought she would pass the test the first time she took it, because it
covered basic knowledge. She also believed her university had prepared her well, but the math portion gave her great difficulty and she had to take the examination six times to pass it. Paradoxically, with regard to test taking, she reported that she is usually very confident and has learned to take her time and focus. As an Early Childhood Education teacher, math concepts would be one of the areas she would have to teach. While math was a difficult portion for her on the Praxis I, she reported that she met expectations on each of her last three teacher evaluations. The teacher is now teaching at the middle school level and it is unknown whether she obtained an endorsement in math or is teaching the subject in her current assignment. The question was not asked, nor was that information offered.

This particular teacher is an interesting case that offers few clues concerning why she had the degree of difficulty she experienced in passing the test. Reports from the NEA/ETS study indicate that her attendance at an HBCU could be an issue but her GPA and major provide no such insight. The teacher’s answers to the following two questions are worth reviewing. With regards to the test predicting her teaching ability or success, she flatly said “no”, but acknowledged simply, “I believe some people are great test takers while others may not be.” Her answer to the last question regarding providing any additional helpful information was:

This is an exceptional study. It is needed to help close the gap between schools where teachers are passing state license exams on the first try and those schools where they are not. It is definitely a concern that needs to be addressed. I have been out of undergrad for over 13 years and the problem still exists. It is almost as if the content and questions of the study hit close to home for her.
The other teacher, who only failed the Praxis I, was also a black female who attended a private university. She majored in accounting, had a high school GPA between 3.0 and 3.5, but took the test for the first time after she had begun teaching. In fact, she took the test no less than four times, but thought she would have passed it the first time because she thought college had prepared her. However, she did not believe the (alternative) teacher licensing program she went through prepared her at all for passing the Praxis II.

It must be noted that although this teacher indicated on Question 13 that she passed the Praxis II the first time, it is the researcher’s opinion, based on her other answers, that she actually did not. On Question 19 she answered that she took the Praxis II one additional time to pass, but correctly answered “N/A” to any additional attempts to pass the GACE. However, to not skew the numerical/statistical results of the study from what the database reports, the researcher will continue to treat the respondent as though she did pass. The inability to follow up because of anonymity precludes doing otherwise. Table 10 provides more detailed responses to the aforementioned questions.

The participant went on to report that she had excellent or better ratings on her last three evaluations, but admits to be very nervous when taking tests and not being a good test taker. She considers herself more of a “hands on” type of person. These self-identifiers provide some insight as to why the student may have failed her first attempt, assuming they are based on her own past test success experience, or lack thereof. Her case, by virtue of some telling answers, may be one worth taking a closer look at with regards to Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory.
The teacher from Georgia Southern University was the only one who failed Praxis II, but did not fail Praxis I. She attended a public state university, had a high school GPA of 3.5 to 4.0, and first took the test while a sophomore in college. She thought her school had prepared her very well and was confident she would pass because it was testing on basic skills. She did pass the Praxis II on her second attempt. The participant reported feeling good about the test both before and after taking it. She did not believe the examination was reflective of her teaching abilities, but believes her practical classroom experience is what ultimately helped her to be successful in the re-test.

Failure rates on the GACE conclude the review of single test failures. Data indicates there was only one participant who failed the GACE exam. This lone GACE fail was also the only black male teacher. He classified his college as “Other” and obtained a degree in biochemistry. His high school GPA was between 3.0 – 3.49 and he took the examination after he began teaching. He explained that he failed the broad science part of the test, and was particularly tripped up by the writing portion. He was comfortable with the content, but thought fatigue played a “major role” in his inability to write what he needed to pass. In fact, he also shared that he did not believe that his school had adequately prepared him for the test.

This particular teacher was successful on his second attempt and explained that he is usually very calm when taking tests because he does well in math and reading. His evaluations were “good” for the three-year period in question and like all of the candidates, he did not believe the test had any correlation to his teaching ability. His position was that his expertise lies in a particular area, but the test sought an unreasonable
depth of knowledge in all areas of science. In his case, based on self-reporting, there is nothing that overtly explains his test failure.

Before analyzing the responses of the three participants that failed both the Praxis I and the Praxis II, Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory will be briefly reviewed as it pertains to academic. In a trite summary, black students who take standardized tests do not fare as well as others when they know the test is measuring their academic ability because of the perceived expectation of their inability to perform well.

It is a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts that has proven true (quite successfully) in repeated studies by Steele (2010) and others that have replicated it in different settings. Likewise, though, Steele (2010) points out that the tenets of the theory are not limited to black people, but occur at the same rate for any group whose self-includes the expectation that they will underperform in a given area (for example women taking a math test). The travesty for black test takers is that so much is at stake on tests of intellectual ability, whether perceived or actual. Many major life decisions are predicated on the results of these tests. The following table provides a side-by-side look at the answers to the questions deemed most relevant to Steele’s (2010) theory, as provided by participants who failed one test.
Table 10

*Single-Failure Teachers’ Responses*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HBCU Teacher (Failed Praxis I)</th>
<th>Private Institution Teacher (Failed Praxis I)</th>
<th>Public University Teacher (Failed Praxis II)</th>
<th>Other College Teacher (Failed GACE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What is your race?</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Describe your experience taking this test.</td>
<td>Passed all but math; very frustrating. It took five to six tries</td>
<td>Unable to pass after four attempts</td>
<td>I took the test in a large group setting in my sophomore year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Did you think you would pass the Praxis I or GACE (as applicable) the first time you took it? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Yes; told it was just basic knowledge</td>
<td>Yes, I thought college prepared me</td>
<td>Yes, the test was based on basic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. How well did your (college/university) teacher preparation program prepare you to pass a teacher licensure exam?</td>
<td>Teacher prep prepared us well</td>
<td>None (not at all)</td>
<td>Very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Generally, what is your experience when you are required to take a test? (i.e. how do you feel before/during, etc.)</td>
<td>Very confident; learned to take my time and focus</td>
<td>I was nervous before, during, and after testing</td>
<td>I felt good about the test before and after. Felt well prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Also, considering your initial pass/fail status, do you think your performance on the exam was reflective of your prospective teaching abilities? Why or why not?</td>
<td>No; I believe some are great test takers while others may not be</td>
<td>No; my classroom performance outweighs my testing abilities</td>
<td>No; at the time I was in college, but I feel practical application from the classroom helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Please add any additional information that you think may be useful.</td>
<td>Exceptional study; needed to close the gap between schools whose students pass the first time and those who do not – a persistent problem for 13 years</td>
<td>Not everyone is good at test taking</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creating a visual representation is a method supported by Yin (2009) for analyzing case study data. Miles and Huberman (as cited in Yin, 2009) said you need to play with your data by “1) putting your information into different arrays, and 2) making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories” (p. 129).

Additionally, Yin (2009) explained the value of relying on theoretical propositions as a
method of analyzing by stating, “the first and most preferred strategy is to follow the theoretical propositions that led to your case study” (p. 129). These suppositions were the driving force behind the construction of Table 10.

To better determine whether or not stereotype threat theory was a factor in the failure rate of these four teachers, a more in-depth analysis was constructed of the questions posed in Table 10. Specifically, questions related to the testing experience were investigated. Initial data collected from the online questionnaires indicated some confusion regarding what the questions were actually asking. This diminished the application and value of side-by-side comparisons. Better wording may have precluded such disparity. For example, in Question 12: *Describe your test-taking experience*, most spoke of the conditions under which they tested, rather than how they felt about the test.

Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory has two basic core premises; a test taker identifies with a particular group, and the test taker is aware of the perceptions associated with their expected performance (e.g., on tests measuring intellectual ability). All four teachers acknowledged their affiliation with the first, but not all the second. Without explicit knowledge, clues in their responses must be sought to determine such awareness.

The HBCU and private institution teachers expressed a sense of frustration upon multiple failures. These teachers along with the other two teachers expressed a sense of confidence that they would pass the test. However, the private institution teacher’s collective answers seem to indicate a *general* lack of confidence. The HBCU teacher clearly indicated a perceptual awareness, as evidenced by the additional information she provided to Question 24. All the teachers indicated a lack of confidence in tests that measure their testing abilities.
Reluctantly would be the best way to describe whether or not stereotype threat was a factor here, at least for these four participants. Stereotype threat may be a factor for the first two teachers, the HBCU and the private institution, as both seem to indicate a distinct awareness of shortcomings. This awareness of shortcomings was probably exacerbated by repeated attempts to pass. Cumulative analysis of these four teachers seems to indicate that stereotype threat was present in half of the cases. To further expound upon the single-test failure findings are the three examples of teachers who failed both the Praxis I and the Praxis II.

**Multiple-test Failures**

Three respondents failed both the Praxis I and the Praxis II. All three were black females, two of whom attended HBCUs and one who attended a public state university. Only one of the three teachers majored in (special) education, while another majored in sociology and the other in chemistry. All three had high school GPAs that ranged from 3.0 to 3.49, however, each one took the Praxis I at a different time; one while in college, another just after graduation, and the third while teaching. Their descriptions about their testing experience was little more than a narration of the outcome, and two of the three thought they were prepared and would have passed. One question specifically asked: *Did you think you would pass the Praxis I or GACE (as applicable) the first time you took it? Why or why not?* Two of the three teachers report feeling confident that they would pass.

Consistent with previous information regarding preparation, one teacher delayed testing until 25 years after college, another thought her university did a good job of preparing them, and the last believed her preparation was more theoretical than practical. However, there was a notable exception in response to the question: *Generally, what is*
your experience when you are required to take a test? In response to this question, one said: “I am not a good test taker. I become anxious and get very nervous.” Another expressed that, “I really stress when I need to take a test, I do a lot of relaxing activities, I study a lot weeks before, I will not study two days before the test. I do not believe in cramming.” The last participant summed it up in just one word; “Anxiety!” While varying degrees of stress are to be expected prior to an examination, if the test taker feels confident in their knowledge and ability to pass, their anxiety should be low.

The respondents answers to the question of whether or not tests measure their ability to teach, underscore a sense of defensiveness. The teachers did not believe that one has any bearing or relationship to the other. A closer examination of their responses proves revealing. One HBCU teacher said that, “No, because I have learned more from workshops, staff development, and self-development than from the test or classes in college.” The second HBCU teacher commented that, “I do not think my performance on the exam was reflective of my performance on an exam. If there is something that I need to teach someone, I know how to prepare myself to do so.” Lastly, the state university teacher shared that, “No, because you can be too smart that it’s hard to convey info to students. I had teachers like that.”

Though the demographic and descriptive background information is useful, the thrust of the applicability of Steele’s (2010) theory comes down to the three factors mentioned earlier; identification, awareness, and caring. An argument could be made regarding the last two questions outlined above, that stereotype threat theory is applicable. Steele (2010) would want to know, if the effect of stigma pressure on these black teachers’ intellectual performance accounted for them failing both tests.
Applying the theory becomes difficult because of questions asked after the fact. In addition to confirming a stigma assigned to black intellectual ability, Steele (2010) discusses another dimension. He said:

Finally, there was evidence that the threat of the stereotype pressured a search for excuses, a search for something other than oneself to blame for poor performance on…. At risk of a stereotype judgment, these students understandably sought some means of softening its blow should it befall them. (Steele, 2010, p. 54)

The difficulty in applying this sentiment is that the questions are now being asked after they have taken the test, and failed it. One cannot know what answers might have been given had the question been asked before the test.

Forced to address what is known, it does appear that there is a degree of rationalization made. All three expressed doubt cloaked in the words of being anxious and of not being a good test taker, as if to suggest one should not expect a positive outcome. Similarly, these three responded the same as the other 20 participants did: failing the test proved nothing with regards to predicting their ability to be successful classroom teachers. While not conclusive, there certainly appear to be some elements of Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory evident here.

