IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH A SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING PROGRAM

By

JENNIFER LASHELLE MCGINNIS TONEY

(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social learning theory and mentoring enhance the achievement of African-American male middle school students. The following research questions framed this study: In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males? The following related questions guided the study:

1. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?
2. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?

The findings from this study indicate that the middle school students and mentors who participated in this action research felt the CMS Mentoring Program positively affected the academic, structural, and personal barriers of the students. Survey and interview methods were applied to help determine if the young men's participation in the program impacted their academic performance in middle school. Precisely, when answering the questions related to this

particular area of the study, the participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the benefits of the mentoring experience on their middle school academics and behavior.

Social learning theory was the theoretical framework that guided this study. This theory has evolved to suggest that if there is a close identification between the observer and the model and if the observer has a good deal of self-efficacy learning will most likely occur (Bandura, 1989). This study sought to answer how an action research process helps key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males. The official academic mentorship model that was developed included training mentors, identifying mentor requirements, and developing and implementing survey instruments to answer this question. The findings indicate critical to the success of a mentoring program is recognizing the importance of building positive relationships with group members through a show of commitment, clearly defined boundaries with consequences, and a willingness to listen to feedback from program participants (Bailey, 2005). The results of this study supported previous research and revealed that a mentoring program positively impacted the young men who participated in the program academically and behaviorally.

Keywords: Mentoring, African-American Males, Achievement Gap, Action Research, Self-Efficacy

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JENNIFER LASHELLE MCGINNIS TONEY

B.S. The University of Missouri-Columbia, 1999

M.S. The University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000

Ed.S. The University of Georgia, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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JENNIFER LASHELLE MCGINNIS TONEY

Major Professor:	Sheneka Williams
Committee:	Karen Bryant
	Jack Parrish
	Karen E. Watkins

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2016

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my entire family.

They are my rock and I could not have made it through this process without them.

To my loving husband, Tiwon U. Toney for always being there for me-you believed in me when I didn't believe in myself-for that I will be eternally grateful.

Special thanks to my mom and dad, Lois and Billie McGinnis for always encouraging me to do my best.

To my sister Jessica, I appreciate you continuously having my back.

To my nephew, Lincoln Dash and my niece Harper Willow, always follow your dreams and you will go far!

To my bestie cousin LaTonia, I love you to the moon and back and I am so thankful for your love and friendship.

UGA CREW-I love all of you! We made it!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Barack Obama is the first U.S. President of African-American descent. Despite reaching such an unparalleled achievement, his high levels of educational attainment, economic accomplishment, and governmental power can still be considered an impracticable and unreachable goal for many African-American males in the Unites States. As such, President Obama is viewed by many African Americans as a role model as well as the nation's first African American President. While he serves as a role model to many students, his academic successes have not necessarily trickled down to students' classroom behaviors. Difficulties related to disturbing classroom behaviors, threats to academic progress, and learning difficulties are some of the factors thought to have broad consequences for the future educational attainment and employment prospects of African-American students (Gavazzi, Russell, & Khurana, 2009).

Evidence showing that relative to White students, minority youth receive lower grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), score lower on standardized tests of academic ability (Jencks & Phillips, 2011), have higher rates of grade retention (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, (2004), and are disproportionately assigned to low-ability groups in elementary and middle school and vocational tracks in high school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver (2007). This evidence reveals the seriousness of the achievement gap between the test scores of both low-income and minority students and their counterparts. Over the last 30 years, urban educational policy and research has been driven by ongoing endeavors to understand these trends and have

produced reform models such as the effective schools movement, school restructuring, and school choice and privatization plans (Balfanz, 2007).

Although recent data from the 2012 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that during this 40-year period, both African-American and Hispanic students have made substantial achievement gains, the average scores for these groups of students remain well below those of non-Hispanic, White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Thus, despite more than three decades of urban school research and reform aimed at improving disadvantaged student achievement performance, current data on urban achievement reveals that these programs have not met the task (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Explanations for the failure of these efforts include a realization that the majority have relied on prevailing remedies that are based on limited empirical evidence (Balfanz, 2007) and that many have neglected to establish a reliable set of coherent procedures for transforming ineffective schools into effective ones (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Moreover, and all too often, studies that examine disadvantaged youth achievement focus only on negative outcomes, failing to uncover and inform interventions of modifiable factors that lead some students to academic success (Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001) despite formidable economic and social barriers (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

Significance

In a competitive global economy, attaining an education is critical to the economic and social survival of the individual (Bailey & Bailey, 2006). One major issue that continues to torment America's educational reformers is the underachievement of students of color, namely African-Americans. Despite being the focus of national, as well as numerous state and local initiatives, the achievement gap between students of color (mainly African-American and Hispanic) and their White and Asian peers continues to create questions about the strength of our

nation's public school educational system. The achievement gap typically refers to the discrepancy in academic achievement between different ethnic or socioeconomic groups (Alexander, 2009). Subgroups can be based on a variety of factors such as gender and geographic location, among others; however, the disparities due to race are often at the forefront of discussion and research.

Historically the African-American and White achievement gap in academics has been a prevalent and persistent concern. Before the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2001, public schools were already worried about closing the educational achievement gap among all students, especially African-American students since *Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka Kansas* (Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005; Olneck, 2005; Ikpa, 2004). Most public school educators realize the problem of wide achievement gaps among student groups. "While considerable progress in reducing racial disparities in academic achievement was made during the 1970s and through the mid-1980s, that progress stalled in the 1990s, and today, at all ages, substantial disparities remain between the academic success of African Americans and European Americans [White Americans]"(Olneck, 2005, p. 95).

This permeating problem has yet to be resolved. Educators, policymakers, and researchers have offered many recommendations for closing the achievement gap. Policymakers suggest that the problem in achievement disparity stems from wrongly designed school policies. Other suggestions include "failing schools" while some scholars suggest factors such as cultural, social, economic, and parental discrepancies (Converse, 2009; Alexander, 2009; Milner, 2010). There are many underlying theories and probable causes for the achievement gap between African-Americans and Whites.

A variety of interventions have been developed to assist at-risk students who are below average in educational skills. In addition to academic skills, at-risk children were often deficient in social skills and emotional development (Carter, 2004). Commonly, at-risk children lack basic support from parents and guardians and, in some cases; they live in surroundings where basic needs, such as food, shelter, and love, are not available. Because of these perplexing home circumstances, these students could be ill-equipped to cope with social and emotional situations that might be presented to them in schools on a daily basis (Carter, 2004).

Adolescence

Adolescence represents a turbulent time for any population, during which young people question many things about themselves and their surroundings (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Adolescents struggle to identify their definition of self amid the social pressures of school and home-life (Cobb, 2001; McDevitt & Ormond, 2002). Along with infancy, adolescence is one of the times during the lifespan when individuals experience rapid and dramatic changes (Shaffer & Kipp, 2013). This period is a time in which many students have increased behavior problems regardless of family structure or ethnic background. Because these students are at a crossroads where they are no longer children, but not yet adults, frustration accumulates, and its effects are often transferred into the school setting. Student frustration is often communicated through their loss of interest in school, lack of social communication, and an increase in violent and disruptive behaviors (Vernon, 2002).

Social Learning Theory and Mentoring

Social learning theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement. According to Bandura (1993, 2000), self-

efficacy is viewed as a person's perception of his or her capabilities to attain a specific task or goal. Within a mentoring program, many scholars may perceive themselves differently after working closely with a mentor.

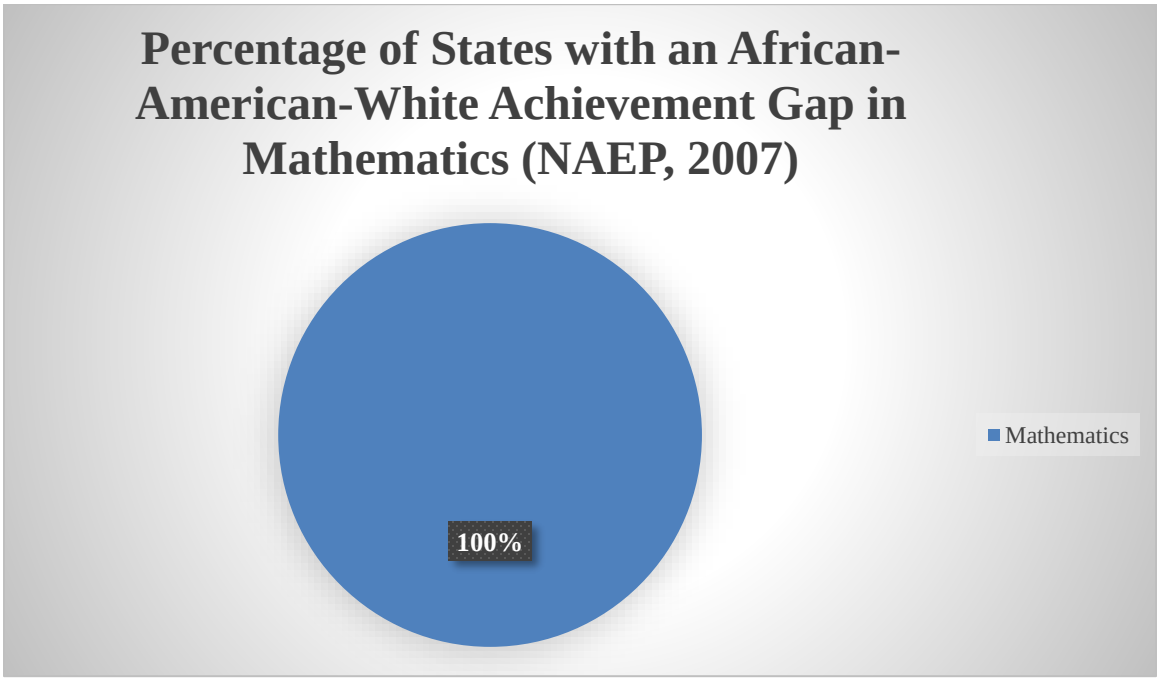
Students with problematic behaviors and struggles for academic success are at risk for dropping out of school and need a mentor, a one-on-one relationship with a caring and competent adult role model that many are missing in their daily lives. A mentor can be someone who would be able to assist students in meeting challenges and tasks that they face and will hold them accountable for their actions (Hoover, 2005).

Effective mentoring seeks to establish a positive and trusting relationship between student and adult while focusing on the student's needs. The mentor serves to foster a caring and supportive relationship, providing clear guidelines and expectations for the mentee while modeling and promoting self-awareness, self-confidence, management of behavior, and positive attitudes toward assisting others (Webster, 2005). Most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of example (Bandura, 1997). The central goal of the mentoring program at Constructivist Middle School was to close the achievement gap through increasing the self-efficacy of the mentees.

The achievement gap between African-American and White students is defined as the difference between the average score for African-American students and the average score for White students. On a national scale, the achievement gap is of immense concern. As shown in Table 1 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2007 found when using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores to look at the African-American-White achievement gap nationally in 8th grade, mathematics gaps existed in all of the 41 states for which results were available (2007).

Table 1

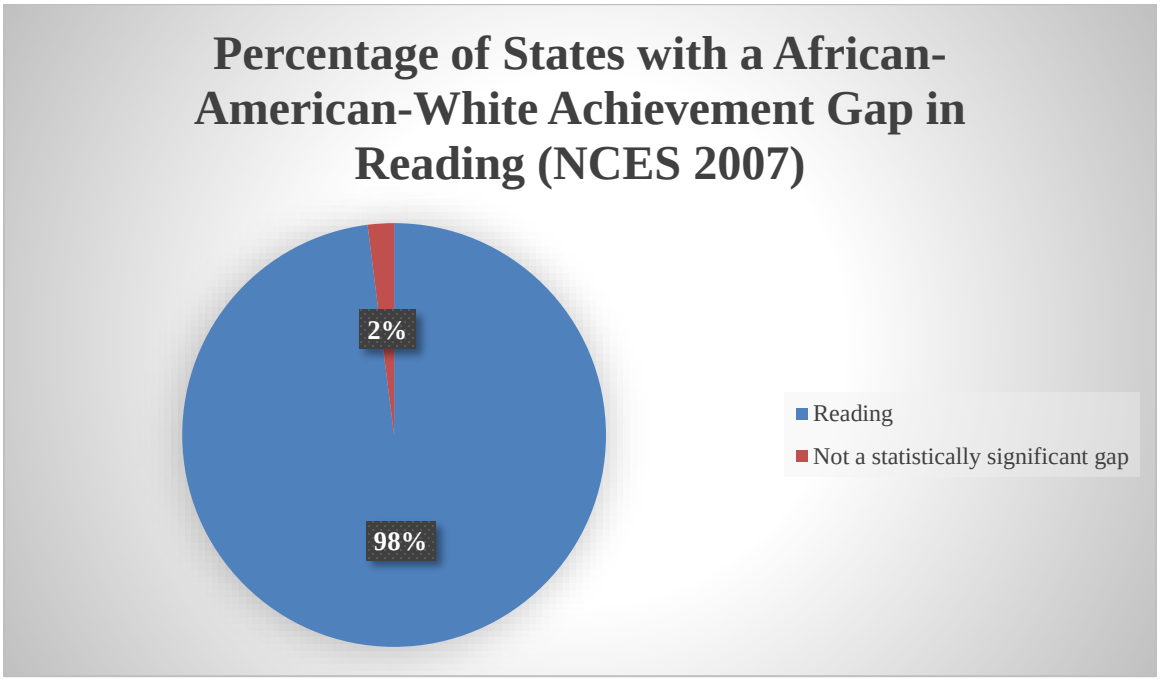
Percentage of States with an African-American-White Achievement Gap in Mathematics



At grade 8, reading gaps existed in 41 of the 42 states for which results were available using NAEP data as shown in Table 2. In Hawaii, the 7-point difference between African-American and White students' scores in 2007 was not statistically significant, and thus there was no gap for Hawaii (NCES, 2007).