In reviewing the previous four (single-test) failures, and considering the dimension that involves lowering expectations as an aspect of the theory, only one seems to clearly not fit the mold; the public university teacher who failed only the Praxis II. She offered no explanations, she indicated she was fully prepared and she expected to pass. That said, the online questionnaire is only one component of this multiple case study evaluation. It remains to be seen whether or not the interviews, which lend themselves to
much more in-depth probing and questioning, will confirm or dispute the application of stereotype threat theory.

**Introduction to Interviews**

Five teachers were interviewed from Baxter Elementary School, all of whom failed state licensure testing. Demographic and background information were established in the beginning, with critical questions presented in an open-ended format. The interviewees were encouraged to respond with whatever information they thought was appropriate. All five participants were receptive to the interview and eagerly answered the questions. Their responses were extremely candid and many similarities were noted in their responses. When selecting teachers, an interesting phenomenon occurred. There was one colleague who assisted in identifying teachers to interview. When scheduling the interviews seemed to be an issue, the colleague had little difficulty finding five teachers who had failed at least one of the three tests and fit the additional selection criteria.

This colleague did not stop at five possible interviewees; she stopped querying pass/fail status after the eighth (confirmed) teacher. Eight! The first eight teachers the colleague asked, confirmed that they fit the (failure) criteria at Baxter Elementary School, all of whom happened to be female. Both of the males who had been asked passed all tests. How many more of the black female teachers out of the 23 at Baxter Elementary would have reported that they failed one of the three tests? Even if no others had failed, the failure rate would already be no less than 35 percent.

If the teachers at Baxter Elementary demonstrated test taking difficulties, the question arises as to the impact this might have on the academic performance of the
students they teach. Baxter Elementary has met or exceeded state standards for the last three years at every grade level from first to fifth grade. The transcript of their interviews may be found in the appendices, but the most germane part of their dialogue is analyzed in the following sections. Like the online questionnaire respondents, their answers were viewed through the theoretical construct of Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory. Analysis reveals that a prominent theme emerged from their interviews.

**Subject Interview I: Nancy James**

Nancy James (a pseudonym) is a teacher at Baxter Elementary. She was the first teacher who agreed to participate in these interviews. She is a black female who has been teaching for 13 years. She attended Murray State University in Georgia, which is a state college, and majored in Early Childhood Education. Her high school GPA was “at least a 2.5.” Nancy took the Praxis I for the first time in college during her junior year (because her school required them to do so) and she passed it.

In describing her feelings about the test, Nancy shared that she was a “little nervous” because she did not know exactly what to expect. Also, she elected not to participate in any of the study groups, instead “going off what I learned in my regular classes.” When asked why she eschewed the groups, she reported that given she was a nontraditional student and they were so much younger, she would have felt uncomfortable around them outside of the classroom setting.

The Praxis II was a different story. That test was focused on elementary education coursework and Nancy thought she would do well on it. Instead, Nancy missed passing the test by exactly five points, twice! Her initial level of confidence before taking the test she was tied to the fact that she received A’s and B’s in the related
academic coursework. When asked if she believed there was any type of disconnect between how she was graded and her performance on the test, she was not sure. She attributed her failing score due to the fact that she bounced between schools as an undergraduate student. Nancy believes she may have somehow missed something by taking core classes in one place and general studies (elective) courses in another.

Nancy confessed that she became more nervous the more times she took the test. By her third test session, she questioned whether she had missed some academic material along the way or was not using the correct terminology or “buzz” words the scorers might have been expecting to see. Upon reflection and returning to her experience, Nancy discussed how different and disconnected her two educational experiences were. The curriculum and “working in groups” philosophy in Georgia was not as rigid as the academic coursework she obtained in Pennsylvania. Upon asking her to compare the overall curriculum between the two schools, she rated the Pennsylvania school an 8 and the Georgia school at a 6.5. Nancy blamed this part of her education for having to take the Praxis II a total of three times in order to pass.

When asked about her general attitude towards tests, Nancy explained that: I’m not the greatest test taker, but I don’t shy away from it. It doesn’t make me nervous when I hear ‘test’. It’s only certain areas that I don’t feel I’m as immersed in that I should be, like, social studies and science, but everything else I could probably do pretty well in.

Despite her opinion and failing the Praxis II twice, Nancy maintains that she still has a healthy self-esteem. She is adamant about the fact that, no matter what, she is confident in her ability to teach someone how to grasp a concept. She admits that the test results
could have had that effect on her – but it did not; her voice then trailed off as she said, “… but no, I don’t think it personally did”.

One of the things that helped her to gain confidence about retesting was that she was not the only one who needed to retest. In her own words, “… but because I have known people that failed it many more times that I had, so I wasn’t feeling bad or down on myself.” As the interview progressed, Nancy became more self-reflective and became somewhat defensive about her self-perception.

A sense of absolution emerged in subsequent questions and a previously mentioned area of weaknesses resurfaced. When given the opportunity to re-visit what she might have done differently since high school to influence a different test outcome, Nancy remarked that she would have paid more attention in school, especially in social studies and science. She admits that to this day, when asked to teach social studies and science beyond the third-grade level she consequently feels challenged and uncomfortable. Nancy’s response reveals underlying feelings of self-doubt. Her answer to the follow-on question supports this.

Nancy was asked: Do you think there’s anything concerning where you were born, raised, or attended public school that could have factored into your testing experience for the first time? Why or why not? Her response was:

It could have because there is a stigma – because I was born and raised in the South, in Atlanta, and you know there’s a stigma that Southerners, we aren’t as exposed or we don’t know as much as those who went to school in the north and by me living and growing up here and then eventually moving up to Pennsylvania, I did notice a difference in the education, even with my child. My
children went to school up there and when we moved back down here I was like, wow my daughter was in kindergarten putting commas in sentences and we get back down here and that’s not taught until third grade. She was in kindergarten? So, yeah, I think so.

Her response was very enlightening because it is her experience, in her own words.

It was similarly interesting when Nancy responded to the question concerning her perception of cultural bias and the examination. She thought the tests could be culturally biased, but sought the need for statistics to know for sure. Nancy shared that she knew, “plenty of sisters…” who had failed the examination and being surprised that they had done so. She mentioned teacher one in particular with whom she had student taught and regarded as a “very good” teacher. This teacher teaches in a neighboring county school district, just received her doctorate degree, and was selected teacher of the year. However, this teacher required “ten or more times to pass the Praxis.” Nancy then concluded her answer to the question by saying, “So, it could be.”

When asked about the type of education program she had gone through (traditional program), Nancy lamented about how unfair she thought it was that so many teachers come to teaching through the Teach for America (TFA) program. The idea that a prospective teacher could have chosen to major in any other discipline, yet still be afforded the opportunity to teach, did not seem to sit well with her. She concluded by pointing out that she did not think TFA teachers were fully prepared to enter the classroom because in her opinion, “… they need to be thoroughly immersed.”

The concluding question of the interview began by introducing Nancy to the basic premise of stereotype threat theory. She was then asked whether or not she believes there
is any merit to it, based on her own experiences regarding the field of education. Anything other than Nancy’s own words would not as aptly convey the message she shared. Her response was:

Well, that’s a hard question because if you already know that someone has prejudged your ability that will mess with you psychologically. So if you are at that age that has been, and honestly, I was going to say, maybe it’s where you were raised that may already be a thought in your head because, you know, depending on the area that you were raised in that it’s something that your family…. We already know that they’re not going to do well, blah, blah, blah. Whereas, in other areas, maybe that’s not even a subject that’s brought up so … if it’s something that you are aware of that will mess with you psychologically, but if it’s something that is never brought up and you grow up in an area where it’s not just African Americans, then maybe you don’t have that preconceived notion that someone thinks that of you.

To synthesize Nancy’s thoughts, the question was repeated: So do you think that his theory has merit? Nancy replied, “I’m sure. Yes, I think it does.”

When offered the opportunity to provide closing comments about any aspect of the test or testing, Nancy explained that she is not sure how she feels about the tests overall. She reiterated that she did not feel the courses taught at her (Georgia) university sufficiently prepared her for the test. She also shared that the teacher candidates she knows who are required to take the GACE as opposed to the Praxis, are still not faring well on the state licensure examinations. Her closing words on this issue are as follow:
I just think the colleges and the board, whoever comes up with these tests to get your license, they need to have something in place to make sure that when teachers come through colleges, that they know the information that they need to know. Instead, you have this college not focusing as much in this particular area as this college did, so this person is better prepared for the test than this person, who is over here at another college. Just like they have common core, where everything is supposed to be on the same level, they need to make sure the teachers, the students that are coming through to major in education, are also on a level playing field as far as the material they’re being given in these education courses.

Subject Interview II: Ramona Evans

Ramona is a black female who has been teaching for 10 years. She attended a predominantly white, state university named University of Southern Indiana. Of the 8,000 students who attended there, 98 of them were black. She earned a bachelor’s of science in education and entered the school with a 3.3 high school GPA. She was a senior in college when she took her first Praxis exam; however, she did not pass it the first time she took it.

Ramona explained that she took full advantage of every opportunity provided her because she knew she wasn’t strong in writing. She fondly remembers attending tutorials that were offered by a “wonderful” retired professor from the university. She shared that he covered a different subject each day of tutoring and she went as often as three times a week. Nevertheless, she confessed to being scared going into the writing portion of the
Praxis exam, the essay. Ramona was actually strong in math and as a freshman; she attended math class with juniors and seniors.

Consequently, she thought she would do well on the math portion of the Praxis I; however, it was the math and the reading that she actually failed. The writing, which she regarded as her weakest subject, was the one she passed. It took Ramona two more attempts to pass the reading and math portions of the test. (Ramona did not have to take, or does not recall taking, the Praxis II. She also did not take the GACE) When asked then how well she felt she was prepared by her university to take the Praxis I, she replied, “Coming from Indiana they were very thorough in making sure you had an understanding for the exam, so a lot of the questions were familiar to me.” She explained that her scores were “really close” to passing on the two sections she failed. Years later, Ramona is still in disbelief that she failed the math portion of the exam.

Ramona wonders if it would have made a difference if she had taken the test earlier than her senior year. She repeated that the (math) practice sessions should have made a difference. When probed, she explained that she attended math practice sessions when they were offered as well, usually about three times a week. Again Ramona commented on the “awesome” professor who was about 60 years old and retired, but was dedicated to helping all of the teacher education students to pass the Praxis I. In her mind, he was the sole reason for her success on the writing portion. After reflecting for a moment, Ramona added that he and the amount of emphasis she herself placed on it due to her level of concern were probably the reasons.

When asked about her experience in general when it came to taking tests, Ramona opined about how poorly her university did regarding their end-of-course requirements
but did not discuss testing. A portfolio for music and a 27-page project in a special education class were a few examples of the end-of-course requirements that she had to complete, rather than an examination. She found that disconcerting because she felt the semester coursework aligned with what they needed to know, but this material was not revisited before tests.

Through further discussion, it became evident that Ramona was referring to course material taught during her freshman year, which she did not see again until she took the Praxis. As a senior being tested on concepts presented much earlier in her college career, she felt herself to be at a distinct disadvantage. She commented that she probably needed, “…to go back and look at my notes before I was taking my exams.” Learning from this experience, as a teacher, she incorporates reviews for her students before tests. These reviews cover material presented at different points in the school year so that her students will not feel like they had never seen the material before.

Ramona believed that an equal part of her problem in passing the test was that she is not a good test taker. She explained that while she may perform well on course examinations, when it comes to finals or standardized tests, she does not. When she hears the proctor proclaim that there is only 30 minutes left, she begins to freeze up rather than work faster. However, she staunchly claims those scores have absolutely no bearing on her teaching ability. “Cause even people that are test takers that pass the test with flying colors don’t make a good educator,” she stated.