Table 2

Percentage of States with a African-American-White Achievement Gap in Reading



Issues relating to the African-American-White achievement gap have been addressed by a number of recent studies. Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities, issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), for example, examined the education of all major racial and ethnic groups in the United States from prekindergarten through the postsecondary level, along with employment and income data for these groups. The report identified a variety of factors which are correlated with the achievement gap between African-American and White students. For example, African-American students were more likely than White students to come from families living in poverty, which is associated with lower educational performance (Vanneman, et. al, 2009).

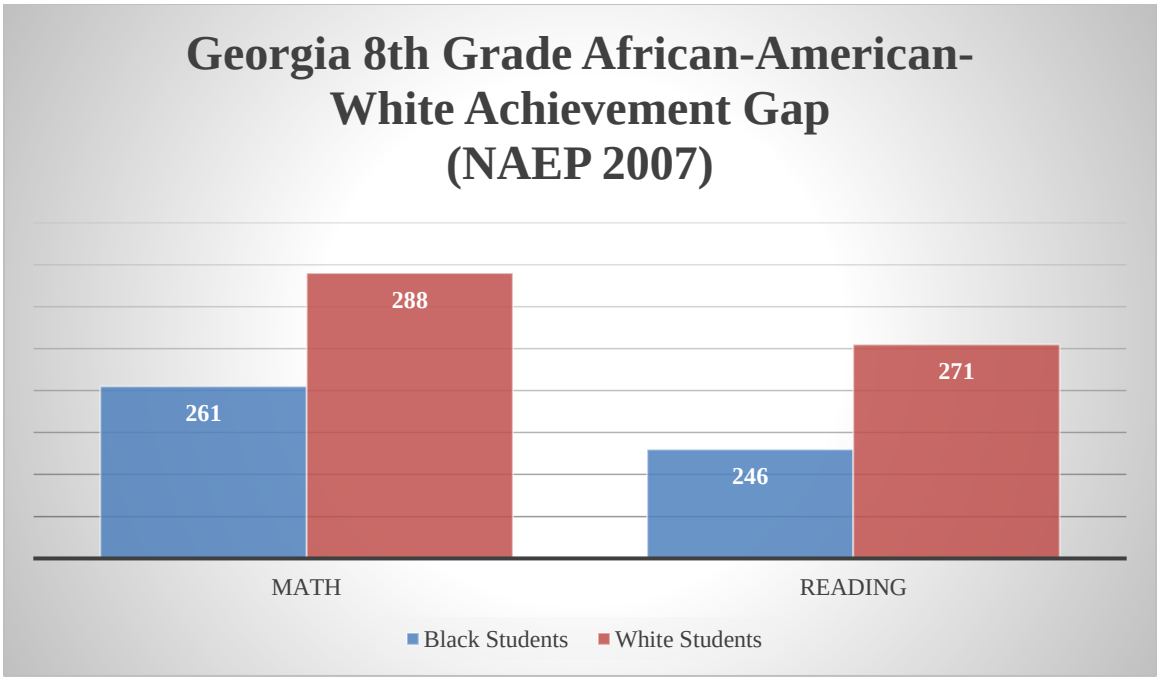
Barton and Coley (2007) correlated student achievement, as measured by NAEP, with four home factors: (a) the presence of two parents in the home, (b) the hours children spend watching television, (c) the hours parents spend reading to them, and (d) the frequency of absence from

school. Compared to White students, African-American children were less likely to come from a family with both parents in the home, spent more hours watching television, were read to by their parents for fewer hours, and were more likely to be absent from school.

According to the NCES (2007), the African-American-White achievement score gap in mathematics for public school students at grade 8, by state or jurisdiction in Georgia was 27 points on the NAEP in 2007. In the same year, the African-American-White achievement score gap in reading for public school students at grade 8, by state or jurisdiction was 25 points as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Georgia 8th Grade African-American-White Achievement Gap



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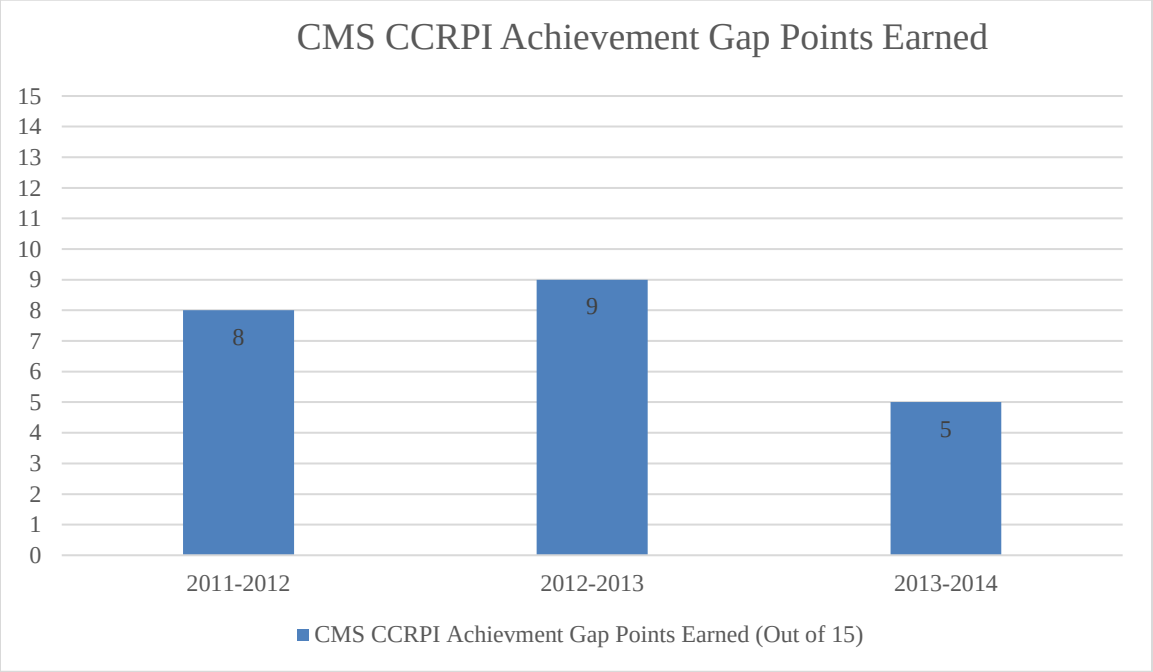
According to the 2012 College and Career Readiness Performance Indicators (CCRPI) scores that were released from the state of Georgia, Constructivist Middle School earned eight out of a possible 15 achievement gap points. 2013 CCRPI scores that were published by the state of Georgia showed that Constructivist Middle School earned nine out of a possible 15

achievement gap points, which shows growth in the right direction from 2012, but it still shows a large gap. 2014 CCRPI scores released from the state of Georgia show that Constructivist Middle School earned five out of a possible 15 achievement gap points, which is significantly lower than previous years. This could have happened for a variety of reasons, (a) new staff members at the school, (b) an increasing special education population, and/or (c) the new assessment, the Georgia Milestones Assessment System.

Table 4

CMS CCRPI Achievement Gap Points Earned



Problem Framing

The academic struggles befalling countless African-American male youth have been the source of trepidation in many homes, schools, and communities across America. When compared to males from other ethnic groups, African-American males often trail behind in many academic categories from elementary school through college. As a result of their educational failures, parents, educators, and government officials have been exploring ways to resolve this

dilemma. While a number of solutions have been proposed and even implemented by a variety of stakeholders, too few seem to offer reasonable rates of success to address what appears to be a growing problem among this at-risk African-American male youth population.

This action research project attempted to improve student achievement and self-efficacy of African-American males through a mentoring program at Constructivist Middle School. This study also examined the impact of mentoring on academic improvement for African-American males participating in an organized mentoring program. Young men who took part in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program were the focus of the study. Utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures, the study evaluated the mentoring program's effectiveness in improving student academic performance while in middle school.

According to various studies on educational achievement, socioeconomic status, and data from the U.S. justice system, African-Americans often produce the most negative outcomes when compared to their White and Asian counterparts. Often burdened with the problem of racism, socioeconomic challenges, and various forms of oppression, African-American males tend to be more susceptible to criminal acts, substance abuse, and early sexual behavior in addition to their academic struggles (Wyatt, 2009). As a result, they fall behind in most major categories typically used to measure present and future success, and lead the way in those behaviors that are most inhibiting and destructive. However with the support of their mentors, who have proven there are ways to overcome these very obstacles, the futures of many African-American male students can be much brighter and they will not have to capitulate to the negative pressures often confronting them. An accredited derivative associated with taking part in a mentoring relationship has been developing pro-social behaviors (Arbreton et al., 2009). Jerald (2007) reported pairing caring adults with at-risk youth in supportive, structured activities was a

means of increasing awareness about the advantages of schooling and acted as a deterrent to youth in jeopardy of dropping out of school. Additionally, the mentoring relationship helped protégés address some of the nonacademic barriers to learning, such as limited (a) parent education, (b) financial resources in the family, and (c) social exposure (Harper, 2006).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Based on personal experiences teaching young men who attend Constructivist Middle School, I focused this study on pinpointing the benefits and the overall significance that lie in mentoring African-American males. The purpose of this study was to investigate how social learning theory and mentoring enhance the achievement of African-American male middle school students. Additionally, we wanted to help recognize some of the wide-ranging benefits that structured mentoring initiatives can have on underachieving African-American middle school males, with an emphasis on those benefits that can be connected specifically to their educational improvement. Furthermore, this study was designed to determine how mentoring might be used as an effective strategy for helping African-American males succeed throughout middle school. The research study also measured the degree in which consistent and effective mentoring might serve as a means of providing African-American males with skills and strategies to enable them to experience success in school and in the community.

More specifically, this research was designed to determine if the program was influential in preparing these students for some of the challenges they may have faced during their time in middle school. These data were used for the purpose of creating second order change by using the mentees' feedback and recommendations to implement any necessary changes to improve the mentoring activities (as well as other aspects of the program) conducted with future young men in the CMS mentoring program.

Based on the information provided about the dismal state of young African-American males outlined in the problem statement and purpose, the central question of the study is: In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males? The following related questions guided the study:

1. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?
2. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?