Similar to the first interviewee, Ramona recalled having a student teacher two years ago, a black female, who took the GACE five times but could not pass it. Ramona shared, “She was so upset that she left the profession, but in the classroom an excellent
teacher!” She continued, “I told her I’d even pay for it because you have a passion to work for the kids and you’d be an excellent educator, but she said I’m going back to New York, I’m through!” Ramona observed this particular teacher in the classroom and said the kids loved her; she was an “Excellent!” teacher. Upon being asked what she told her the problem was, Ramona replied that it was the “… the basics; whatever the GACE test is now. She couldn’t pass it.”

When asked if there was anything she would have done differently, from high school, given the opportunity Ramona said:

I did everything I could! I stayed every week, three sessions. The professor knew me by first and last name and couldn’t wait for me to take the test. If somebody offered anything free, I was there. I studied, had all the books, I went everywhere I could to make sure I had all the knowledge I thought I needed to pass the test.

Even all that stuff couldn’t do anything for it.

Ramona offered some insight after reflecting for a moment. She reported that she grew up in a small town and attended a high school of 800 with only 20 black students. Her statement captures the essence of her experience:

I know with the background of my family, my mother didn’t graduate from high school; she dropped out at the age of 16. My father didn’t graduate from high school so our language skills and writing skills wasn’t the best and I was always pretty much weak in that area due to the background of the environment that I grew up in, which, is life. So that’s something I couldn’t change. Can’t change what you’re born into. You can only try to do the best that you can, but with all that being said and them knowing my family and knowing
the background that I grew up in - we were very poor. So, basically, the school helped us.

And me playing sports they wanted to make sure that I got all that I needed to become successful in life. I didn’t drop out. I paid for my sports and my shoes. And they – I know that they probably knew I had a weakness in my writing and reading all throughout high school. Now, they didn’t bother me with it. They always gave me pointers on how I could change the writing, this, that, and another, but they never failed me or made me feel like I couldn’t do it. And then when I got in college and I had to take those general courses I knew I really wasn’t there for the experience of needing that writing and language background and skills, but my whole thing at that point is determination. I was determined to graduate from college and be the first one from my family.

I was determined to have a house where my parents - we hardly had - we lived in a two bedroom with five kids. So sometimes when you have that determination and that will to be successful, even if you know that you have a deficiency in an area you don’t get stopped because of you not having that – I mean, I’m okay now but I know that it’s still a weakness to me. Even getting the education leadership at a 3.8 GPA in college I had hell writing my papers. I know where I lack but I’ve never let it stop me at what level I want to be on in life. So if I had to take that test ten times to pass it I would have took it ten times and that’s what I couldn’t get my student teacher to understand. Even if you only took it five times take it a sixth, seventh - don’t ever let a test stop where you want to be in life as a goal. So with that being said, I wouldn’t change nothing. It only
built me up, made me stronger. Success is not always measured by your grades, if you pass a test; it’s if you’re determined to pass that test. That’s really what it boils down to, “are you determined?” I got my Master’s. My parents look at me – “what?! You finished your Bachelors’ now you got your Master’s?!” I don’t know what else I want in life. I’m okay without getting the doctoral but if I’m determined enough I’ll go back and try for it.

When asked if she thought the test was culturally biased, Ramona did not believe so. She indicated that, as long as there is a consistent standard across the states, there should not be cultural bias, but that it has been so long that she really cannot remember. Her answers to the question of teachers needing a background in the field of education were similar to the first interviewee. Without a doubt, she thought it was necessary to have more teachers but that they were somewhat resented. The interview concluded with the question concerning thoughts about Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory:

I think… I know that this may be a bad thought but I think sometimes as we want to make excuses for ourselves as an African American we use our color to justify why we may not do well. Now, I don’t know if I actually agree that as an African American – because, to be honest with you, I grew up with Caucasians. I mean, people probably say she acts white. But no, that’s just what I grew up in and I think often times we see ourselves that we can’t be successful because we’re Black. We can’t pass the test because we’re Black. That’s not true. I think it depends on how much education and background that we receive would either take some of that pressure off of us to do better on the test but often we just need to have that determination I said earlier that we going to pass the test.
I think it’s a mind thing but we can’t use our color as a reason why we don’t do well. And the reason why I say that is we may not initially know how many Caucasian people didn’t pass. And a lot of times they don’t want you to know. But, overall, we have got to get out of that frame of mind that our color can stop us from being successful. That’s just my point of view. That’s my point of view. If you’re taking the same test that I’m taking not unless it’s got something on there that actually says to the effect that – like I tell people all the time, when we talk about the CRCT and then in Indiana I think they take the ISTEP test. There is some difference because in Indiana we may talk about there’s a row of corn, there’s six rows of corn and six are vertical or something and then down here if it was on the kids test in Georgia and they’re exposed to the city they might say well I don’t understand the question because this talking about ears of corn.

Now, if it’s set up like that where it depends on the area so we’re going to make this test like this area and Georgia’s look like this then I would say yes. Then it’s for us to not do well on, but if the test is set up general black or white it doesn’t matter the color. Because you can have somebody at 4.0 and they won’t pass the test. It may be worded a little different. It may be worded in education acronyms but if it’s the same in education field in Indiana as it is in Georgia then it has nothing to do with color. And overall, we probably have less people that are African American in the education field because that’s not where we want to be in. That’s just how it is.

Subject Interview III: Joi Johnson
Jo is a black female teacher of 12 years who attended a public HBCU, Jackson State University, in Jackson, Mississippi. She majored in Elementary Education and had a high school GPA of 3.2. Jo took the Praxis I for the first time as a junior in college and the Praxis II while student teaching. She failed the Praxis I on her first attempt, which was handwritten, but passed it the second time when she took it on the computer. Jo failed the reading test as well, but also passed that portion on her second attempt. Her own words can best describe the thoughts and feelings she had going into the test:

As far as the writing was concerned, I knew my problem was basically writing the way I talk, so a lot of the grammatical errors I had not mastered even throughout college so I don’t think that I was ready academically to be successful. Plus, I struggled with reading even in elementary school and thus it affected my writing. I think I should have had a little more preparation within my classes to have success on that writing test.

Upon mentioning preparation, she was asked her thoughts on how well her university did in preparing her for the test. She explained that she did not have practice writing within a certain topic. Jo lamented that, “I wasn’t as prepared for Praxis I as others; we did not have enough material that gave us enough practice, but by the time we got to the Praxis II and beyond, there were more preparation materials available.”

She added that she found the subject matter difficult. In this context, she mentioned the challenge of the reading, and how it in turn affected her writing. She insisted she kept a degree of confidence nonetheless. There was little doubt in Jo’s mind that she would pass both exams before taking them.
Even with the thoughts of her Praxis I failure in the back of her mind, Joi claimed she maintained a sense of confidence by simply preparing more. She availed herself to any books she could to help her preparation efforts for the Praxis I. For the Praxis II, she passed with the content knowledge she had acquired throughout the years. Though she attributed classroom experience for helping her to learn what she would eventually need to pass, Joi shared that she also volunteered in the schools as well. She insisted the hands-on experience from both teaching and volunteering made the difference in her performance on the Praxis II. Her participation in study groups with four to five classmates also helped immensely. That approach became necessary because, “When it came to Praxis in Jackson State, you’re almost on your own as far as the test prep part; professors just were not available for that.”

When asked about her general experience taking tests, Joi stated that she disliked them and did not feel they were a valid indicator for her future success as a teacher. She expanded upon the idea that her opportunity to practice in her chosen field would be determined on whether or not she could pass a test. That notion made no sense to her and she stated that this method should not be the determining factor impacting her fate and chance to do what she loves. As Joi explained what would happen if she did not pass the exam; she could get her degree, but she could not teach. She said she wished she had known that before she started and wanted to know why so many? Joi concluded by saying that she was, and is, nervous the entire time when taking a test.

Given the opportunity to start anew from high school, Joi said that she would have made sure she knew the material covered better by researching it and studying
more, even taking additional classes in that area. Regarding the impact of her actual upbringing, Joi expressed a belief in the deficiency of her early education. She stated:

I think that the schools I went to throughout middle and elementary, high school – I don’t think that I was prepared as others. And I say that because when I think about my writing and my reading compared to my classmates, I just feel that they had better exposure based off what they could produce compared to what I could produce.

Eventually placing blame with her university, Joi lamented that:

I think my environment did play, you know, where I came from and the school’s caliber of teaching it may have played a small part, but I still think that my school should have provided something for those that struggled… even when I took the Praxis I, I failed and I went back, I really still didn’t have any other things to prepare, I just went back hoping and praying the second time I did better. It’s not like there were some things available or the school provided me with additional help so that when I did it the second time I would do better.

Joi also confessed that she believes the test is culturally biased because it is not “relatable” most of the time. For example, some of the topics they give you to write about come down to what you had been exposed to within your given culture. If your exposure was minimal, and you are tested at a “higher level,” then it is “cultural/educational” disproportionate, she stated. She thought that was cultural bias.

Concluding with the question on stereotype threat theory, Joi said:

I can understand that theory by saying that we have added pressure just because of our background, of having that risk of failure. I understand that and I agree with
it, but, I guess it also depends on the confidence you have and the exposure that have to prepare. I sort of, kind of, agree. I can see why his conclusion is stereotypically we have to come in with that even extra burden of failure than a person who is not of our ethnic background. And that’s true, we almost have to go in almost proving we can do what it says that we can do (though perhaps she meant “can’t”).

When asked for clarification, if she was saying there was an extra burden then based on race, she responded with, “Definitely, it was an issue for me.” In a follow-up question about whether she related it back to her environmental situation or upbringing, she responded, “partly.” Joi returned to the idea that her school could have done more to help her, compared to other schools. That concluded the interview.

**Subject Interview IV: Marie Rogers**

Marie is a black, female teacher with 13 years of teaching experience who attended a private university and majored in Business Management. Her high school GPA was “two point something” but she could not exactly remember. Marie did not take the Praxis I until her second year of teaching, but she passed it the first time. She reported that she does not like to take tests. She shared that, “I have test anxiety and the fear of me taking a test based on my career; I have no desire to take that test.” When asked then whether or not she passed the Praxis II on her first attempt, she reported that she did not.

She did not think she would have passed either the Praxis I or Praxis II the first time because she said she does not test well. Her concerns were further exacerbated by the fact that she believed her teacher education program did not prepare her to test. Their
preparation was “None; zero percent.” She explained that she had a nine-month alternative certification program that did not prepare her for the classroom or for the exam. In fact, when asked how many attempts it took her to pass the Praxis II, she said that, “I never passed it. It took me about four times and I gave up.”

When questioned about her experience in general when it came to taking tests, Marie talked of, “Butterflies in the stomach, whatever they say, I just want to get it over.” However, she did not think the results of her test cast any reflection on her ability as a teacher. She elaborated that, “It was like a separate entity. What I’m able to accomplish in the classroom is not the same as the exam,” she concluded, “… the exam does not prepare me for the classroom. It’s not the same.”

Given the chance to do things differently from high school on, Marie said she would have taken more advanced classes that would have better prepared her to test. Connected to the question about her upbringing or background factoring in to her test situation, Marie explained that:

I guess you could say that I’m not the best writer and if I had someone who more prepared me and took the time to work with me, maybe that could have been part of my upbringing…. And also, being in a house where both parents had less education, maybe that could have been a contributing factor too. Or it could have just been me not taking the initiative to do that.

When asked about whether or not the test was culturally biased, Marie did not respond immediately. She simply explained that her problem centered on an inability to discern between what she deemed “two possible answers” and her consistently choosing the wrong one. She lamented that each time she felt she could have gone either way, but
she always just made the wrong choice. She concluded there was no cultural bias, it was just “… me not knowing the correct answer.”