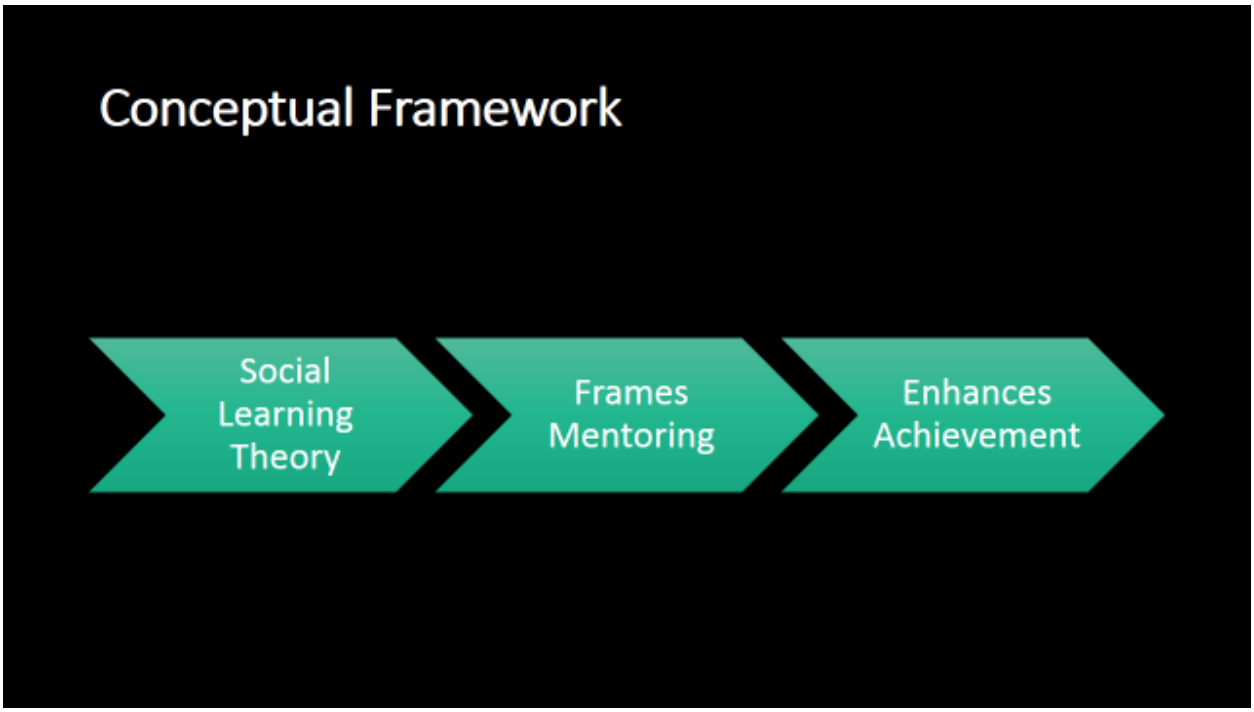


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Achievement through the Mentoring Program

Significance of the Study

"Every student needs at least one thoughtful adult who has the time and takes the trouble to talk with the student about academic matters, personal problems, and the importance of performing well in middle school" (Jackson, 2000, p. 105). Many schools are faced with a

growing number of at-risk students who enter the building each morning. As school leaders, principals should anticipate and plan according to these concerns. Some principals turned to proactive programs, such as mentoring, to develop appropriate plans in working with at-risk youth (Krivacska, 2003). Daloz (2004) reported that mentoring provided at-risk students with a positive and influential adult in their lives. According to Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson (2014), mentoring allowed individuals the opportunity to receive the benefit of guidance and counseling from an older, caring adult.

The intent of this study was to contribute to the overall knowledge base about the effectiveness of closing the achievement gap through a mentoring program. Explicitly, this study focused on the mentees' academic grades, attendance record, and discipline referrals before and after the mentoring program took place. As a result of a myriad of factors, many African-American males find themselves struggling academically in schools. Understanding the unique perspectives of these young men may help ensure that all students find academic and behavioral success. Analysis of data from this research study might enable school leaders to employ better intervention strategies for working with at-risk youth. More specifically, school leaders might obtain a more wide-ranging understanding of the positive, and perhaps life-changing, effects that mentoring could have on at-risk students during the critical ages of adolescence. With success of this program, administrators and teachers across the nation will be able to transfer some of the practices and interventions to their respective schools. This, in the end, might assist them in growing academically and flourishing in their adult lives.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were applied to this particular research study.

Achievement Gap. The achievement gap refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performances of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity and gender (Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohmstedt, & Borman, 2013).

At-Risk Student. A student who demonstrates behaviors that hinder academic success: poor grade-point average (failed one or more school years), excessive absences (more than 10 unexcused absences throughout the previous school year), chronic discipline referrals (10 or more discipline referrals to the main office) in one school year (Schorr, 2000).

Constructivist Academic Mentoring Program (CAMP). In 2015, the action research team developed this mentoring program to provide additional support for identified at-risk students. We partnered each of the ten participants with ten different mentors. The mentors were not the students' current teachers. Employed professional educators served as volunteers to mentor identified at-risk students and to promote educational development, academic success, and growth throughout the school year.

Mentor. The mentor could be a classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, librarian, or other paid faculty member. For this study, students were partnered with professionals who were not their individual classroom teachers (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson, 2014).

Mentoring. "A one-to-one, teacher-student relationship occurring during regular school hours and after school, using specific mentoring behaviors for the purposes of improving student academic success, decreasing referrals, increasing attendance, and improving the quality of student-adult relationships" (Alkin & Ellet, 2004, p. 24).

Middle School. "A school, by design, that houses students in grades 6, 7, and 8, primarily aged 11-14" (Hurt & Holt, 2003, p. 64).

No Child Left Behind: Federal programs that strive to improve the performance of America's primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for schools, and school districts (Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohmstedt, & Borman, 2013).

Self-Efficacy: The belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1993).

Site Coordinator. "The individual at the site who is viewed as being a positive role model among all those involved in the mentoring program" (Jacobi, 2001, p. 38). The site coordinator was responsible for collaborating on all mentoring activities, administrating CAMP strategies, and keeping records on mentors and at-risk students (Jacobi, 2001). The site coordinator was also the link to gathering data within the school setting. The coordinator was responsible for administering all surveys to participants during both pre- and post-mentor implementation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW and THEORETICAL FRAMING

This chapter reviews the literature that provides the theoretical framework and grounding for this study. This research included an examination of over one hundred books, journal articles, and dissertations spanning several topic areas related to mentoring and African-American achievement that undergirds the conceptual framework of the study. The University of Georgia Library GALILEO system was accessed to conduct searches of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Dissertation Abstracts Online. The following keywords were used to guide the searches in these databases: adolescence, mentoring, African-American males, African-American male achievement, achievement gap, African-American males and mentoring, middle school, and African-American males and middle school achievement.

Social Learning Theory

This goal of this research is to find out the influence of mentoring and its impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers of students, as well as their self-efficacy. Research is accessible which looks at the usefulness of mentorship programs in the area of retention and/or academic success among students at-risk for failure or attrition (Jacobi, 1991) but does not study how this intervention influences members' self-efficacy and discernment. Recent research has applied social learning theory and social cognitive theory as an analysis tool to gauge the efficiency of mentorship programs (Haynes, 2004). A critical examination of the social learning theory is provided below in an effort to justify its relevance for this study.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) hypothesizes that one mechanism by which individuals learn is observation of others individuals in their social environment. Similarly, the theory of mentoring proposes that through psychological support, a mentor is able to help a protégé develop his or her sense of competence, confidence and self-esteem (Allen & Day, 2002). Principally, social learning theory extends this theory by contending that this development is achieved through observing and modeling the behaviors and attitudes of others (Ormund, 1999). Bandura (1977) expounds upon this theory in the following quote:

> Learning would be laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (p. 22).

Merriam and Carafarella (1999) further expounded the significance of the social learning theory in reference to mentoring by stating "Social learning theories contribute to learning by stressing the importance of social context and illuminating the process of modeling and mentoring" (p. 139). This theory considers that people learn from one another, including concepts of observational learning, imitation, and modeling. Social learning theory is also relevant because it is seen as a bridge between behaviorist learning theories and cognitive learning theories (Ormond, 1999).

The introduction of social learning theory helps to explain human behavior in terms of uninterrupted reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's version of social learning theory is unique in that it presents a sophisticated take on behaviorism by embracing a cognitive-behaviorism approach that addresses

the interface between how we think and how we act (Bahn, 2001). Demonstrating or modeling behavior is another key aspect of social learning theory.

According to Bandura (1977) social learning theory consists initially of knowledge by the individual observing a variety of models. Children repeatedly observe and learn standards and behavior patterns, not only of parents, but also of siblings, peers, and other adults. After this, performance may follow, developing a pattern of behavior different from the original model (Bahn, 2001). Modeling is considered a commanding means of transmitting values, attitudes and even patterns of thought and behavior (Bandura, 1977). This sort of copied learning is highly likely to occur when the role model (i.e. mentor) is relevant, credible, and knowledgeable, and if the behavior is rewarded by others (Eby, Lockwood, & Butts, 2005). The potential of an effective mentor's influence on the behavior and perceptions of a protégé are readily apparent and amalgamate with social learning theory to form an investigative lens from which to view the impact of the mentoring relationship on a student.

In finishing the investigation of social learning theory and social cognitive theory it is advantageous to review the following quote provided by Bandura (1989):

> Humans have an unparalleled capability to become many things. The qualities that are cultivated and the life paths that realistically become open to them are partly determined by the nature of the cultural agencies to which their development is entrusted. Social systems that cultivate generalizable competencies, create opportunity structures, provide useful resources, and allow room for self-directedness, increase the chances that people will realize what they wish to become. (p. 75)

This quote helps show the importance of social systems and cultural influences on the decision-making ability of people. As this study continues to measure the impact that the CMS

Mentoring Program has on of African-American males, it is vital to consider social learning theory as framework for this particular study. Due to social learning theory's emphasis on social interaction, environmental influences, and modeled behavior, it is the goal of this researcher to use this theory to help explain behavior and behavior change.

African-American Male Achievement

Discussions about the educational status of African-American males and the nature of their precarious educational position are infused with compelling metaphors such as "endangered species," "epidemic of failure," and "institutional decimation." Many believe that schools are not only failing to meet the particular social and developmental needs of African-American males but are academically abusing them (Holland, 1989; Leake & Leake, 1992; Polite, 1993). Out of the alarming discourse surrounding this issue has emerged an urgency to address the problems of African-American males' school experiences (Davis and Jordan, 1994).

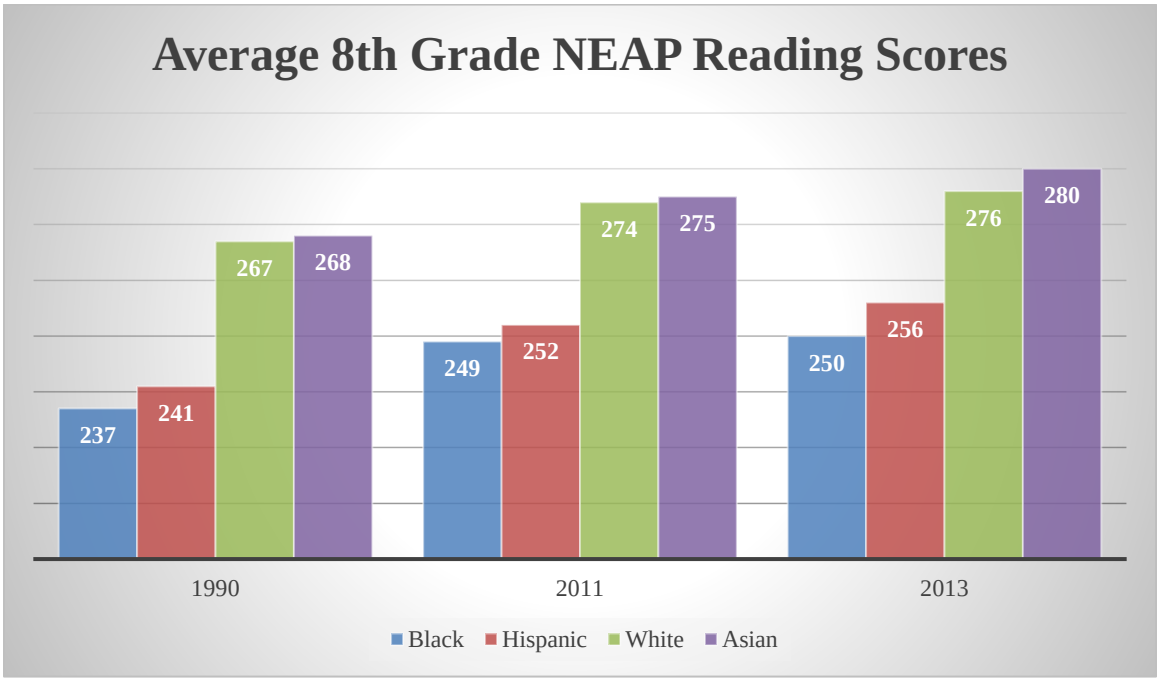
When evaluating the achievement of African-American students on a national level, the discrepancy between their achievement levels and those of other subgroups is evident. According to a study by the National Center for Educational Progress (NAEP) comparing reading testing data from the 1990 to 2013 scale scores of eighth graders, African-American students trailed Asian, White, and Hispanic students in virtually every category. In 2013, 16% of African-American fourth grade students were at the proficient level in reading and 2% were at the advanced level compared to Asians who had 49% of students at the proficient level and 16% at the advanced level, and Whites with 42% of proficient students and 10% of advanced students (Kena, et al., 2014).

In eighth grade, only 14% of African-Americans were at the proficient level in reading compared to 45% of Asians, and 42% of Whites (Kena, et al., 2014). The advanced level eighth

grade reading scores for African-Americans rounded to 0 while 6% of Asians and 4% of Whites were at that level (Kena et al., 2014). When comparing average eighth grade reading scores, all subgroups' scores have steadily declined since 1990, but results for African-Americans was the lowest of all ethnic subgroups as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Comparison of NAEP Reading Scores



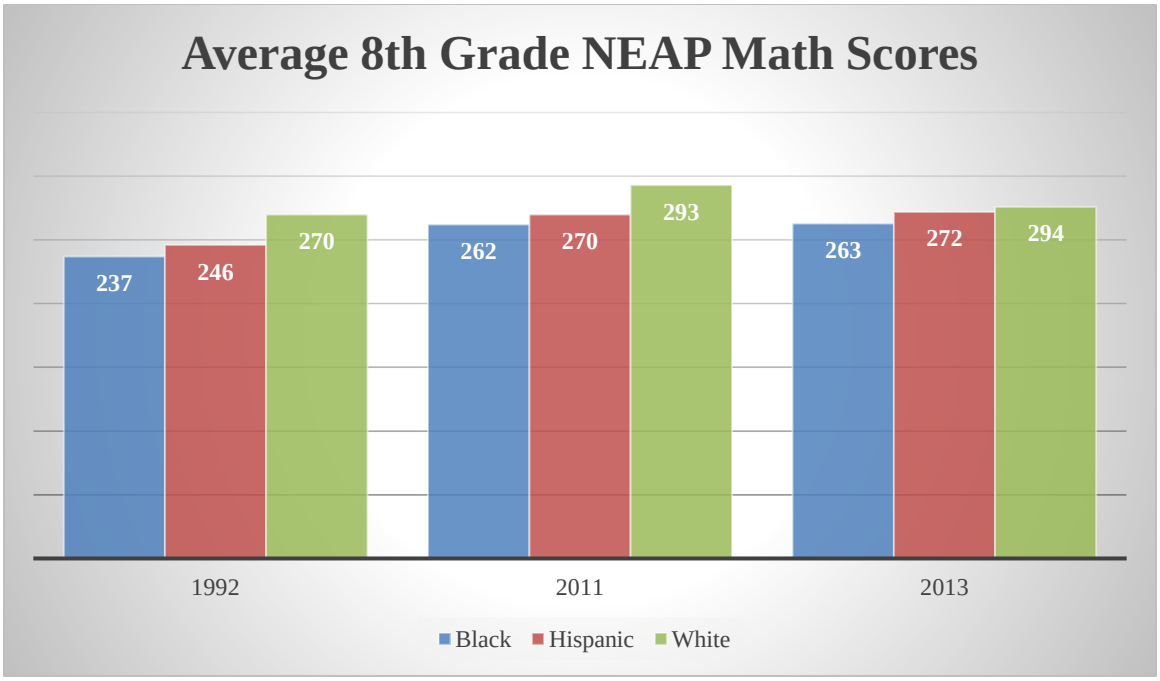
Note. Adapted from National Council of Education Statistics, 2014.

Table 6 shows that very similar to the reading scores, African-American students performed the lowest among all subgroups on the NAEP mathematics assessment. While the margin was slightly greater between African-American and Hispanics at the proficient level compared to the reading results, it was comparable at the advanced level. Based on the eighth grade mathematics test results, significant achievement gaps at the proficient level between African-Americans and Whites, and African-Americans and Hispanics were evident with the following percentages of each group scoring in that range: African-Americans 16%, Whites

51%, and Hispanics 22% (Kena, et al., 2014). At the eighth grade mathematics advanced level, there were only 1% of African-American students scoring in that range compared to 2% of Hispanics, and 8% of Whites (Kena et al., 2014).

Table 6

Comparison of NAEP Mathematics Scores



Note. Adapted from National Council of Education Statistics, 2014.

In addition to NAEP assessments, enrollment in algebra by the eighth grade is another method the U.S. Department of Education uses to measure academic success and consequently uncovered more racial disparities in achievement. Algebra completion by eighth grade is often an indicator of a student's degree of high school math success and has been reported to help increase one's chances of acceptance into a four-year college. Bovick and Ingles (2008) argued that when students are given an equal chance to take rigorous courses like algebra (in the eighth grade), the achievement gap will decrease significantly and standardized tests and other assessments will reflect less of a disparity between races. However, according to Walston and

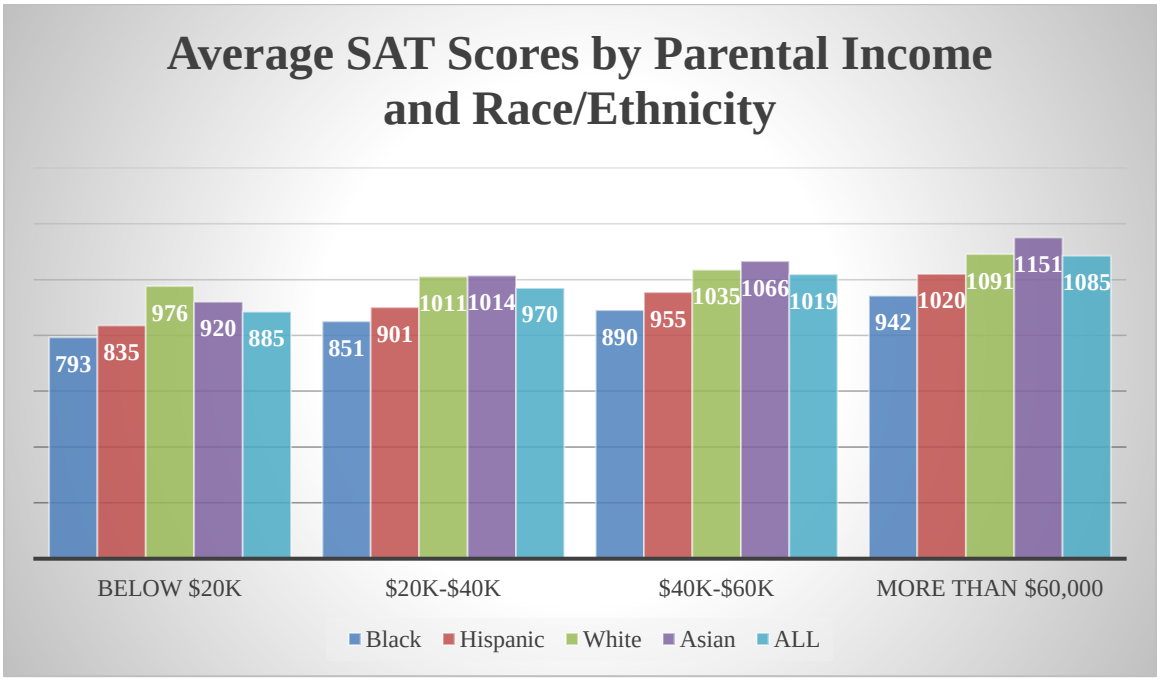
McCarrol (2010), only 19% of African-American eighth grade students are enrolled in an algebra course (or a higher math class) compared to 67% of Asians, 45% of Whites, and 38% of Hispanics.

Even when African-American students score as well as their counterparts in elementary school math, it has been shown that they are still less likely to be placed in algebra by the eighth grade, reducing their chances of achieving academic equity. While 62% of high achieving fifth grade math students end up in algebra by the eighth grade, only 35% of those high achieving African-American students are placed in algebra compared to 94% of Asians, 68% of Hispanics, and 64% of Whites (Walston & McCarrol, 2010).

When comparing SAT scores, one can see that income does impact achievement. The scores of all races improve as their family income increases. However, wealth or poverty alone fails to fully explain the racial achievement gap, which persists irrespective of income level. Specifically, African-American students are the lowest performing group at every income level (Singleton, 2015).

Table 7

SAT Scores by Income and Race/Ethnicity



Note. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education.

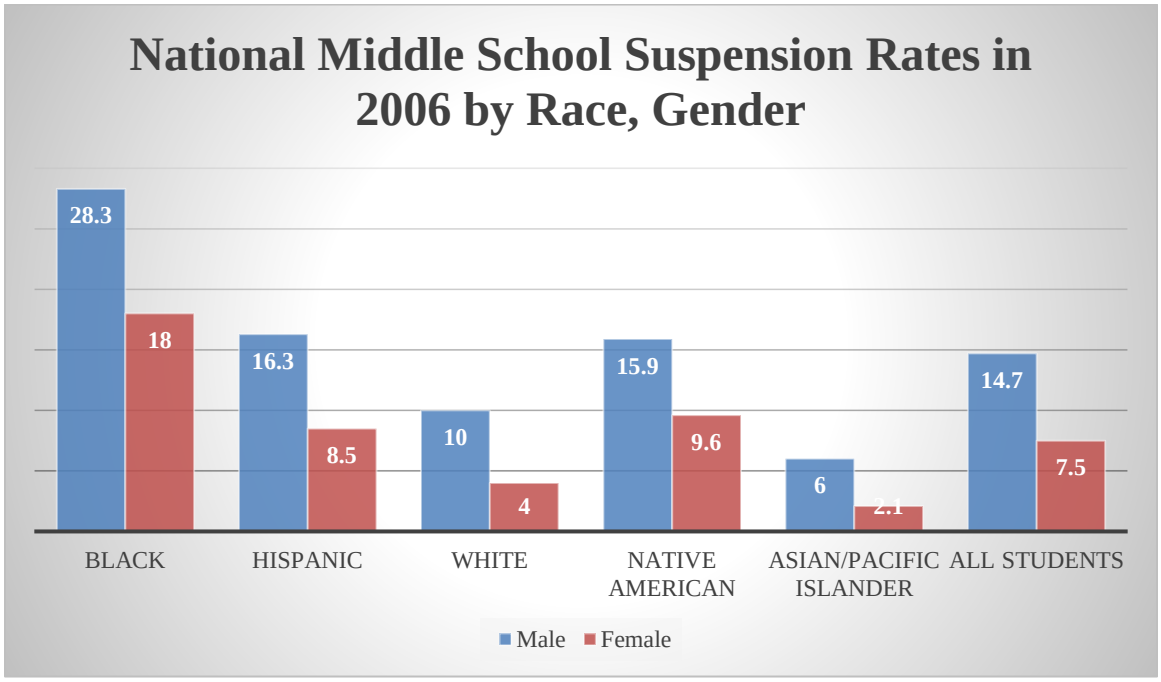
Behavior Disproportionality

In categories related to school behavior, African-American youth continue to produce less than favorable outcomes when measured against youth of other subgroups, particularly when it comes to infractions that result in time out of school. The suspension and expulsion rates are two examples of behavioral factors that often hinder the academic progress of African-American youth. Although overall school discipline rates decreased for most subgroups between 1991 and 2005, they actually increased for African-American students over that same period (Wallace et al., 2008). Between 1973 and 2006, the suspension rate among African-American middle school students increased nine points, increasing the suspension gap for African-Americans and White students from three to 10 percentage points in those 3 decades (Losen & Skiba, 2006).

African-American students (regardless of age range) have been reported as being suspended as much as two to three times more than other subgroups (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Unfortunately, the extensive amounts of time African-American males miss out of school impacts their academics and in addition to underperforming, reports indicate that suspended students feel less connected to their school, tend to be less invested, and lack motivation to achieve (Gregory, et al., 2010). Concerns about lost instructional time, as well as other possible harmful side effects from suspension, are amplified by consistent findings that African-American youth are over-represented in school suspensions and that the increased use of suspension has been largest for poor and minority children as referenced in Table 8.

Table 8

2006 Middle School Suspension Rates by Race and Gender



Note. Adapted from National Middle School Suspension Rates in 2006, Office *of Civil Rights.*

Student Retention

Student retention has also been identified as a school factor influencing youth who drop out of school. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) found that as early as middle school, strong relationships exist between retention in grade and a student's decision to drop out. According to McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), in cities with the highest dropout rates, up to 40% of students repeat the ninth grade, of which only 10%-15% go on to graduate. In both middle and high school, low rates of academic achievement, student failure in particular, leads to disengagement from school which is a strong predictor of dropping out (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).

The results of high retention and dropout rates among African-American males have adversely affected graduation rates. According to Greene and Winters (2006), only about 55% of African-American males and females nationally graduate high school, which is slightly higher than Hispanic males and females at 53%, but significantly lower than Whites (about 78%) and Asians (about 72%).