Regarding the matter of traditional teacher preparation programs versus alternative certification, Marie staunchly believes nothing can take the place of a four-year education curriculum. She expressed that unlike the nine-month program of which she was a part:

I think a person comes in to education they need the four years’ experience of education, not just nine months, ‘cause in four years, you’re more prepared for the classroom, because it gives you an opportunity to see everything from every perspective of education.

Concluding the interview with her response to Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory, Marie opined:

I feel there’s a lot of pressure when you’re taking those standardized tests because they do look at the fact that if you pass or fail when you’re looking to apply for a position and if you didn’t pass those tests then you’re not qualified for the position and that’s just based on the test, not based on your performance in the classroom. I can’t speak for every African American, but I can speak for myself, those tests is not a reflection of my ability in the classroom.

When asked to elaborate about the “pressure” she mentioned relative to Steele (2010), her focus remained on the pressure associated with the potential inability to secure a position without passing the test and obtaining licensure. Marie concluded the interview this way:
If I had to do it all over again, I would not choose education; I would have stayed in the business management profession and never looked at education. I wouldn’t suggest to anyone to go into education if they are not a strong test taker.

Subject Interview V: Emily Shell

Emily is a black female with 16 years teaching experience who attended a public HBCU, Clark-Atlanta University, and majored in Early Childhood Education. She reported her high school GPA as 3.1. She took the Praxis I while still in college, during the latter part of her senior year, but she did not pass. She added that she took it two or three more times before she did pass it.

Emily reports feeling comfortable going into the exam the first time, but became nervous with each successive attempt. To bolster her chances of passing, she studied in study groups. She confided that she felt “pressured” because her certification hung in the balance and the sense of pressure was joined by a sense of bias about the test. She expounded by saying that she was advised by others to be cautious about reporting certain requested information, like your GPA, as if that somehow communicated a message about yourself. Emily also provided the unsolicited statement that she felt the test did not measure her ability to teach.

At this point in the interview, Emily clarified a statement she made earlier; she never passed the Praxis I. She took the GACE when it was offered and passed it on her first attempt. In fact, relative to the Praxis I, she found the GACE sort of “easy.” Emily also confided that she had been teaching under a provisional license when she passed the GACE, which added to her pressure because she would have been removed from the
classroom had she failed it. What helped her to pass was the hands-on teaching experience she possessed.

When asked if she passed the Praxis II the first time she took it, Emily said no, she did not pass the entire test, just the written portion. That still counted as a failure, so once again she had to re-take the test. As previously mentioned, she did pass the GACE on her first attempt. She reported feeling less nervous about taking the GACE because it was a new test written by a new company.

Emily thought her coursework at Clark-Atlanta was geared towards education, not test taking. College preparation for taking the test navigating her way around it, and understanding the nuances, did not exist. She was not able to compare her college test-taking experience with others. She claimed she took the ACT and SAT too long ago to remember feeling any pressure to perform, nor did she take it seriously. That has changed now though, because as much as she wants to obtain additional endorsements, they require testing, which now make her “a little leery.”

Upon being asked about what she would do differently if given the chance, as far back as high school, Emily said she would have taken the SAT more seriously. If she had performed well enough on the SAT, she would have been exempt from taking the Praxis I and subsequently the Praxis II. When asked about how her upbringing or where she was from might have impacted her test scores, Emily replied:

I really don’t want to believe that but I do feel as if there was some stigma to it, you know, to the test because I remember they used to have the TCT test and just listening to people who took that test and passing that test, I felt in my mind that there were some things that were changed because our race, more of us, and I say
us as black Americans, were passing the test, so they felt a need to change the test.

Emily provided additional answers that were a departure from the question; however, attempts were made to clarify. After repeating the question about the possible impact of her background, Emily responded:

Honestly I think so. I never passed it. It took me about four times and I gave up. So yes, I think my background had something to do with it; I think exposure had a lot to do with it, so yes I do think.

Emily stridently expressed a need for additional education coursework for teachers. She consistently re-emphasized that she had nothing against those who went through alternative certification programs; she just felt they needed the experience of discussing education and instruction in a classroom environment to better understand what it meant to differentiate instruction and teach across the curriculum. She also mentioned how hard she had to work to obtain the skills she needed to be successful in the field, so they needed to do likewise.

Emily opined in response to the last question involving whether or not she thought Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory had any merit. She offered:

I agree with that. I totally agree with that. I think African Americans are pressured. I feel we are prepped for testing differently from other cultures and other economic groups as it relates to our race and because we’re under pressure we feel like I have to do this, I have to do different things to be successful. And I don’t think we should be measured by testing in the education field.
You have some teachers, they have degrees on top of degrees take tests and they just- some people are just great test takers where you have some that are not great test takers and I use myself as- I don’t think I’m a great test taker. I think I’m a better test taker now because I know the importance. I have to take a test in order to get another endorsement so for me I feel like it’s more so. I have to do it in order to advance not because I need to know it, not because- some people do things just because. Some people do things because I have to do this in order to advance. So I feel yes we are pressured to have to take a test.

She then began sharing information about her son, who is also an education major, then concluded the interview by reiterating her agreement with Steele’s (2010) precepts:

And I’ll use my son as an example. This is his area. He’s kinesiology with a minor in education and I stay on him and I don’t know if it’s right or if it’s wrong but I stay on him all the time. And those content areas make sure you paying attention. You know, I almost feel like I have to prep him so when that testing time comes for him he’ll be prepared to take it not because - I think it’s more so he can be successful.

And I feel like in order to be successful in the education field you have to pass a test and I don’t think they should measure how well or how excellent of a teacher you can be because some people test very well and, I compare myself to some people, I feel I’m way ahead of them when it comes to the classroom. But other people look, because they have more endorsements and in order to get the endorsement you have to take a test.
So no, I don’t think it should measure me so I do agree with that we are pressured and if we can’t pass the test then we’re looked at differently and if we don’t have this endorsement- I honestly feel that- I agree with that statement that we are pressured to- testing really drives how far you can go in the education field because you have to get endorsements, you have to get paper on top of paper and I just feel like it’s just more testing and a paper trail in the education field so yes I agree with him on that.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to better understand why there are a disproportionate number of black teachers failing state teacher licensure examinations across the United States by focusing on those in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. An additional emphasis was placed on this phenomenon in re-segregated schools because their teaching staffs are predominantly black, which would further exacerbate the effect of removing such teachers from those classrooms.

Chapter Four captured the voices of the participants through questionnaires and interviews. Each teacher was given the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences relative to the state teacher licensure testing experience. While many of the participants shared common experiences, they all had different beliefs and backgrounds. Therein lays the challenge of attempting to discern the factors that may have contributed most significantly to the difficulties they experienced in passing the state examinations. Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory was the framework through which the study viewed this problem. While this framework helps to understand the problem under investigation, it does not offer solutions to it.
Chapter Five will address the need for future action by offering recommendations based on the findings. Cross-case analysis will be conducted to synthesize findings across the various participants. Results of this study will then be compared and contrasted against the NEA/ETS findings in an attempt to gain workable solutions to the identified problem. Finally, the researcher will summarize by offering directions for further study.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“I wouldn’t suggest to anyone to go into education if they are not a strong test taker.”
- Marie Rogers
Elementary Teacher Interviewee

Introduction

There is no ethnic or racial group who scores lower on every conceivable state licensure test given to educators and prospective educators, than black teachers. Black teachers are being disproportionately removed from the classroom while the need for them continues to rise. The increase of urban, re-segregated schools, where the majority of black teachers are found, further exacerbates this issue. This phenomenon appears to be occurring in greater numbers with the standards encouraged by NCLB and imposed by states. If allowed to persist, this dichotomy will have an adverse effect on not only children of color, but on all children attending schools of all kinds: public, private, rural, urban, and suburban. The overarching question of this study asks why this phenomenon is occurring.

Chapter Five begins by reviewing this study’s premise and research questions. Subsequent sections present synthesized findings for each research question asked. These analyses are followed by a cross-case comparison to a joint study by NEA/ETS. Finally,
overall conclusions and recommendations are presented including directions for further research.

**Purpose**

Current research details the positive impact of black teachers on black students; however, the number of black teachers is dwindling due to current federal legislation. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lower pass rates of black teachers on teacher licensure exams compared to their peers of other races. These lower pass rates have resulted in preventing teacher candidates from entering the field, and have disproportionately removed those who presently teach in it.

The findings dictate a need for a range of actions from reconstructing the tests, to utilizing supplemental materials (e.g., portfolios), or eliminating the tests altogether. However, the latter consideration is the one that would be the most involved, as it may require changes to current state or federal legislation. Without modifications, the current test procedures undermine black teacher recruiting efforts presently in place nationwide.

**Research Questions**

1. According to teacher perception, how well do colleges and universities prepare black teachers to pass state teacher licensure examinations?

2. How does stereotype threat influence the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations?

3. Is initial failure of a state teacher licensure examination a valid indicator of future observed teacher performance?
Summary and Analysis of Question One: Perception of Preparation

Multiple factors contribute to the disproportionate number of black teachers failing state licensure exams. Three key contributing themes have emerged from an analysis of the findings: preparation, self-deprecation and fortitude, and upbringing and rearing.

Preparation

Chief among them is the concept of preparation. Black teachers feel as though they had prepared themselves adequately, but report that they were not prepared well enough by the academic institutions they attended. Given the evidence collected, institutions may have adequately prepared teachers to teach but they failed to adequately prepare them to pass the test to allow them to teach. A closer look at the issue of preparation is addressed by the first research question: *What factors contribute to the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations?*

Preparation was the first factor identified that contributes to the question of why some teachers failed their initial state teacher licensing examination. Both groups of participants, the middle school group who answered the online questionnaire and the elementary school group who participated in the interviews, were asked the question concerning respondents’ perceived level of preparation. Of the 23 respondents who answered the online questionnaire, 14 said they were either adequately or well prepared; nine said they were not. Some said there were no programs of any kind in place to assist them. Of the five interviewees, none indicated that they were adequately prepared. A distinction must be made between prepared to teach and prepared to take a test. A college or university teacher education program should engage in both types of preparation.
With a perceived training level of adequate for 14 of the 23 questionnaire respondents, a question of sufficiency arises. While 14 students felt prepared, nine students did not. They devoted no less than four years of their lives to training to become what they wanted to do in life, only to nearly fail to see its fruition. Should not universities be required to go the “extra mile” to ensure their graduates are ready to enter the field for which they have been trained for the last four years? In fact, contractually, can it even be considered an “extra mile”?

Some may argue that is too much to of universities to ensure that their graduates pass. The following are responses from teachers who felt adequately prepared: 1) “Very well, I attended the teacher prep course at Georgia State,” 2) “Morris Brown spent a lot of time preparing us for testing; at that time they required us to take the NTE,” and “I believe I was well prepared. My teacher preparation program was centered on the principles of advocacy, reaching the whole child, and teacher leadership. This framework I feel provided the lens needed to perform successfully on the exam.” Do teachers from the universities whose graduates report not feeling prepared report such positive sentiments? With 9 of 23 graduating educators not feeling prepared to pass their state’s licensing exam the question of sufficiency arises; especially considering it is disproportionately distressing one group. Institutions make the mistake of assuming a certain level of inadequacy is acceptable, it is usually not the institutions that suffer.

Data obtained from the interviewee participants help expand upon the data collected from the questionnaire participants. Of the five interviewees, one teacher said the school she transferred from was doing a pretty good job, unlike the school she transferred to before graduating. Another teacher talked admiringly about a “60-year old
retired professor” who volunteered his time to help the students. The university cannot take credit for that as an initiative, even if they contacted him first. Cumulative data from interviewee participants suggests that none of the teachers interviewed really thought they were adequately prepared by their respective colleges or universities to pass the state teacher licensing examination.

Combined data from all participants indicate a clear theme. Of the 28 total participants, 14 felt they were at least adequately prepared, and 14 thought they were not. Is 50% an acceptable threshold for teachers to feel adequately prepared? What collective body would tout this threshold as a successful advertising campaign to attract future educators to their institution? These data are especially disconcerting considering it disproportionately pertains to one group of educators.

**Self-Deprecation and Fortitude**

A second contributing factor to why some failed their initial state teacher licensing examination relates to *self-deprecation and fortitude*. While not as strong a theme, it was recurrent in the words spoken by the interviewees as well as the words written on online questionnaires. Self-deprecation and fortitude have been combined because in many ways, they the opposite sides of the same coin. They will not be discussed in extensive detail here as may be symptomatic of a larger problem to be discussed later.

Self-esteem in another term used to identify these two terms and was evident in the answers of both the online and interview respondents. When predicting their degree of success on the test, members of both groups often invoked the idea that they were “not good test takers” or “I don’t write very well.” While most people are able to identify
their shortcoming or areas that need improvement, speculation arises when the student has failed to succeed in an area self-identified as a weakness. If self-deprecation gives way to failure, what might have been considered overly harmful initially, has just become exactly that.

Conversely, fortitude was explicitly recognizable in the case of one participant. In fact, the force with which it was demonstrated is what highlighted the fact that not everyone may have it. Under the circumstances examined, they might certainly have needed it. What is it that causes someone to push through to succeed where others, similarly equipped, have failed? More important than determination is the innate ability to persevere from the outset to preclude failure in the first place. It is fitting, but ironic, that the interviewee teacher who exhibited such an attitude, teaches at a school whose marquee displays the well-worn motto, “Failure is not an option.”

Ramona Evans is the interviewee that fully embodied that never-say-die attitude. Despite the challenges she had endured, she came across very empowered, charged, and confident. However, it was not a confidence akin to arrogance, but one fueled by determination. She exuded an unmistakable energy. It is not surprising that as a student preparing to test, she explained how she attended any and all available study groups and training sessions; especially the ones that were free. An inspiring person, Ramon shared this during the interview:

So sometimes when you have that determination and that will to be successful, even if you know that you have a deficiency in an area you don’t get stopped because of you not having that – I mean, I’m okay now but I know that it’s still a weakness to me. Even getting the education leadership at a 3.8 GPA in college
had hell writing my papers. I know where I lack but I’ve never let it stop me at what level I want to be on in life. So if I had to take that test ten times to pass it I would have took it ten times and that’s what I couldn’t get my student teacher to understand. Even if you only took it five times take it a sixth, seventh - don’t ever let a test stop where you want to be in life as a goal. So with that being said, I wouldn’t change nothing. It only built me up, made me stronger. Success is not always measured by your grades, if you pass a test; it’s if you’re determined to pass that test.

Ramona is an example of someone who used what she had identified as a weakness to motivate her to do bigger and better things, whatever the costs. Does that mean that if other sought to emulate her they would consequently avoid failing teacher licensure exams or other types of additional endorsement exams? Absolutely not! However, what it does mean is that by taking the initiative to repeatedly go the extra mile, the chances of failure are drastically reduced. While the possibility of failure cannot be eliminated altogether, but the odds of success just went up exponentially.

Compare Ramona to Nancy. Ramona has advanced degrees and additional licensure endorsements to Nancy who does not (including an administrative one that required even more testing). Nancy has resolutely avoided study test groups with the same passion that Ramona has sought them out to. Nancy identified herself as a nontraditional student, older than her college peers, and therefore believed she would be uncomfortable in a non-classroom setting studying with her college peers. Passing the state licensing examination held the key to Nancy’s future; but even that fact could not help her to overcome her level of discomfort. Ramona appears to have felt the opposite.
Further comparison between the two shows that though Nancy has been teaching for 13 years and is an excellent teacher, she has chosen not to pursue an advanced degree or seek additional endorsements. Accordingly, she has not been required to test anymore. It is certainly not that Nancy is incapable of attaining advanced degrees or passing additional tests to obtain additional endorsements, she has simply chosen not to do so. Perhaps, unlike Ramona, she may not think that she can or is simply not willing to expend the extra effort to do so. Unfortunately, those questions were not asked. While Ramona should be praised for her efforts to continue improving herself, Nancy should not be faulted for choosing to obtain higher degrees or endorsements. The third contributing factor may have bearing on Nancy’s decision.

**Upbringing and Rearing**

Upbringing and rearing is the third contributing factor for why some teachers failed their initial state teacher licensing examination. This theme ties into stereotype threat theory and provides explanation towards the root cause of black teachers’ disproportionate failure of state licensure testing. The effects of stereotype threat coupled with upbringing cannot be underestimated.

Given that the question of background effect was not asked on the online questionnaires, analysis of this theme will be drawn exclusively from discussions with the five interviewees. Specifically, the following question was posed to the interviewees:

*Do you think there’s anything concerning where you were born, raised, or attended public school that could have factored into your testing experience for the first time? Why or why not?*
All five teachers interviewed indicated that factors such as where they were raised and where they attended public school eventually had a bearing on their initial test success. Each of them was encouraged to expound in detail. One of the most poignant testimonies came from interviewee one, Nancy, who discussed the stigma she believes is associated with being born and raised in the South, specifically in Atlanta. She described how it is believed that they “don’t know as much” compared to those who went to school in the North. She confirmed this belief for herself after moving to Pennsylvania for a period of time and observing how her daughter was educated. She later returned to the Georgia and noted how much further ahead her child was academically compared to her peers.

Interviewee two, Ramona, freely admitted that not only did she grow up poor, but she acknowledged that neither of her parents finished high school. She firmly believed that by not completing high school hindered their children’s language and writing skills, her own included. As a result, they were “always pretty much weak in that area due to the background of the environment that I grew up in, which is life.” She continued by explaining the school knew the background of her family as well and provided her “pointers” where they could, but never failed her because of the issues she had.

Interviewee three, Joi, shared how she didn’t think she “was prepared as others” in school because of her reading and writing skills compared to her classmates. She described it as, “I just feel that they had better exposure based off what they could produce compared to what I could produce.” While she did not attribute this deficit to where or how she was raised, as did the previous two interviewees, she did recognize there was a difference between her skills and the skills of her peers. Joi may have been
reticent to speak of the education level within her family or the language within her home, but contributing factors were certainly at play.

Interviewee four, Marie, shared a similar dialogue. She described the low education level of her parents and the fact that neither of them finished high school. She was of the impression that she was, “not the best writer” because she had no one at home that was able to work with her to help her improve.

Interviewee five, Emily, also used a word the third interviewee did; exposure. Specifically, she said, “Growing up, the exposure wasn’t there as much as some of the other college students I went to classes with.” She concluded by saying, “So yes I think my background had something to do with it, I think exposure had a lot to do with it, so yes I do think.” Four of the five interviewees indicated that background was a significant factor contributing to their success or failure on state licensure examinations.

Summary and Analysis of Question Two: Stereotype Threat Theory

Stereotype threat theory is the framework through which the results of this study were viewed. It was used to help explain the disproportionate number of failures of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations. It was the second of three research questions that asked: How does stereotype threat influence the pass rates of black teachers on state teacher licensure examinations?

The wording of the question implies the underlying importance of the theory and the results will be viewed through this lens. One question on the interview pertains specifically to stereotype threat theory. The question was presented with this piece of information:
Professor Claude Steele at Columbia coined a theory entitled Stereotype Threat Theory to explain the disproportionate number of failures of African American students on academic exams. To summarize, he said it was due to the degree of pressure a black student feels because he/she is historically not expected to do well when the student knows it is a measure of his/her academic ability.

While Steele (2010) pointed out that stereotype threat could be negated if the test taker was told it measured something other than academic ability, this caveat did not apply to the state-administered examinations. Everyone taking the test knew what the test measured. So, in Steele’s (2010) words, “They were taking this test, and others like it, under the weight of history” (p. 54).

Stereotype threat theory encompasses more than what has already been stated. Understanding additional tenets will help to determine how the theory applies to this study. A supplemental tenet includes the notion of blame. For example, did participants place blame or express negative opinions of their college or university’s efforts to prepare them to test? Regarding this component, Steele (2010) wrote that students inherently seek out a source in which to place blame for their poor performance. This serves as a means to prepare them from the stereotype judgment should they not score well. Perhaps the college or university did not properly prepare the teachers for the test; however, by placing blame on their institutions, teachers are not assuming responsibility for their failing scores.

Self-deprecation is another tenet of stereotype threat theory. Steele (2010) explained that black students lower their expectations of passing in an attempt to insulate or buffer themselves from failing. Interviewees who openly report that they “do not test
well” or “have problems in reading and writing” may also subscribe to the underlying idea of, “so don’t expect me to pass.” Steele (2010) expressed it this way:

The psyche of individual blacks get damaged, the idea goes, by bad images of the group projected in society – images of blacks as aggressive, as less intelligent, and so on. Repeated exposure to these images causes these images to be ‘internalized,’ implicitly accepted as true of the group and, tragically, also perhaps of one’s self. This internalization damages ‘character’ by causing low self-esteem, low expectations, low motivation, self-doubt, and the like. (p. 46)

The previous statement clearly has application when discussing low self-esteem and expectations, but also applies to upbringing and rearing. Recall that four of the five believed their backgrounds or upbringing affected their test performance. Steele (2010) agreed by saying:

Socioeconomic disadvantage, segregating social practices, and restrictive cultural orientations have all dampened the educational opportunities of some group more than others, historically and in ongoing ways. These differences might well yield corresponding group deficiencies in skill – enough to affect a group’s college achievement and enough for observers to point to. (p. 47)

While Steele (2010) agrees that background is a contributing factor, he emphasized that he did not believe it was the sole cause.

It is the totality of these four tenets that form the essence of stereotype threat theory. The overall stereotype of being black coupled with culpability, self-deprecating beliefs, and background was the lens through which this study was viewed. Several questions emerge from the data. Many black students have come from backgrounds such
as those experienced by many of the interviewees yet they have still performed well. What might account for the difference? How does the psyche of individual blacks get damaged along the way? A black student may be from a disadvantaged background and may be aware of the negative images of how blacks are portrayed in society, but still consistently perform well on standardized tests. Specifically, tests in which the black student is aware of what the test is measuring.

Consider a black student from a disadvantaged background, who is aware of the negative images of how blacks are portrayed in society, who is taking a standardized test that he/she knows is designed to determine his/her academic ability, and who nonetheless still tests well. Within the context of stereotype threat theory, it would seem that this student has defied the odds of failing. That may be true; however, one more factor must be considered; identification.

Identification is a component essential to feelings of belonging. The student has to not only identify him or herself by a certain stereotype; they must also define themselves by it. The importance of this aspect of the theory is best underscored by the fact that the theory was initially called identity threat theory. Steele (2010) explains the forerunner of stereotype threat, as:

> The subset of identity contingencies that actually threaten the person in some way— is a primary way by which an identity takes hold of us, in the sense of shaping how we function and even in telling us that we have a particular identity. (p. 71)

Identity threat gave way to stereotype threat because of threatening contingencies Steele (2010) identified as, “usually threatening or restrictive contingencies like negative
stereotypes about your group, group segregations of one sort or another, discrimination and prejudice, and so on all because you have a given characteristic” (p. 74). For example, stigmata or stereotypes about women and math exist and pose restrictive contingencies on performance. Figure 2 is a depiction of what Steele and Aronson (as cited in Sackett, Hardison, & Cullen, 2004) learned relative to white and black student performance on SATs conducted in 1995. It illustrates the impact of the threat on academic performance if the person knows what the test is measuring.