When African-American males struggle academically, are suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates, drop out of high school, fail to enroll in college, and when enrolled in college fail to earn a degree, problematic circumstances often ensue. Gavazzi et al. (2009) argued that poor academic achievement and behavioral challenges in school are factors that can lead to delinquency in African-American males, and as a result make them twice as likely to engage in antisocial behavior compared to their peers who find greater academic success.

Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1993), the self-efficacy theory is based on a person's belief in his or her own ability to exercise and maintain some level of control over events that affect his or her life. "Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1993, p. 118).

Merriam and Carafarella (1999) helped clarify the relevance of social learning theories in reference to mentoring by stating "Social learning theories contribute to adult learning by highlighting the importance of social context and explicating the process of modeling and mentoring" (p. 139). The inclusion of social learning theories (inclusive of social cognitive theory) is the result of social learning theory's emphasis on how social context and the environment reinforce behavior (Ormond, 1999). This theory considers that people learn from one another, including concepts of observational learning, imitation, and modeling. Social learning theory is also relevant because it is seen as a bridge between behaviorist learning theories and cognitive learning theories (Ormond, 1999).

Bandura's (1977a, b; 1986) model of self-efficacy seems to be a befitting framework to discuss how mentees participating in the CMS Mentoring Program may be influenced by attitudes and perceptions of their mentors. This framework includes the perceptions or how people feel about their ability to perform a task as well as the consequences people expect to result from their performances. This includes discussions on the behavioral aspects toward one's efficacy and the outcome the person expects to receive. Bandura (1977b), a social learning theorist, illustrated behavior as being a shared interaction between the individual, environment, and behavior. Although we know these variables are naturally interdependent, Bandura (1977b) highlights the core of operations that occur among the three variables by means of cognition.

Bandura's (1977b) explanation of the self-efficacy theory cannot be complete without discussing the concepts of symbolic, vicarious, and self-regulatory processes. For purposes of this study, self-regulation was discussed as it speaks to perceptions.

Self-regulatory activities enable a person to exercise some degree of control over their behavior (Bandura, 1977b). Positive attitudes and perceptions or the cognition that children possess about their ability to demonstrate academic achievement was relevant to the current study as they may impact motivation, preferably intrinsic motivation. It was important to note that the key to understanding Bandura's theory as it is related to the current study was not the actual skills that students have to achieve academically; but what students believe they are capable of in pursuing academic achievement. Bandura (1977a, 1986) further posits that efficacy expectations also establish motivation. This establishment derives from or is reflected by the amount of efficacy exhausted as well as the degree of persistence demonstrated during trials or obstacles. One of the goals of this research is to increase the mentees' self-efficacy in academics with help from their mentor.

Mentoring

Mentoring is referenced in Homer's "The Odyssey" written around 700 B.C. through the character "Mentor" who was a friend of Odysseus (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005). According to Dappen and Iserhagen's account, when Odysseus went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted Mentor to look after his son Telemachus and to protect him as he grew and developed into manhood. While Mentor is described in such a way, and was given such a charge, it has been argued that he did not adequately fulfill that role and failed to epitomize later definitions of what the term mentor has come to signify.

Mentoring in the United States has been traced to the late 1800s to a program called Friendly Visiting. According to Guetzloe (1997), the program was established to match middle-class adults with poor children and youth to provide them with role models; however it did not last long, and ended in the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the formal program diminishing, aspects of the Friendly Visitors model still existed in certain parts of the country well into the 1960s and 1970s (Townsel, 1997). According to Townsel (1997), the basic model still involved White middle-class and upper middle-class adults going into poor urban areas to help serve as a positive example to the children (usually minorities).

In 1904, the Men's Club of the Central Presbyterian Church of New York recognized the need to help youth in their community, and started what is now known as the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) organization. BBBSA traditionally has been a community-based mentoring program where adults are matched with youth of the same gender, on a one-on-one basis. BBBSA is still recognized as one of the largest and longest running mentoring organizations in America, with nearly 500 agencies serving millions of children across all 50 states (Cutshall, 2001). BBBSA continues to be a model for other community youth mentoring programs, and a number of mentoring researchers make reference to the organization in their work.

Mentoring Defined

Although the length, nature, regularity, and purpose of the relationship may vary, the concept of mentors and mentoring can be found in the literature from many fields. Such diverse interests as art and music, business, community advocacy programs, education and science have invested in the concept of mentoring. In the field of education; mentors have been used to support beginning administrators and teachers, first year graduate students, college freshmen,

gifted and talented students, regular students entering a transition phase, at-risk students, and special needs students.

The concept of mentoring has been defined, interpreted, and implemented in a variety of ways, and in one of its most basic forms can describe the relationship in which someone offers assistance or advice to someone else. The person offering the assistance is usually referred to as the mentor and the one who is the recipient of the support is sometimes considered the mentee or protégé. Loeser (2008) defined mentoring as a situation arranged by a community organization, business, or school where two individuals agree to meet one-on-one on a regular basis. Age is often included in mentoring definitions, and in one such case has been described as the pairing of a younger person (mentee) with an older more experienced person (mentor) with the expectation that the dyad will develop into a relationship where the mentor will support and guide the mentee (Thomson & Zand, 2010). Goldner and Mayseless (2009) also emphasized the dyadic characteristic of mentoring and explained it as the relationship between nonprofessional and non-parental adults and their protégés.

Mentoring relationships are practiced in various facets of American society including corporations, government, colleges and universities, communities, and schools. In each relationship, the mentor is encouraged and sometimes required to pass information on to the mentee and the information varies based on the situation and nature of the mentoring relationship. Mentors have also been known to share specific skills, habits, practices, or behaviors with their mentees. According to Rhodes (2006), a mentor listens to, cares for, advises, and shares information about life, careers, and other experiences with another, usually a younger person who requires their assistance. Youth determine how they see themselves based on the opinions they see reflected back to them (Rhodes et al., 2006). Self-identity is an important part

of adolescent development. A positive mentoring relationship can contribute to a more positive self-identity.

Many mentors are volunteers who engage in mentoring simply because they have a desire to help others. In other circumstances, mentors are motivated to serve in that capacity to receive compensation in exchange for services they provide. In both cases, mentoring is important and necessary for some people to learn, develop, and improve personally, educationally, or professionally. The instances where mentors are compensated for their time and service often occur in professional or business settings. This is reflected by Hall (2015) where they explained mentoring as "a form of professional socialization wherein a more experienced individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and patron of a less experienced protégé" (p. 43).

Types of Mentoring

Adult-to-adult or peer-to-peer are two widely practiced forms of volunteer mentoring, however adult-to-youth is one of the most popular mentoring structures. This traditional style of mentoring is practiced by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), and many other mentoring programs serving youth throughout America. Often referred to as youth mentoring, this applies to situations where adults are formally assigned to serve as mentors to adolescents and teens. According to Eby et al., (2008), youth mentoring involves a relationship between a caring, supportive adult and a child or adolescent. Gordon, et al. (2009) characterized a mentoring relationship as one that is built on mutual trust, use of accurate and reliable information, reasonable goals, decisions, and options; challenge ideas, beliefs, and actions; holistic support (intellectual, psychological, emotional); and encouragement for their dreams.

Adult-to-youth mentoring programs are sometimes designed solely for youth who are labeled "at risk." At-risk youth are associated with needing special attention and support, often as

a result having negative life experiences, making poor choices, or experiencing lack of time spent with other adults. At-risk can refer to a number of characteristics including youth who are economically disadvantaged, exhibiting academic or behavioral problems in school, engaging in behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, or dealing with teenage pregnancy. Loeser (2008) suggested that youth mentoring programs in most instances are created for the at-risk child and those youth who may be abused or neglected, a parent or expecting parent, a juvenile offender, a low academic achiever, or even one who has a disability. Describing mentoring programs targeted for at-risk students, Converse, Lignugaris, & Kraft (2009) defined the relationship between an adult mentor and a child as one that is essential in the fact that when a child is paired with an adult mentor there is a greater chance of a nurturing and positive outcome for the child when it comes to attaining life's goals. The belief is that these youth have value and ability, but lack the presence of positive role models to help guide them through life's challenges and help them make appropriate choices.

The hope for at-risk youth who are referred to mentoring programs is that they will acquire positive characteristics they may be lacking, or get rid of negative attributes that may be hindering them. According to Eby et al., (2008) mentoring is typically used as a way to increase desirable behavior (e.g., good grades, improved effort) and decrease undesirable behavior (e.g., dropout rate, drug use). Some mentors of at-risk youth have concluded that their efforts have indeed been effective in helping to reduce a variety of negative behaviors. When Hickman and Garvey (2006) analyzed the results of a mentoring program's impact on achievement and behavior, they found mentors reported high success rates in addressing risk factors such as drug use, self-esteem, low academic achievement, and abuse. In another study of youth deemed at risk due to behavioral problems, the group receiving intervention through mentoring demonstrated

positive changes in four of seven areas that were analyzed as opposed to no improvement in the group receiving no intervention (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002). The intervention group in this study also received confirmation of positive behavioral change from their parents and teachers.

Youth mentoring programs throughout the country have typically been designed as one-on-one efforts where an adult is matched to an adolescent or teen and makes a commitment to share time engaging in conversation and other types of activities. It has been estimated that more than 4,500 organizations throughout the nation support mentoring initiatives (Dubois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002). According to Rhodes and Dubois (2008), mentoring is one of the most popular social interventions in American society, with about 3 million U.S. youth who are engaged in formal one-on-one mentoring. While the one-on-one style is the preferred method and is most widely used, there are insufficient numbers of adults available to be matched with each youth waiting for a mentor. According to Wandersman et al., (2006) 2.5 million young people are in mentoring relationships; however, an estimated 15 million are still in need of mentors.

The lack of available mentors has encouraged mentoring agencies and program directors to explore mentoring options beyond the one-on-one format. As a result, mentoring utilizing a group format has been one of the methods used to help address the vast number of youth in need of mentors, and although the one-on-one relationship tends to be minimized in this format, this mentoring style can still be deemed effective. Gordon, et al., (2009) suggested that for mentoring programs to be effective there should be reasonably frequent contact, sufficient interactive time together, and the mentee achieves their objectives and accepts the collaborative experience with six separate functions: (1) emphasis on the relationship, (2) emphasis on

information exchange, (3) focusing on facilitation,(4) focusing on confrontation, (5) attention to their role as a model for the mentee, and (6) attention to the vision that the mentee brings to the relationship.

Youth mentoring programs serve diverse populations, and are implemented in various ways throughout the country. Despite the variation, certain characteristics have proven to be widely effective and can increase the likelihood of mentoring success. Duration of the relationship is one important characteristic that is often mentioned in research. The ability for the mentor and youth to form a strong and lasting bond has been deemed crucial for the youth to develop positive outcomes through mentoring (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). It may seem that any time a youth spends with a mentor would be beneficial, however the extent of time a mentor commits to the youth is important. In a national report of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America program, Rhodes and Lowe (2006) found positive youth outcomes increased as the length of the mentoring relationship increased. Rhodes (2007) also found when mentors and mentees can endure through the uncomfortable situations or moments of the mentoring relationship that seem unfulfilling, the benefits of the relationship tend to be more evident. In a study of adult survivors of child abuse, the survivors that were considered "well adjusted" identified as having at least one long-term relationship with a mentor while growing up, while the adults labeled "poorly adjusted" were less likely to report having any such relationship (Southwick, Morgan, Vythlingam, & Charney, 2006).

A number of mentoring studies discuss the impact the duration of youth mentoring relationships have on the levels of reported success, and studies make recommendations regarding the minimum length an adult-to-youth relationship should last. A commitment of at least one year is favorable for mentoring youth. Furthermore, when the relationship lasts more

than 12 months there is an increases in self-worth, an increase in perceived social acceptance and scholastic competence, improved parental relations, and decreases in drug and alcohol use (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However, in situations like school mentoring where students are in school for less than one year, at least six months of time spent together is necessary to make a measurable impact. In an analysis of a school-based program, Rhodes (2007) reported that the youth who showed the most favorable results on the measured outcomes were those youth who were in the longest mentoring relationships. In a related study of the BBBSA, Rhodes and Dubois (2008) highlighted the importance of long-term mentoring, and uncovered no notable benefits stemming from mentoring relationships lasting less than 6 months.