Figure 2. Interpretation of Findings from Steele and Aronson

Based on a description of the stereotype threat tenets presented and its relation to the participants in this study, four of the five interviewees succumb to the mold. Only one defies the mold; Ramona. She was the only interviewee who insisted that her background did not affect her testing. In fact, as mentioned earlier, given that she was the
lone dissenter actually strengthens the stereotype threat theory argument. Findings from Ramona’s interview are consistent with the previous illustration of black students who did much better when they were not told the intent of the test they were given. Ramona could have avoided being affected because she did not embrace the typical perception of what it means to be a black female that society ascribes to.

After four years of studying stereotype threat theory, Steele (2010) expressed the following:

And throughout the whole of it we’d gotten no evidence that the underperformance we’d observed came from characteristics of the person who was underperforming. It seemed, instead, to come from the pressure of group stereotypes they had to deal with on tests or in classrooms. We came to think of this pressure as a ‘predicament’ of identity. An American woman in an advanced college math class knows at some level that she could be seen as limited because she is a woman; a black student knows the same thing in almost any challenging academic setting; and a white elite sprinter knows it, too, as he reaches the last 10 meters of a 100-meter race. These people know their group identity. (p. 59)

This conclusion may be a bit simplistic. It is not the theory that is wrong, but the fact that by knowing her group identity Ramona is not destined to underperform. Ramona embraces being black wholeheartedly and refuses to subscribe to the idea that her color comes with a perception which would characterize how she is expected to perform (e.g., on a test measuring her intellectual ability). Even as a black, female taking the math portions of the certification test, she had high expectations for her performance.
Ramona’s description of her school experience, being one of only 20 black students in a school of 800, may be influence her identity. She talked about the fact that her parents were uneducated and they way that their lack of literacy impacted her language and writing skills. Her response to circumstance was “you can’t change what you’re born into.” While a true statement, it also implies that the nature of your upbringing is not easily overcome. Ramona shared that while her family was poor, the school helped to equip her as she participated in sports because, “they wanted to make sure that I got all I needed to become successful in life.”

Additionally, Ramona said the school gave her “pointers” and never failed her despite her academic struggles, nor did they “made her feel like she couldn’t do it.”

Moving from the impact of background to the impact of perception, Ramona she accused many of something once referred to as hiding behind their color. “I know that this may be a bad thought but I think sometimes as we want to make excuses for ourselves as an African American we use our color to justify why we may not do well.” She continued:

I mean, people probably say she acts white. But no, that’s just what I grew up in and I think often times we see ourselves that can’t be successful because we’re black. We can’t pass the test because we’re black.

Her story continues to defy the norm and Ramona did not feel as though her color contributed to any of the difficulties she experienced in her state licensure testing. In Ramona’s case, stereotype threat theory is substantiated.

Ramona’s situation did not meet all of the tenets of stereotype threat as previously mentioned. However, even her departure from the idea that background affects performance can be understood based on her unwillingness to identify with the
perception that black people have testing shortcomings simply because they are black. Or her refusal to place blame on others for any performance struggles. The presence of any one of the themes is enough to help explain the poor performance of black students on standardized tests. A combination of any or all of the tenets would do so overwhelmingly. While Ramona did not meet multiple tenets of the theory, her case still conforms to stereotype threat as an explanation for her difficulty on the state licensure tests (having failed two of them).

**Stereotype Threat Theory Counterarguments**

The strength of any theory is built upon its ability to consistently explain the occurrence of a phenomenon, but it is weakened when other unrelated reasons may do so just as easily. Yin (2009) strongly advocated for the inclusion of theory in a study to help bolster the construct validity of it. In the case of stereotype threat theory, there may be several other plausible explanations for why the students failed the initial testing. They may be as innocuous as the fact that sometimes people have a “bad day” or are not otherwise feeling well the day of the test. Sometimes people who know the material still fail, especially as one interviewee mentioned, when they are able to narrow the possible answers down from four to two and one seems just as right as the other. This interviewee expressed that she thinks she “guessed wrong more often than right.”

The merit of a strong theory is that it has usually been tested and re-tested under many different circumstances before it is proffered as viable. The theory then continues to be replicated in studies to verify its validity. A theory is not designed to cover every possible contingency, but rather it is designed to explain the consistent recurrence of certain phenomenon within society. None of the interviewees of this study intimated that
they “had a bad day” or were not otherwise feeling well. Since no one indicated that sentiment, stereotype threat remains a valid explanation for the phenomenon.

The act of understanding test material (but still having difficulty deducing correct answers) falls squarely into the realm of stereotype threat theory. Steele (2010) discussed how the associated stress of narrowing down possible responses actually impairs a test taker’s ability to do well. There is pressure exists when taking tests in general but the stress is compounded by the additional pressure of identify conformation. As Steele (2010) explained:

So we can say now that part of stereotype threat’s effect – its impairment of women’s math performance, of lower-class French students’ performance on language exams, of white males’ miniature golf performance, and so on – is caused directly by its effect of increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and related physiological signs of anxiety to the point that these reactions interfere with performance. (p. 121)

Perhaps the year in school that students tested was a factor, program type (alternative certification versus traditional education programs), taking the GACE versus the Praxis, or some other factor could explain the failures. Yet one of the most prominent rationales underlying the findings of this study was where one attended college. The inability of some schools to properly prepare their teachers may not be an excuse but may rather be a projection by the teachers to place blame and not take ownership of their failure.

Cumulative findings indicate that some teachers failed and some teachers passed state teacher licensing examinations. This point becomes even more salient when
addressing the issue of the colleges and universities the teachers attended. With the increased overall number of teachers failing state licensure examinations and the disproportionate number of black teachers failing, increased attention has turned to HBCUs to determine if they are a contributing factor.

To determine whether or not HBCUs are a contributor to the problem, one last review of the data is necessary. There were 23 participants in the questionnaire portion of this study; of those, 10 students attended HBCUs. Within that group of 10 students, two did not pass the Praxis I the first time and two did not pass the Praxis II the first time. This equals a total of four initial test failures from the 10 HBCU graduates. There were three of seven failures on the combined tests for those who attended state colleges; one on the Praxis I and two on the Praxis II. These numbers represent a failure rate of 40% for those attending HBCUs versus 43% for those attending state colleges and universities.

**Summary and Analysis of Question Three: Teacher Evaluations**

The third research study question asked: *Is initial failure of a state teacher licensure exam a valid indicator of future observed teacher performance?* Historically, teacher evaluations have been the yardstick for measuring teacher performance and their value cannot be overstated. Teachers who completed the questionnaire were only asked if they had taught for at least three years in order to qualify them for the study. The average number of years of the five teachers interviewed exceeded this cut-off by many years with an average time in the classroom of 12.8 years. The fact that each of them has received no less than a Satisfactory rating on their evaluations speaks volumes and cannot be ignored. Overall, licensure fail rates are not consistent with teacher evaluation ratings. There is more to follow on this subject with regards to recommendations.
Comparison to NEA/ETS Study

Growing collaboration across agencies has been initiated to stop the disparity of teacher pass rates on tests. As stated in a report:

Since 2006, the National Education Association (NEA) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) have been working collaboratively to support teacher candidates in preparing for The Praxis Series of teacher licensure assessments, currently used in 41 states and territories. Our focus has been particularly targeted to assisting minority candidates. This work is foundational to the mission of both of our organizations. (Tyler, 2011, p. 3)

They realized upon initiating this effort that they needed stronger research comprised of both statistical and field data. The NEA and ETA both claim to be committed to changing the disparity between the 40% of minorities attending public schools across the nation and the 16% of minority teachers represented in the classrooms (as of a 2007-2008 reporting). The student rate has since notably increased.

These organizations published a data analysis of their results, which was captured in Table 1 of this study. For the purpose of this study, the interview section of that report will be reviewed in detail. While comparisons regarding both design and results may be made between this study and theirs, additional value can be attained by recognizing how they complement one another.

Differences of design are clear. Theirs was a nationwide, longitudinal study that was conducted on college campuses, involved both students and professors, and focused on minorities in general rather than one minority group in particular. This study, however, was much more limited in scope and time. Specifically, it focused on one
particular metropolitan area and one racial group’s disproportionate failures, those of black teachers. It also included teacher scores on the GACE, the Georgia test series that superseded the Praxis test series. There was some degree of correlation between the two studies with regards to their findings. What follows is a comparison of the findings by looking first at those reported by the NEA/ETS study and then those of this study. The primary focus will be on those derived from the qualitative portion of the NEA/ETS study.

NEA/ETS focused their campus interviews on schools that primarily served minority populations, including several HBCUs. The NEA/ETS study included six major findings from their interviews: 1) faculty struggled with students’ deficiencies in mathematics, reading comprehension and writing stemming from poor preparation in Pk-12; 2) familiarity of the education faculty with teacher licensures tests varies widely; 3) close cooperation between arts and sciences faculty and teacher education faculty is recognized as a goal but not always achieved; 4) two models of licensure assessment support emerged as prevalent, though there were no consistent models; 5) motivating students to use the university’s preparation services is a challenge; and 6) faculty members want the test to have more questions relevant to the minority experience.

Findings from this study corroborate the first finding of the NEA/ETS study and were able to expound upon academic deficiencies. For example, to support the first finding by NEA/ETS concerning student deficiencies in basic reading, writing, and math that stemmed from their Pk-12 education, the interviewees of this study expressed the same inadequacies in their own education. Relative to the question of background, they were not shy about pointing out the difficulties they experienced in their public
educations that they wrestled with from grade school through college. It is understandable that college faculty would be both surprised and disappointed by the students’ poor levels of preparation.

Findings two through four of the NEA/ETS study speak to the issue of the blame; placing it on colleges and universities, specifically HBCUs. The previous paragraph spoke of student preparation for college but this paragraph speaks to the colleges’ preparation of the student. This was a key issue discussed by both groups of participants in this study, questionnaire respondents and interview respondents. The question that emerges from these three related findings is; why would familiarity of the education faculty with teacher licensure tests vary widely among the faculty of a university’s college of education? With the hallmark of research and the education of aspiring teachers on the campuses of institutes of higher learning, why would not such familiarity be at the top of the requirements list? Unequivocally, this lack of familiarity is a failure on the part of that school.

The third finding from the NEA/ETS study deals with the inability of the arts and sciences schools to work with the education schools within the same university. This finding does not speak well of that college or university. The fourth NEA/ETS finding is related to the college’s level of preparation to receive education students and to consistently support the process of teacher testing. Institutions must decide which is more effective: additional courses or workshops tailored to provide testing support or weaving the knowledge into their coursework. While one method might not necessarily be better than the other, what is clear is that one should be incorporated. This finding blends with the next regarding motivating students to use the services if they are
available. This two-part issue takes the onus off of the school and places it on the student. First, the university needs to make the services available; and then, the student needs to avail him- or herself of it. Or, if the university does incorporate some aspect of test preparation into its coursework, the students would be given an opportunity to see where they need extra assistance.

The final NEA/ETS finding pertains to an area outside the purview of both school and student; the content of the test. Who better to have collected and presented this observation as part of their findings than the people who create the tests? Test content was incorporated into in the interviewee question regarding the presence of cultural bias in the composition of the test. When asked this question, three of the five interviewees believed some degree of cultural bias does exist. According to the NEA/ETS findings, the need for increasing the number of minority-relative questions was not so critical as to suggest cultural bias was a serious issue. At the grade school level, this may be true. However; at the collegiate and graduate level, students who had more exposure to different cultures as young adults tended to not be as constricted in their understandings of the ways of other cultures.