In addition to studies that suggest short-term mentoring may lack benefits for the youth involved, research has shown it can even serve to hurt the mentee. While youth in mentoring relationships were reported to make academic, psychological, and behavioral improvements when mentored one year or longer, progressively fewer positive outcomes emerged for youth mentored between three months to one year (Rhodes et al., 2005). Similarly, Southwick et al., (2006) reported that volunteer mentoring could actually have a negative impact on certain groups of at-risk children if it is done inconsistently or for only a short time period. Dubois and Rhodes (2006) stated that youth in mentoring relationships ending within the first three months had more reduced self-esteem than youth who received no mentoring at all. In addition to reduced self-concept, youth in mentoring relationships of less than three months can also exhibit declines in perceived scholastic competence (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). When studying BBBSA, Rhodes (2008) found the nine months (or less) constraints of school-based mentoring were deemed less enduring than community-based initiatives which extended throughout the entire year. While youth mentoring is a valuable resource for at-risk youth and other youth as well, it is important

for mentors to be available to make a generous time commitment to the mentee in order for their efforts to be beneficial.

While the duration of time mentors spend with their mentees is important, the consistency of time together is critical as well. If a mentoring relationship lasts a year, but the mentor and mentee meet infrequently, the relationship will likely suffer due to the lack of time spent together. Rhodes and Chan (2008) highlighted the value of mentoring over a "significant period of time," (p. 11) but also stressed for close bonds to develop-mentors and youth need to consistently spend time with one another. Consistency of contact, especially when coupled with a sizeable time commitment, often produces a successful mentoring relationship. According to Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lily, and Povinelli (2002), regular contact between mentors and mentees is essential to positive relationship outcomes.

In addition to helping to foster a positive mentoring relationship, the ability for adults to maintain regular contact with their mentees yields a number of benefits. The notion of regular contact has been indirectly connected to positive youth outcomes particularly because the time together allows for engagement in beneficial activities and bonds of support to take root (Rhodes, 2007). While some mentoring formats may not allow for consistent contact, that characteristic has been deemed essential to higher-quality mentoring relationships (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). In a study of a branch of the BBBSA and another similar mentoring initiative Parra et al. (2002) found that mentors who are able to maintain monthly contact with their mentees had a tendency to report greater benefits for the youth with whom they were assigned. Rhodes and Lowe (2008) reported specific benefits when they found "regular contact overtime is important and can enhance the mentee's feelings of security and attachment in the mentoring and other important relationships" (p. 11).

It is the formation of the bond between the adult and youth created by the time they share with one another which helps to foster successful mentoring relationships. Other studies support the notion that frequency and consistency of contact have positive outcomes for youth and revealed that these relationships allow for emotional bonding to take place, enable trust to be established, and help youth cope with stress and other issues. Rhodes and Dubois (2008) noted the benefits of mentoring are evident only when mentors and youth are able to develop trust, empathy, and mutual respect as a result of their time spent together.

School Based Mentoring

Schools constitute an obvious setting in which to promote youth mentoring. Successful school-based mentoring programs can benefit not only the individual, but also the school as a whole, by establishing social support networks that integrate caring adults from the surrounding community (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996). This, in turn, can contribute to a sense of community in the school. Research indicates that such a sense of community, as reflected in students' level of school connectedness, serves as a protective factor for a number of adverse behaviors (Battistich & Horn, 1997). In fact, it has been suggested that school connectedness is the single most effective aspect of the school environment in predicting better health and healthier behaviors among adolescents (Blum & Rinehard, 1997). No doubt due to the many benefits linked to mentoring in the school setting, including relatively low cost, and convenience to both mentors and mentees, school-based mentoring programs have proliferated. More than 70% of site-based mentoring programs, which comprise 45% of mentoring programs overall, are located in schools (Rhodes, 2002).

Conversely, as noted, the literature on mentoring, specifically the peer-reviewed literature, is exceedingly limited. All together, these studies have not provided a strong body of

substantiation to support the positive effects of mentoring programs. Moreover, research has established not only that some mentoring programs are not achieving their intended objectives (McPartland & Nettles, 1991), but also that an inadequate mentoring relationship can have an undesirable impact, lowering a child's self-esteem and trust in adults (Rhodes, 2002).

Even with the latest promotion and increase of mentoring programs, primarily in educational settings, there remain insufficient and unreliable data regarding the effectiveness of this type of intervention (DuBois et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2008; Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). One likely justification is that these mentoring programs have diverse formats and characteristics (e.g., theoretical frameworks, frequency of contacts, target populations, and types of assessment), which could significantly impair their ability to be compared for their effectiveness. Another possible problem is that the investigation to identify the reasons that lead to failure of such programs is inadequate (Spencer, 2007b).

The latest meta-analyses and literature reviews concentrating on mentoring reason that the programs should satisfy a series of features or good practices to reassure their positive effect. For example, DuBois et al. (2002) highlighted five practices that predict the positive effects of mentoring programs: (a) providing ongoing mentor training; (b) structuring activities for mentors and mentees; (c) clarifying expectations concerning meeting frequency; (d) involving parents; and (e) monitoring program implementation.

Eby et al. (2008) piloted a meta-analysis based on 116 research papers focusing on youth, academic, and workplace mentoring programs to compute the effect size of these programs on the mentees' behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career outcomes. There were two chief findings in the results from this study: first, mentoring is more powerfully related to mentee attitudes and motivation/involvement than their behaviors (e.g., academic

achievement), health, or career outcomes. Eby et al. (2008) speculated that this finding might be because attitudes are more malleable than others (e.g., personality variables). Second, these authors found that, consistent with the bulk of previous studies, the overall extent of the association between mentoring and outcomes was small; nevertheless, the results of their study also suggested that academic mentoring is more strongly associated with positive outcomes than youth and workplace mentoring.

Based on the norms established by Cohen (1988), the results indicated that the effect sizes were small-medium for academic mentoring, small for workplace mentoring, and not significant for youth mentoring. Thus, Eby et al. (2008) maintained that, even in the case of academic and workplace mentoring programs, it is not probable to affirm that positive outcomes are caused by the mentoring relationship because most of the studies included in the meta-analysis were cross-sectional or of a non-experimental nature. Therefore, these authors propose that future research should use experimental designs, investigate academic mentoring intervention outcomes over time, and should be anchored in clear structures.

Elements of Effective Mentoring Programs

The goals of mentoring programs are to enhance student achievement, to provide nurturance, and to pass on values to the next generation, known as generativity (Erikson, 1959). Mentors are able to pass on life lessons that help their mentees shift into adulthood and help prepare them for life's journey (Freedman, 1991). For children living in poverty, compassionate mentors help keep hope alive that education, opportunities, and significant employment are possible. The supremely effective mentors are those who want to make a lasting connection with and difference in the lives of young people.

Benefits of Mentoring

Researchers have found evidence to show that youth mentoring can be both effective and ineffective but when implemented effectively, it has a number of benefits. More specifically, mentoring has been credited for helping adolescents build their self-esteem, become more resilient, and become better at solving their problems (Converse & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2009). Other benefits have included the ability for youth to cultivate a trusting relationship with an adult, to learn how to model appropriate behavior, to develop new skills and interests, and to have the opportunity to be exposed to new experiences (Loeser, 2008).

The benefits of youth mentoring have been analyzed closely especially in connection to school improvement, and the impact of the adult-to-youth relationship on school success has been the subject of many studies. Although results vary based on the program, a number of findings have indicated favorable results. Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000) noted that mentors tend to enhance the outlook of students when it comes to their academic efforts, attitudes, and overall school performance. Mentoring can also increase self-esteem in youth, and students with high self-esteem often enjoy going to school and tend to perform well when they are there (Loeser, 2008). In a study where 54% of youth reported having a mentor, the majority of them identified their mentoring relationship as helping them develop an overall positive attitude toward school (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Results from a BBBSA study of mentored youth after an 18 month period also yielded significant differences in behavior and academic performance of the mentored youth when compared to the control group (Rhodes, 2008).

Related to school issues, researchers have analyzed youth who exhibit excessive truancy and those youth who are at risk of dropping out of school. When close to 1,000 adolescents were surveyed after an 18-month period of being mentored, Rhodes et al. (2000) found that among

other positive outcomes, mentored youth showed significant improvement in their scholastic competence as well as their school attendance. Hickman and Garvey (2006) found that youth who are engaged in mentoring relationships only skipped school half as many times as students in the comparison group who were not receiving mentoring support. In a study of dropout rates, findings indicated that the students who made the decision to drop out of school expressed that part of their decision was based upon the lack of adequate support from a caring adult presence in their lives (Dondero, 1997). The presence of mentors can help to reduce the number of students who are truant and who drop out of school by providing the nurturing and guidance needed to help them make appropriate decisions and to remain in school regardless of the challenges or problems they may experience.

In addition to school improvement, mentoring has proven to be an effective way to build a variety of positive characteristics in youth that directly impact their health and well-being. In a study of the outcomes of mentoring, Rhodes and DuBois (2008) found that adolescents involved in mentoring programs often improved in a number of areas; one key area being better health.

Loeser (2008) also listed a number of benefits related to youth mentoring that both directly and indirectly impact the lives of youth. His research found that positive adult and youth relationships like mentoring are among the leading factors that help young people avoid suicide, depression, sexual risky behavior, and teenage pregnancy. In a related study, having a mentor increased the likelihood of youth engaging in increased levels of physical activity as well as using birth control on a more regular basis (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005). Additionally, youth in mentoring relationships are less likely to engage in violent acts or abuse drugs and alcohol (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2005)

Parents are often listed as a critical component of successful mentoring initiatives and their feedback has been instrumental in helping researchers uncover the breadth of benefits that programs may be yielding. Successful mentoring can improve the emotional connections youth have with their parents and can even improve child-parent relationships for youth in foster situations as well (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006). When parents of youth who participated in a New York City BBBSA program were surveyed regarding their thoughts about their children's mentoring experiences, 63% revealed their child's attitude and behavior improved significantly as a result of having a mentor (Royse, 1998). Mothers of at-risk African-American male youth who were engaged in mentoring to address their delinquency and mental illness reported decreases in problematic behaviors both at home and in school (Keating et al., 2002).

In addition to the viewpoints of parents about the impact of mentoring on their children, studies have analyzed ways youth view their parents as a result of being a part of a mentoring relationship, and some of the results have been favorable as well. In comparison to youth without mentors, those with mentors often express positive relationships with their parents and these positive relationships often transfer to teachers and the other adults in their lives (Rhodes et al., 2000).

Conclusion

There are many approaches to the research regarding mentoring underachieving African-American males. Depending on the results of this study, there may be similar evidence to support the connection between mentoring and academic improvement. If this becomes apparent in this research project, this study will have an impact on schools with young African-American males who are underachieving both academically and behaviorally. Like parents, schools across

the country serving populations of African-American male students are looking for answers to increase the levels of achievement and increase standardized test scores. If mentoring can be a proven method to help address the various problems facing African-American male middle school students, especially with regard to academics, schools might begin to advocate for such initiatives, or be willing to work more closely with community organizations that have a desire to collaborate with them on mentoring programs and other related endeavors to support African-American males. The gap this study will address is the lack of information about effective mentoring programs for underachieving African-American male middle school students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology for the action research case study of African-American students participating in a school-based mentoring program. The purpose of this study was to investigate how social learning theory and mentoring enhance the achievement of African-American male middle school students. The research questions this study answers are: In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males? The following related questions guided the study:

1. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?
2. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?

Qualitative Action Research Case Study

Qualitative action research case study enables researchers to study the intricacy and the particularity of social phenomena. A qualitative approach for this study was chosen for several compelling reasons. In general, qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Specifically, a qualitative approach is warranted when the nature of research questions requires exploration (Stake, 2013). Qualitative research questions often begin with how or what, so that the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of what is going on relative to the topic (Patton, 2002).

In this study, to help determine the possible benefits of mentoring African-American male youth, I engaged in one action research cycle that helped me move from recognizing a problem that needed to be addressed, to discovering ways to help address the problem, and understanding steps that needed to be taken to help prevent the problem from occurring again. The recursive process involved the following cycle, broken down into three progressive stages: Think, Look, and Act.

Additionally, a qualitative study allows the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). For the present study, I explored participants' perceptions and ideas about themselves and their world through data collection that focuses on the mentees and their feelings on academic achievement.

Furthermore, qualitative research methods are the best tactics when studying occurrences in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). The current study focused on the mentees' experiences of participating in the school-based mentoring program and the program's effects on mentees' self-efficacy and the achievement gap at the students' school.

Moreover, qualitative methods emphasize the researcher's role as active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). For the present study, I, as the researcher, was the key instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings (Stake, 2013). Qualitative research methods that were used in this study include: purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and systematic, concurrent data collection and data analysis procedures.

Since qualitative methodologies are fundamentally anchored in a concern for growing a depth of understanding both of a particular phenomenon and a building of meaning that persons

attribute to their experiences, care must be taken to attend to the complicated nuances that emerge (Jones, 2002). Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) submitted, for example, that the intent of qualitative research is, through in-depth examination, to illuminate and better understand the rich lives of human beings and the world in which they live.

To this end, Oldfather and West (1994) paralleled qualitative research to the musical genre of jazz.

> This comparison is fitting when bearing in mind the many elements of jazz and the ways these same qualities permeate qualitative research. They further recapitulated that the inclusive, improvisational, collaborative, and interpretative qualities of jazz are adaptive, and shaped by the contributors much like qualitative research is shaped by both the researcher and those participating: Those who experience jazz firsthand (as players or members of a live audience) are those most profoundly affected. Similarly, those who participate directly in qualitative research, who are physically, intellectually, and emotionally present in the research context, and who hear the interchange of voices for themselves are those for whom the understandings are most vivid and meaningful (Oldfather & West, 1994).

The qualitative approach is based on the idea of attempting to comprehend social processes in context, while exploring the implications of social events for those who are involved in them (Esterberg, 2002). Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world—studying things in their natural settings while attempting to make sense of and interpret occurrences in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research has grown in popularity over the past quarter of a century, and continues to emerge as a means to answer questions in the educational field. The purported qualitative turn that has overtaken the social sciences in the last twenty-five years has produced both a rich body

of research using non-statistical methods and a fundamental amount of methodological advice on how to engage in qualitative inquiry (Prasade, 2005).

Additionally, the components and foundations that guide qualitative research served as the means to contextualize and understand the research questions in this study. A qualitative approach was most suitable for this study because it fostered a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (mentees) and their own understandings of how the mentoring program affected them. The use of rich, critical description provided in-depth, detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. The essential elements of a qualitative research process are generally defined as including epistemology, a theoretical perspective, and methodology (Crotty, 1998).

Action research is a model of professional development that promotes collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue (Stringer, 2014). Within the action research process, I studied student learning as it relates to the achievement gap. It is a process that allowed me to learn about students participating in the mentoring program. In addition, I was able to monitor improved student learning through the program. The idea of action research is that educational problems and issues are best identified and investigated where the action is: at the classroom and school level. By integrating research into Constructivist Middle School and engaging my co-workers in research activities, findings were applied immediately and problems solved more quickly.

The action research case study was designed to help measure the effectiveness the mentoring program at Constructivist Middle School (CMS) might have in enhancing the academic achievement of African-American males. Efforts geared towards the improvement of African-American males, particularly with regard to their academic improvement are very much

needed. I implemented a variety of strategies in the process of my research design, collection of data, cycles of change, and data analysis.

Design of the Study

Qualitative action research case study served as the key methodology for this study. This section describes the background of case study research, defines case study methodology, examines the relevance of case study methodology, explores the characteristics and misconceptions of case study methods and describes case study research designs. All components of the research design are connected. However, these connections are not rigid. Maxwell's (2005) rubber band analogy explains the connections and interactions clearly, "This 'rubber band' metaphor portrays a qualitative design as something with considerable flexibility, but in which there are constraints imposed by the different parts on one another, constraints which, if violated, make the design ineffective" (p. 6).

In terms of the contributions of case studies, Flyvbjerg (2006) believed that greater numbers of good case studies would strengthen social science. However, he cautioned researchers to be mindful of the five greatest misunderstandings of case study research: (1) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (2) one cannot generalize from a single case; therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; (3) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (4) the case study contains a bias toward verification; and (5) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies.

Case Study

Stake (2010) described case study methodology as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals.

Cases are constrained by time and activity, and researchers gather detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. For this study, the phenomenon under investigation is the effects of the mentoring program on the achievement of African-American males. The case for the current study is mentees that attend CMS that participated in the CMS mentoring program.

Case study researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. For this study, I collected data through in-depth interviews, and additionally reviewed documents provided to me by the school where the study was conducted (CMS). Specifically, interviews were conducted and audio-taped, those recordings were transcribed into word documents, district documents were reviewed, and data were coded for emergent themes. Another component of case studies is the unit of analysis, defined as the area of focus of the study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2013).

Additionally, this study was conducted using an action research approach. Hinchey (2008) defined action research as "A process of systematic inquiry, usually cyclical, conducted by those inside a community rather than by outside experts" (p. 4). As an educator at CMS, I am considered to be an "insider" which afforded me the opportunity to also play the role of the researcher leading the study. While the primary researcher role is valuable in any study, action research emphasizes the importance of collaborating with others as change agents.

In addition to being characterized by having an insider conducting the study, the process of action research is also recognized as a model of social inquiry involving a spiral of interconnecting cycles (Schwandt, 2001). While other research styles tend to be linear in nature, action researchers move through typically three or four recurring acts in the process of improving upon an identified problem. In this study, three steps were used recurrently in my efforts to help

determine ways to help close the achievement gap between African-Americans and Whites at CMS. The three steps to be implemented follow: Think, Look, and Act.

Experiencing these steps a number times throughout this study helped me become aware of what the group of mentees need as reported directly from the young men themselves. This unique aspect in action research of acquiring information to help solve the problem directly from the participants affected by the issue is a significant component of this type of research design. Hinchey (2008) noted that theorist John Collier emphasized the importance of this element of action research as far back as 1945 when he suggested that those impacted by research findings should be the ones involved in helping to shape them.

Together with Hinchey's (2008) first definition of action research, she went on to add, "Its goal is to identify action that will generate some improvement the researcher believes important (p. 4). As the researcher, I believe that all of the work with the mentees is important, but I also realize a specific focus was necessary to create that important improvement. Following the guidelines of action research gave the ability to embark on the process of generating a lasting impact in the lives of the young men in this study, and to possibly influence those still participating after the study was finished.

Sample Selection

I was interested in providing a mentoring program for African-American male middle school students that are underachieving in school. The sample for this study was a purposeful, convenient sample. The site for research, Constructivist Middle School was selected due to the fact that I worked there and I had insider access. Merriam (2009) stated, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77).

Teachers and staff at CMS were asked to nominate potential candidates for the mentoring program based on a set of characteristics, including grades, attendance, and discipline records. Flyers were placed around the school to encourage students to sign up for the mentoring program. Letters were sent to students explaining the program and enclosing an application and consent form for them to submit to me, if interested. Interested applicants were sent a letter of congratulations with an explanation of the mentoring program and how their mentor will be selected. For the purpose of this research, there were ten mentees, ten mentors, and eight members of the Action Research team.

Data Collection

Green, Camilli, & Elmore (2006), echoing Yin (2013), stated that a carefully conducted case study benefits from having multiple sources of evidence, which ensure that the study is as robust as possible. The concept of methods refers in general to the appropriate use of techniques of data collection and analysis (Prasad, 2005). In a case study, it is important to converge sources of data, also known as triangulation, as a means to ensure comprehensive results that reflect the participants' understandings as accurately as possible. Yin (2013) and Stake (2000) concurred that triangulation is crucial to performing a case study reliably. Additional sources of data allow case study researchers to create a story—one that honors participants' meaning-making processes. Seidman (2013) supported this same view, stating, "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories." (p.68)

Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness (Seidman, 2013). Based on the scope of this research, which focused on making meaning, I selected interviewing as the

primary data collection vehicle, and thickened the data with three additional data points: mentees' academic grades, attendance, and discipline records.

As a rule, interviews must be conducted cautiously to ensure a reliable case study. Purposeful sampling, including the consideration of an individual versus a group focus, should be considered, as well as sample size and appropriate participants to choose for the interviews. The interview is often viewed as a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee responds accordingly (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher should determine early who the "gatekeeper" of the knowledge is and be able to access the best sources to ensure as rich of a data sample as possible. There were two reasons I identified building mentees as gatekeepers. First, they know themselves best. Second, and more importantly, I needed to hear directly from mentees in order to know what particular portions of the mentoring program help them achieve academically.

When conducting interviews, relationships and rapport must be established, and coupled with trust, "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. We interview people to find out from them those things we can't observe" (Patton, 2005, p. 196). Active listening and nonjudgmental behavior are two of the common practices that should be prioritized when interviewing for case study research. There are six types of questions (Patton, 2005; Merriam, 2009) to be employed during the interview process for case study research: (1) experience/behavior, (2) opinion/belief, (3) feeling, (4) knowledge, (5) sensory, and (6) background/demographic.

Esterberg (2002) described a pattern for general and specific questions, called, "open-ended" questions, and cautioned against dichotomous or leading questions, which could lead to a closed style of questioning. The intent for this study was to make the interviews conversational.

As the researcher, I shared information about myself with the participants to establish the trust and rapport necessary for this conversation. Conducting the interviews in this way allowed me to put participants at ease, and allowed for an optimal interviewing environment.

To attain the needed data from the research participants, qualitative methods were conducted throughout the course of this study.

> Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2014).

Throughout the action research process, I used multiple forms of data to inform decisions. I purposely crafted critical incident interviews for this action research case study. The critical incident methodology is "a method for collecting data that consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations from memory of human behavior and classifying them in a way that facilitates their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad principles" (Flanagan, 1954).

I used semi-structured interviews with the participants in the study as well. I also used observations of participants in the action research team and in the mentoring program. To collect the data from the group, I used a digital recording device. After interviews, I enlisted the services of an expert to transcribe interviews into typed form.

I collected survey data as well. The surveys were developed to assess the mentoring program's impact on a change in perception over a five-month period and to compare its effect with other spheres of guidance impacting a student's discernment. A Likert scale was used to measure the degree to which the participants agreed or disagreed with each statement presented.

Mentoring programs have been evaluated in an assortment of ways. Typically, evaluation is divided into two distinct types: (a) Formative evaluation: Information that is collected during the course of the mentoring program and will be used to help improve the program. (b) Summative evaluation: Evidence that is collected upon completion of the program in order to demonstrate whether or not the program has achieved its objectives.

The first task is to decide what kinds of information are of most interest at this stage. If the program is in its early stages, the focus may need to be on formative evaluation information, which will help revise the program before undertaking a summative evaluation. If the program has been in place for a while and is thought to be relatively stable, then a summative evaluation may be more useful. Typically, both kinds of information will need to be collected, but emphasis on one or the other may vary based on the program's stage of development (Converse & Lignugaris, 2008).

As I prepared for a summative evaluation, I considered what kind of information would be most useful. For example, I wanted to know what the mentees thought of the program overall, what value they placed on it, and how it has affected their perceptions of themselves as scholars.

In addition, I wanted to know what the mentors thought of the program, its value, and their perceptions about their role in it as well.

I wanted to know what impact the mentoring program was having on Constructivist Middle School as a whole. For example, did students that participated in the program want to have leadership roles within the school? Were they feeling better about their role in the school? I wanted to collect descriptive data about the program and participants. Descriptive data helped me better understand the evaluation findings. As the literature review presented, many studies reported improvements on a variety of school variables. I expected that the variety of data collection methods used would enhance the influence of my study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is a matter of the degree of consistency of observed objects agreed upon by one observer on different occasions or by different observers (Hammersley, 1992). According to Hammersley (1990), validity refers to how accurately an account can represent the social phenomena. Reliability and validity are often mentioned together, for they are closely related issues in terms of research credibility. Similar to generalization, concepts of reliability and validity are viewed differently by researchers from different philosophical perspectives.

"Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Gibbs, 2007 as cited in Creswell, 2014).

According to Creswell and Miller (as cited in Creswell, 2014), validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. Creswell

(2014) also shared strategies to enhance the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy, which I implemented in my research: (a) triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes, (b) use member checking (respondent validation) to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate, (c) use survey information to analyze data, and (d) use a rich, thick description to convey the findings.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research studies involve a continuous interplay between data collection and data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). For this reason, I began analyzing data following the first interview to identify patterns, and to facilitate subsequent data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Qualitative analysis is a form of intellectual craftsmanship. There is no single way to accomplish qualitative research, since data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Similarly, a qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense (Stake, 2013). Stake reminded qualitative researchers that, "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis, he explained, "essentially means taking something apart" (p. 71). In this particular case, it not only means understanding the ways mentees respond to the mentoring program, but also identifying and defining the patterns that emerged from that meaning making process.

Qualitative data analysis, then, gives meaning to first impressions and final compilations. It is an analysis that tells the story of mentees' feelings about the mentoring program through

their own words. Methodologically, Esterberg (2002) suggested, "getting intimate with data" (p. 157), and describes the main objective of immersing oneself in interview transcripts to "load up your memory" with the collected data.