**Conclusions Based on Findings**

Conclusions based on this study’s findings are straightforward and will be addressed according to research question. To being with, evidence shows that colleges and universities are not doing a good job of preparing black teachers to pass state teacher licensure examinations. Who better than the teachers who attend such institutions to provide an assessment of that capacity? Even in the small sample contained in this study, an unacceptable number of respondents felt that they were unprepared by their institution
to pass state examinations. While their opinions are subjected, other factors tell the story more convincingly. If there are no efforts to assist students beyond the normal classes, no workshops or tutoring sessions sponsored by the institution, which is a telltale sign they are not doing enough.

The second question addressed why black teachers are disproportionately failing these state teacher licensure examinations. Stereotype threat theory was the framework used for obtaining answers. Black teachers as college students and freshman teachers are under a lot of pressure. They are under the typical pressure that taking tests generate, but they are also under additional pressure because they are black teachers taking tests. Most are aware of the fact that, as a black student, the expectations for them to pass at not as high.

They can even experience psychosomatic reactions to the testing situation before or during the test that hinder their ability to perform well. In many cases, the students are acutely aware of their weaknesses associated with their academic abilities, which manifest themselves in the form of diminished self-esteem and self-confidence. Many of these concerns originate in elementary school and have remained, in their minds, still unresolved. The result of the issues mentioned is a lack of concentration when testing and could even include a decreased level of concern with regards to the outcome of the test. The testimonies of this study’s participants consistently bore that finding out.

Lastly, findings to the third research question elucidate how inconsequential the tests are in relation to the quality of the teachers that enter the classroom. What are the ramifications if a teacher does not pass the examination the first time or on subsequent attempts? For two of the five interviewees, the teachers never passed a state test, but
acquired enough experience that the requirement was waived. One of those teachers went on to become the Teacher of the Year at her school in 2009. Likewise, one teacher shared during the interview how a friend of hers, also a black female teacher, is completing her doctorate degree now. However, that particular teacher failed the Praxis I 10 times before finally passing and has been teaching for the past 10 years. That teacher was also selected Teacher of the Year for her school in a neighboring Georgia county.

**Recommendations Based on Findings**

Recommendations are made based on findings from this study. It is widely acknowledged that the education departments of many institutions of higher learning need to improve their programs. Central to their efforts, they need to know *exactly* what requirements their future educators will be required to satisfy, from the time they cross the threshold of that institution until they are licensed teachers in a school district’s classroom. However, that is only step one. Beyond that, professors need to understand the certification process as well. This understanding adds a level of professionalism to the trade.

Unless teaching these future educators represents a pay check and nothing more to education professors, they are missing an opportunity. Consider the effect of grooming prospective teachers for four years only to have them not pass a test; disabling them from putting into practice what they have been taught. If nothing else, the reputation of a school’s education program hangs in the balance when this disablement happens to successive students. One of the teachers interviewed spoke of how ill-prepared and disillusioned she was by the school she attended.
The recommended practice would be for professors to sit for the tests. The university would pay for it and the insight gained would be invaluable. Many college professors in the field of education have not taught at the grade school level, so they have never had to sit a certification exam. The practice of professors experiencing licensing exams would help close that gap and would allow the professor to offer advice from firsthand experience. This would be especially valuable in HBCUs where black professors are more prevalent. It would allow them to diffuse some of the effects of stereotype threat on students by sharing their experience in an attempt to nullify its impact on students.

All these recommendations share one component and that is testing. Based on this study, it does not matter what teacher program the teachers attended, they are all performing well in their classrooms. This observation speaks to the undeniable truth that the education programs they completed, whether traditional or alternative, obviously ably equipped them to become successful teachers. The colleges and universities in this instance are not the problem; it is the testing programs themselves. Why do states persist in this practice when the research is overloaded with information that clearly states there is no connection between passing and failing these tests and being an effective teacher?

Politics is the most prominent answer to this question. No state education entity or governor wants it said that he or she was responsible for doing away with a perceived measure of teacher quality. So what options does that leave? Compromise would be the best approach. Leave the tests in place but provide options to it. One or two states already offer courses in lieu of passing a test. As uncomfortable and time-consuming as
taking a class may be, the graduating teacher candidate has already proven he or she can take and pass classes.

Yet another state has begun accepting prospective teacher portfolios in lieu of taking and passing a test. Again, compromise appears to be a viable option. Any combination of test, classes, or portfolio may be a suitable alternative to testing alone. For states that allow teachers to teach for a time before having to pass the test, the teacher’s evaluations would be still another option. Administrators licensed by the state, who have been licensed teachers themselves, should clearly be in a position to make an accurate determination as to the teacher candidates’ likelihood of success in the field.

Placing any other requirement alongside that of passing a test, does not add to the pressure; it actually reduces it. The weight of the test has now been cut in half, assuming that is how each item would be weighted. Black teachers, once adversely impacted by stereotype threat theory, would have minimized the threat the test poses by diminishing its importance. In fact, since it would not be the lone determining factor as to whether or not a license is issued it could even be referred to as something other than a test of ability.

**Recommendation for Future Study**

One recommendation for a future study would be to identify states who have already embraced alternative methods of teacher licensing. Either those involved with piloting it or teachers who received licenses under it could be surveyed or interviewed to determine how successful the program. This information could then be used to help determine what methods may be viable alternatives to the nationwide test-only mentality now in place.
An additional recommendation for a study was also inspired by the NEA/ETS findings. In their study, they conducted campus interviews at a number of HBCUs, and two other types of universities that cater primarily to Hispanic and Native American students. The results were aggregated and written in general terms into the six findings they reported. It actually told nothing about the specific problems the separate entities were having apart from the rest. More importantly, since each groups’ scores were compared to a standard, the white teachers’ scores, a cross case analysis could transpire.

Using a multiple-case research design, two or more of the minority institutions could be studied alongside a predominantly white one. Rather than conduct interviews, validate a survey and send it to each of the education departments to obtain information on their respective education programs and their students, including Praxis I scores. If one school’s students are faring far better than another on state licensure testing, insight might be gleaned as to how to improve them all. Another consideration would be to include a rural school district to determine how alike or dissimilar their challenges are from those of color in the urban setting.

**Summary**

The first challenge encountered in conducting this study was reaching the perceived requisite number of respondents with the questionnaire. Ultimately, the difficulty turned out to be a great opportunity because it allowed for a change in design. The change to a case study allowed for the decision to conduct interviews alongside the questionnaires, which greatly enriched this study. However, the change came with a second challenge; controlling researcher bias.
No bias is more devastating than the one of which you are not aware. It will color what you want to know, distort the questions you ask, and misconstrue the answers you receive. Even with its challenges, researcher bias serves a valuable purpose. It underscores the personal connection and passion for your topic. Nonetheless, the efficacy of your study cannot be established until it is brought under control. Eventually, that was the case.

The clarity that followed unearthed some realities that came to light during the course of the research and study. A concept that I chanced across while writing the literature review and reading about critical race theory (CRT), was something mentioned in the study as an “involuntary minority.” That is how the study referred to black people because they are the only minority group that came to the United States against their will. There was some significance attributed to that fact.

All other minority groups have come here seeking something better for themselves and their families, so they are ready, willing, and able to endure whatever challenges come their way in the process. More importantly is the attitude with which they face those things. They are insulated by their identification with their heritage and culture, which they brought along with them. Such was not the case for black people.

In fact, as a race, how they refer to themselves has changed over the years. From the very beginning, black people had no such identity that they were allowed to retain. They were African, Negro, nigger, colored, African American, and now black. More importantly, the only standard by which they could measure or judge themselves was by white society. To say that placed them at a distinct disadvantage and portended feelings of diminished self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence would be an understatement.
Despite the passage of time, an end to slavery, and an end to legal and formal school segregation, many vestiges of each still remain. The trouble with black teachers disproportionately failing state teacher licensure examinations is a case in point. What I saw and heard from this study’s participants was something I could not deny; from a lesser degree from the questionnaires respondents to a disturbing degree from the interviewees.

I had the fortune of interviewing five of the most outstanding teachers in the school system of which they are a part; one that is lucky to have them. However, each of them had their own set of challenges trying to climb the ladder of success within their profession. Likewise, they have done so despite considerable odds that managed to take a toll on them. I was impacted by what they said but also how they said it. A couple teachers acknowledged lifelong difficulties with language and writing skills, and in one case even reading as well. Yet they were able to navigate a system that is designed to adequately address all of those issues.

The interviews were inspiring as well as heartbreaking. In those 35 to 45 short minutes, I lived with them through the pain of their grade school years and their secondary school experience. I listened to them talk about the extra measures they took to improve their speaking and writing abilities, yet heard them acknowledge that they never quite conquered all of the challenges posed. Was failing the teacher licensure test on their first trial evidence that they were somehow inadequate? Yes, quite probably. The question that bedeviled me though was how to end it here.

Steele’s (2010) stereotype threat theory was overtly prevalent within these interviewees. Most prominent in my mind are the themes of background and upbringing,
something even the NEA/ETS study alluded to as well. Yes, their respective colleges and universities had done them a disservice, but not before their public schools did so. As pointed out previously, there are many things that colleges can do to help ensure student teachers are successful in passing state test. This will require some degree of remediation because as the NEA/ETS study pointed out, public schools have failed to prepare teachers adequately.

That fact forced me to re-examine my thoughts on HBCUs. I understood that the NEA/ETS study chose those minority-oriented schools to study because they wanted to ensure they had an adequate number of participants for their desired sample. However, for black teachers, all of the criticisms identified in the study’s findings were levied on HBCUs, even though many black students attend elsewhere. Based on the present study, I have come to certain conclusions regarding HBCUs.

The problem with black students at HBCUs, may be more than convoluted than it appears on the surface. It may be that the university does do a good job of preparing them. If this is the case, it is difficult to identify where the problem lies; with the college or with the student. Based on the results of this study, while Steele’s (2010) theory has merit, I submit another proposition. It is something that has been talked about at different times and in different ways: the student’s background.

There was once a popular saying enumerating, “Leaders are not born, they are made!” Successful teachers can be made as well; some will be required to work harder at it than others. It is not that HBCUs are poorly preparing black students. It is that HBCUs, by their very nature, accept students that some mainstream major and prominent universities will not. What the HBCU fails to do is pass students along. If a student
identifies their own deficiencies, help must be made available to them. If the university identifies a deficiency, help must be made available to them. No matter how anxious a student may be to graduate in four years, gone are the days when that is the standard.

Granted, kids can be cruel, so we are mindful of the ridicule that students receive who are retained in elementary school and even secondary school. College is not grade school and the people attending are not children. We need to have a frank conversation with these adults and inform them that if they are not ready for college level work, do not go yet! Avoiding ridicule is not the primary motivator for pressing forward at this level though. It is the avoidance of paying more money and the desire to start making it. The question is, what are you willing to trade for it? This is not to say that students should stay out college for endless amounts of time. If they remain out of college until they feel more capable, rather than just eager, they will be more successful.

There were two teachers who failed tests that talked about attending countless workshops to prepare, while other teachers would not go anywhere near them. Even though those who attended workshops also failed, it stands to reason that those who attended tended to fair better than those who did not. The HBCUs are not doing black students a disservice by bringing them in, but they might be doing one by turning them out too soon. Just as black teachers in public school classrooms have high expectations for their students, the same should be said of HBCU professors. Do not do your students any “favors” of that kind; it hurts rather than helps.

Graduating students need to embrace the philosophy of lifelong learning. Similar to the teachers in this study, if admit you could still improve in an area, then you should still work to learn. That is especially true if you have been entrusted with children to
teach, especially black children, who themselves may be struggling. Breaking the cycle does not only refer to what occurs within a family, but within a race, gender, or even a nation. If you know the things that hindered you, re-double your efforts to ensure the students of whom you stand before are not hindered.

Lastly, several respondents spoke about one university program that is patterning itself after another who consistently churns out successful graduates. I completely support such a notion. It was Elmore (1996) who emphasized getting to scale with good educational practices. Educational by no means is limited to public grade schools. If 47 or more states in this country can embrace a set standard of teaching and learning, certainly the brilliant minds that staff and run our nation’s universities can collaborate to some degree. At the end of the day, it works for the betterment of us all.
APPENDIX A: IRB PHASE I APPROVAL

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an
IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation,
suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research
conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the
Institutional Officer.

DATE: October 3, 2012

TO: Dr. Edith Rusch, Educational Leadership

FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action
Protocol Title: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta Protocol #: 1208-4220M Expiration Date: October 2, 2013

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires October 2, 2013. If the above-referenced project has not
been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form
30 days before the expiration date.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most
recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed
Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which
contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI - Human
Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.
Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to
protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HIS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human
Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
APPENDIX B: IRB PHASE II APPROVAL

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: April 7, 2013
TO: Dr. James Crawford, Environmental & Public Affairs
FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action
Protocol Title: African American Teacher and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Qualitative study Phase II
Protocol #: 1303-4419M
Expiration Date: April 6, 2014

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires April 6, 2014. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451047 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047 (702) 895-2794 • FAX: (702) 895-0805

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APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT PHASE I

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Education
Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Edith Rusch, Dr. James Crawford, Michael L. Taylor

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Michael Taylor at (702) 461-1718 or Dr. Edith Rusch at 702-895-2891 or Dr. James Crawford at 702-895-4949.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine if African American teachers in metropolitan Atlanta (Georgia) area school districts are disproportionately failing state teacher licensing examinations.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria: Teacher in a metropolitan Atlanta area school district.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Complete a 20-question teacher questionnaire. Only aggregate data will be reported.

Benefits of Participation
There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn whether or not African American teachers in the metropolitan Atlanta area are disproportionately failing either the initial licensing examinations or subject-specific exams, ultimately resulting in their removal from their classrooms.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. Though no disclosure of your identifying information is required, there are some questions you may find slightly uncomfortable.
TITLE OF STUDY: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta

Cost/Compensation
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 30-45 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

☐ Yes

☐ No
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT PHASE II

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Education Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Qualitative Study

INVESTIGATOR(S): Michael L. Taylor; James R Crawford, PhD

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Michael Taylor at (702) 461-1718.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine why African American teachers are disproportionately failing state teacher licensing examinations by conducting a qualitative study in metropolitan Atlanta (Georgia) area school districts.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criterion: Teacher in a metropolitan Atlanta area school district that failed either the Praxis I, Praxis II, or both on your initial attempt or one or more subsequent attempt.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in an interview that will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Benefits of Participation
There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn whether or not African American teachers in the metropolitan Atlanta area are disproportionately failing either the initial licensing examinations or subject-specific exams, ultimately resulting in their removal from their classrooms.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. Though no disclosure of your identifying information is required, there are some questions you may find slightly uncomfortable.
TITLE OF STUDY: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Qualitative Study

Cost/Compensation
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 45-60 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Participant                        Date

_________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Education Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Qualitative Study

INVESTIGATOR(S): Michael L. Taylor; James R Crawford, PhD

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Michael Taylor at (702) 461-1718.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine why African American teachers are disproportionately failing state teacher licensing examinations by conducting a qualitative study in metropolitan Atlanta (Georgia) area school districts.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criterion: Teacher in a metropolitan Atlanta area school district that failed either the Praxis I, Praxis II, or both on your initial attempt or one or more subsequent attempt.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in an interview that will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Benefits of Participation

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn whether or not African American teachers in the metropolitan Atlanta area are disproportionately failing either the initial licensing examinations or subject-specific exams, ultimately resulting in their removal from their classrooms.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. Though no disclosure of your identifying information is required, there are some questions you may find slightly uncomfortable.

Cost/Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 45-60 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.
Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant          Date

______________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
Dear Ma’am/Sir,

Thank you for taking the time to review this request for information. I am conducting an interview of teachers in an attempt to gather information for a doctoral dissertation study on an issue some might find a little unsettling, as I did. Recognizing the ever-growing shortage of teachers across the country in the face of an ever-increasing need, the Education Testing Service (ETS) and National Education Association (NEA) jointly undertook a five-year study.

Taking into consideration a dire need for diversity within the teacher workforce, they noted that it is African American/Black (AA/B) teachers that are disproportionately failing state teacher licensure exams at rates that significantly exceed that of all other racial/ethnic groups; White, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans. Their goal was to identify potential reasons and attempt to stem the tide. My effort is to conduct a qualitative study within the metropolitan Atlanta area schools in an attempt to determine potential causes for this phenomenon.

As a teacher, myself, in an Atlanta area school district, I hope you share my thoughts that our entire teaching force is made stronger by the diversity within it, in an attempt to reach and teach our equally-diversified student population. As such, be assured no identifying information will be published in or from the study, but I will provide the results of my findings to anyone who participated who wishes to receive them. I hope you will strongly consider participating in an effort to hopefully better understand and address this problem.

Should you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact:

Michael L. Taylor, Principal Investigator  
(702) 461-1718  
Email address: drwhodini7@yahoo.com

Dr. James Crawford, Committee Chair  
(702) 895-4949  
Email address: jrcrawford@unlv.edu

Sincerely,

Michael L. Taylor

Michael L. Taylor, M.A., M.S.  
Elementary Teacher Education/Strategic Studies
APPENDIX F: AUDIO INFORMED CONSENT

African American Teacher and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Qualitative study Phase II

Affidavit

Consent to Audio Tape

I, ______________________________, agree to be audio taped as a part of the interview for this study. I have been assured that my name will not appear in the final written study. I understand that if I am uncomfortable at any time during the interview that I may stop the process with no penalty or harm to me or the researcher.

Participant’s Name ______________________________

Signature____________________________

Date____________________________

Micheal Taylor, CO-PI 702-461-1718
James R Crawford, PI 702-895-4949
Teacher Licensure Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your gender? ___M ___F

What is your race? ___African American (black) ___Caucasian ___Other

Number of years have you been teaching 1-3 years _____ More than 3-years_____

Describe the college/university you attended.

Historically Black College (HBCU) ____ Predominately Black institution_____

State College _____ Intensive/Extensive Research University _____ Prominent Private _____

Other_____

Name of college/university you attended

What was your college major? ______________________

What was your high school grade point average (GPA)? ___

2.0 – 2.49 ____ 2.5 – 2.9 ____ 3.0 – 3.49 ____ 3.5 – 4.0 ____ 4.0+ (Honors Program)

What was your college undergraduate grade point?

Do you have or are you pursuing an advanced degree at this time? Yes___ No___

THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW ARE RELATED TO TEACHER LICENSURE AND HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER REQUIREMENTS

When did you take your first Praxis exam?

In college _____ Just after graduation _____ First year of teaching _____

Did you pass the Praxis I exam the first time you took it? ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A

Describe your experience of taking this test

Did you pass the Praxis II exam the first time you took it? ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A

Did you pass the GACE the first time you took it? ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A

Describe your experience of taking this test

Did you think you would pass the test the first time? Why or why not?
How well did your teacher preparation program prepare you to pass a teacher licensure exam?

If you did not pass the Praxis I exam initially, how many times did it take you to pass? ___

If you did not pass the Praxis II exam initially, how many times did it take you to pass? ___

If you did not pass the GACE exam initially, how many times did it take you to pass? ____

Generally, what is your experience when you are required to take a test?

What was your teacher evaluation rating in each of the six areas and overall for 2009/10/11?

Also, considering your initial pass/fail status, do you think your performance on the exam was reflective of your prospective teaching abilities? Why or why not?

Please add any additional information that may be useful to this study.
APPENDIX H: ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Additional Interview Questions

1. Thinking about your level of preparedness for the Praxis, if you could have done anything differently – from high school until the time you first took the test – what, if anything, would it be and why (i.e. high school concentration, college major, when you first took the test, college you attended, etc.)?

2. Do you think there is anything concerning where you were born, raised, or attended public school that could have factored into your testing experience the first time? Why or why not?

3. Do you believe the tests are somehow culturally biased as a possible reason why black teachers disproportionately do not fail well on it? Why or why not?

4. What type of program were you in that prepared you to teach (bachelors, certificate, alternative certification, etc)?

5. How important do you think it is for prospective teachers to have a background or degree in the field of education and what effect, if any, would that have on their test success?

6. (If nothing is this vein is previously mentioned), Professor Claude Steele coined a theory entitled Stereotype Threat Theory to explain the disproportionate number of failures of African American students on academic exams. To summarize, he said it is due to the degree of pressure a (black) student feels because he or she is historically not expected to do well when the student knows it is a measure of his or her academic capability. What are your thoughts about such a theory?
APPENDIX I: WORDLE HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS
REFERENCES


Qualifications

Skilled in conducting research to further the goals of a number of educational organizations across the United States. Likewise, managed an educational nonprofit responsible for conducting conferences in five cities across the country in the areas of defense, intelligence, and diplomacy for 5900 students annually. Extensive experience as an officer in two different components of the U. S. Air Force. Maintain a Top Secret SCI clearance. Completed All But Dissertation (ABD) for a doctorate degree in education administration, and scheduled to defend in April 2013.

Professional Experience

CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, Las Vegas, Nevada 2000 – 2005
Program Manager- Stay in School Mentoring Project

• Conducted research to determine the scope of the need for the services this program provided for “at-risk” middle school students in U.S. 4th largest school district
• Data gathered/presented garnered a $75k grant from the United Way and later research provided best practices application. Student retention rate was 92%

Acting Director of Education Programs/Operations Center Director

• Coordinated the development of educational programs and executed conferences in five U.S. cities in defense, intelligence, and diplomacy
• Contracted for all equipment and services necessary to establish offices from which to conduct the conferences

Public Service Academy Manager

• Worked in concert with George Washington University and the University of the District of Columbia to research and develop curriculum for inner-city students
• Supervised the teaching staff of high school students in a program designed to interest students in public service career fields, such as the military and teaching
TEACHING EXPERIENCE

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, Atlanta, Georgia  2005– Present
Teacher, Grade-Level Director

• Teach sixth-grade language arts and lead efforts of sixth-grade team in planning and coordinating entire sixth-grade curriculum across the various subject areas
• Taught eighth-grade language arts to students on various levels of proficiency
• Taught all subjects to third graders; also employed Project Graduation reform model
• Part of Atlanta Public School's "Schools to Watch" initiative as a member of both the Middle School Transformation Committee and Advisory Leadership Team
• Grade-level representative to the School Support Team (SST), tasked with assisting the school in strengthening its instructional program to improve student achievement
• Member of Local School Council

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA-LAS VEGAS, Las Vegas, Nevada
All But Dissertation (ABD) Doctorate in Education Administration, 2011
~ Dissertation: “African American Teachers and State Licensing Examinations in Metropolitan Atlanta: A Case Study”
~ GPA: 3.81

AIR WAR COLLEGE, Montgomery, Alabama
Master of Science in Strategic Studies, 2009
~ PSP: “The Response of the Air National Guard to A Terrorist Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear Attack on the Continental United States”
~ GPA: 3.60

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX, Las Vegas, Nevada
Master of Arts in Elementary Teacher Education, 2004
~ GPA: 3.93

CENTRAL MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, Warrensburg, Missouri
Master of Science in Criminal Justice Administration, 1987
~ GPA: 3.72

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND AT COLLEGE PARK, College Park, Maryland
Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, 1983
~ GPA: 2.77