This dissertation research followed the data analysis and coding procedures suggested by Creswell (2009) and Esterberg (2002). Specifically, Esterberg suggested that open coding is a process where "you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest" (p. 158). Additionally, Creswell (2009) mandated the traditional approach in the social sciences that allows, "codes to emerge during the data analysis" (p. 187). Once the data from this research was examined thoroughly through the open coding process, I reviewed the codes for emerging themes in the data. This research study followed Creswell's (2009) six steps during the data analysis process and, although these steps are described in linear order, Creswell described "an interactive practice" to analysis. That is, there is a recursive element to following these steps—the process is not simply a static, linear order of analysis.

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis (p. 185). During this step, I reviewed audio recordings from interviews and transferred into word document transcripts.

Step 2: Read through the data (p. 185). This step also aligns with Esterberg's directive to "get to know your data". I reflected on the overall meaning to gain a general sense of the information and ideas that the participants conveyed.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with the coding process (p. 186). I followed Creswell's procedure of organizing the material into segments by taking the text data and segmenting sentences into categories. I then labeled those categories with terms based on the actual language from the participants.

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories for these for analysis. (p. 189). I utilized this process to generate codes for the descriptions, which then will lead to generalizing a small number of categories or themes. Then, I analyzed the themes that emerged and gathered the various cases into a general description for this case.

Step 5: Advance how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189). For this step, I weaved the emergent themes into narrative passages, so that the findings emerged logically from the participants' responses.

Step 6: Interpret the meaning of the data (p. 189). Creswell recognizes that a researcher's own background plays just as important a part of the meaning making process as a researcher's fidelity to a theoretical lens. During my own interpretation process, my experience as a teacher could have informed my understanding of the participants' stories. To convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences accurately, I focused on what they said, the conclusions they drew, and their intentions for future practice. The themes that emerged from this study came directly from my awareness of the healthy tension between my own biases and the participants' own meaning-making processes.

Data analysis is "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your understanding of them [the participants] and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 153). The data analysis in this study employed a qualitative approach which included the procedures of identifying patterns, labeling themes, and developing category systems.

The data analysis involved comparing and contrasting the responses to the interviews and the information collected from observations. The interview transcripts of individual interviewees were interpretively analyzed to identify interviewees' views and explanations regarding the CMS Mentoring Program. To minimize the invalidity of this research, I provided the participants with transcripts of their interviews so that they could check them for accuracy. The analysis also included continual revisiting of the data, particularly in the context of reviewed literature.

Data analysis proceeded hand-in-hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study, namely, the data collection and the write-up of findings (Creswell, 2014). "Qualitative researchers make considerable use of inductive reasoning: They make many specific observations and then draw inferences about larger and more general phenomena. Furthermore, their data analysis is more subjective in nature: They scrutinize the body of data in search of patterns-subjectively identified-that the data reflect" (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p.96). "Qualitative researchers construct interpretive narratives from their data and try to capture the complexity of the phenomenon under study. They use a more personal, literary style, and they often include the participants' own language and perspectives" (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p.97).

Qualitative research occurs within natural contexts and so, in this respect, is more 'true to life.' Yet the findings of qualitative studies may be so specific to a particular context that they do not apply (generalize) to other contexts" (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p. 97).

Yin (2013) regarded the problem of reliability and validity in case study as generating from the lack of a sufficiently operational set of measures. Therefore, he offers several techniques for establishing the reliability and validity of case study: pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis and program logic models. To begin with, the logic of

pattern-matching is to "compare an empirically based pattern with a predicted one" (Yin 2013, p. 106). This is to validate the internal validity of the analytical statements.

The second technique that Yin (2013, p.111) offered is explanation building. This process follows: (1) making an initial theoretical statement or an initial proposition about a policy or a social behavior, (2) comparing the findings of an initial case against such a statement or proposition, (3) revising the statement or proposition, (4) comparing other details of the case against the revision, (5) revising the statement or proposition again, (6) comparing the revision to the facts of a second, third, or more cases, and (7) repeating this process as many times as is needed. The difference between this approach and pattern-matching is that at the beginning, the proposition is not fully stipulated.

The third strategy that Yin suggested is a time-series analysis, which is to "examine 'how' and 'why' questions about the relationship of events over time" (Yin 2013, p. 118). The researcher has to divide the observation according to the time-series in order to compare patterns in different time frames. Patterns can be complicated because the variables change over time. However, "the ability to trace changes over time is a major strength of case studies" (p. 113).

The final strategy that Yin suggested is program logic models, which match "cause-effect patterns between independent and dependent variables" (2013, p. 118), and are mainly useful for explanatory and exploratory case studies.

To recap, one of the general characteristics of Yin's analysis techniques is that analysis requires exhaustive cross-checking or triangulation. Yin's analysis techniques should be used as supplementary checks to thick descriptions in qualitative case studies. These techniques can help to systemize and consolidate the qualitative data, thus ensuring reliability of this particular way of collecting and analyzing data.

Qualitative research entails the researcher to take an active role in the collection and interpretation of others' meaning making, and to be credible, qualitative researchers must be good and trustworthy. Stake (2010) cautioned qualitative researchers against narrow thinking, and instead suggested that researchers learn to understand their research as their participants do, rather than impose their own assumptions. In qualitative research, these protocols come under the name of "triangulation" (p.109).

Trustworthiness of Data

To increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings, I employed strategies recommended by renowned qualitative researchers. To decrease threats to credibility (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007), I (a) triangulated data; i.e., I used multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2002; Prasad, 2005; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2013); (b) performed member checks (Merriam, 2002) by sending participants a copy of their interview transcript and asking them to verify the accuracy of the content; and (c) requested peer (or colleague) reviews (Merriam, 2002) of my findings as they emerged.

To increase dependability (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007) of study findings, I provided an audit trail (Merriam, 2002)-that is, a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study. Finally, to enable other researchers to make decisions about transferability (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007) of results, I used rich, thick description (Merriam, 2002).

All researchers attempt to design and implement good/ethical and trustworthy studies. Indeed, qualitative researchers believe that if a study is credible, it has to be good in the ethical sense and be trustworthy. A sound case study is significant and complete, utilizes alternative perspectives as well as sufficient evidence and is reported in an engaging manner (Yin, 2013).

However, there are additional strategies, according to Merriam (2002) that researchers need to follow to be ethical and trustworthy: (a) triangulation-using multiple investigators, sources of data or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings. (b) member checks-taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom the data were derived, and verifying its plausibility, and (c) peer review-discussing the process of the study and the congruency of emerging findings with data and the tentative interpretations with colleagues.

In addition to triangulation, member checks, and peer review, Merriam (2002) recommends that credible and trustworthy researchers follow these additional guidelines: (a) reflexivity-engaging critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, biases, and the relationship to the study, which may affect investigation, (b) engagement-allowing for adequate time to collect data, such that it becomes saturated. (c) maximum variation-purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research, (d) audit trail-providing a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study, (e) rich description-providing enough rich, thick description to contextualize the study, such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context (p. 31).

Merriam (2002) further described the strategy of ensuring rich description as "providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context" (p. 31). Thus, the prominence of Merriam's strategies in this study's methodology ensures the goodness/ethical practices and trustworthiness of this research. One strategy, maximum variation, seeks broad experimentation of the sample size to allow for a greater range of application of the findings, which would naturally happen within this study, since all mentees that will participate in the research portion

of the program will be included in the interview process. This strategy, as defined by Merriam (2002), uses multiple sources of data collection methods to confirm findings. Therefore, the goodness/reliability/ethical nature of the research is ensured, and the validity and reliability of this qualitative study is strengthened. Furthermore, maximum variation demands the purposeful recruitment of diverse participants, "to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research" (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Thus, recruiting all mentees from different teams in sixth grade allowed for some diversity, since there were four sixth grade teams at CMS during the time of this study.

Merriam (2009) describes member checks as solicitation of feedback on emergent findings from the people who were interviewed. In this study, mentees, mentees, and Action Research team members provided feedback on the reliability and validity of their interviews when we reviewed their answers. I provided each participant with a draft of the sections of this manuscript where they were quoted to ensure accuracy.

Table 9

Key Milestones and Timeline: *The Research Plan*

Research Question	**Anticipated Data to be Collected**	**Sample**	**Analysis Approach**	**Proposed Timeline**
How does the mentoring program affect academic, structural, and personal barriers of students?	Interviews with mentees, teachers, and mentors, grades of mentees, attendance, and discipline records, survey	Mentees, Teachers, Mentors	Read notes that have been transcribed, look for patterns; look at grades, attendance and discipline data of mentees before and after the mentoring program has taken place to see if any changes have taken place; analyze survey data	August-December 2015
In what ways does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?	Interviews Surveys Mentor logs	Mentees, Mentors	Read notes that have been transcribed, look for patterns and emerging themes	August-December 2015
How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of SLT, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?	Interviews Surveys Meeting notes	Mentees, Mentors, AR Team	Read notes that have been transcribed, look for patterns and emerging themes	August-December 2015

Subjectivity Statement

A dictionary definition (Merriam-Webster, 2016) notes subjectivity as "the quality of an investigator that affects the results of observational investigation." The subjectivity statement is written so that all related experiences of the researcher are presented transparently. This assures that the reader can analytically examine the truthfulness of the research as being bias free which adds to the validity of the research and the reader's assessment of the ability of the researcher to remain in epoche.

As a researcher engaging in a qualitative action research case study about the effects of a mentoring program on at-risk African-American males in a suburban middle school, I have many life experiences that have shaped my view of this phenomenon. I am an African-American, middle class woman who has worked in the school district where the data were collected for nine years. I worked at Constructivist Middle School for five of those nine years. In addition to being a teacher at the school, I am involved in many areas of the local community, including coaching softball at a local church, attending church in the community, and engaging in friendships with many African-Americans in the community.

Prior to beginning my doctoral program, I worked as a teacher in this particular community for five years. In that role, I was responsible for teaching students, working closely with parents, and working with staff members to ensure a quality education for all students.

As I began to engage in my program of study at The University of Georgia, I started thinking about the African-American male students that were lagging behind every other demographic group in my school. I began pursuing dissertation research that explores how at-risk African-American male students respond to mentoring programs. Because of my

experience as a teacher in the school, it was imperative that I explore my position as a researcher to reveal any personal or subjective biases that had the potential to interfere with study outcomes.

As an educator, my professional and research interests were in providing a mentoring program which acknowledges the needs of the students at CMS in particular. Additional biases as a researcher stemmed from my own personal experiences having close male family members that have struggled in school even though they had a significant amount of family support. I believe that all students are capable of making academic progress and that it is the school's responsibility to make ensure that all means all. My ability to build relationships with students has allowed me to be very successful in working with all students, but particularly having success reaching this particular group.

Therefore, I hold strong values and beliefs about the nature of learning and having a positive role-model or mentor. Although it is impossible to remove all potential researcher bias by revealing a researcher's bias, Harding (2007) suggested by placing the researcher's lived experiences in the context of the research and describing the influence of these experiences on the conceptual framework, readers can make evaluative judgments about researcher subjectivity. As I made my way through the research process, I was cognizant of how personal subjectivities could influence my study.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

"There is no I in team" is a very common phrase that has been used repeatedly. It ultimately means to not work alone, but to work together with others to pursue a goal. This phrase is perfect for this case study because the Action Research Team at Constructivist Middle School came together as seamlessly as a championship football team.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social learning theory and mentoring enhance the achievement of African-American male middle school students. More precisely, this action research study was designed to help measure the effectiveness the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program might have in enhancing the academic achievement of a group of African-American males. Based on the information presented in Chapter two, efforts geared towards the development of African-American males, particularly with regard to their academic improvement, is considerably necessary. My direct involvement as the site coordinator afforded me the opportunity to witness positive change among the participants during the course of their involvement in the program.

However, a formal means of analysis to adequately record results in a more valid manner was long overdue. In order to best accomplish that task, I implemented a variety of strategies in the process of my research design, collection of data, cycles of change, and data analysis. Other integral components of this chapter include the identification of the setting, participants, and the change framework used throughout the study.

Situating the Study

Since the opening of its doors in 1979, much has changed around and within Constructivist Middle School (CMS). Shifts in leadership, learner and teacher population, instructional practices, community partners, and extracurricular opportunities have all served to develop the school as a unique, evolving institution of learning. Despite these shifts, an unwavering quest of "Success for All" has endured throughout the years, and this pursuit of excellence is evidenced through a rich heritage of achievement and recognition in academics and athletics. The evolution as a learning community continues, as CMS seeks to support the achievement of unique learners within the context of 21st Century curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability. The 134,602 square-foot facility offers multiple opportunities to develop the young adolescent as an evolving learner and an individual. Constructivist Middle School offers learning space for core curricular areas, intervention courses, and connections course offerings that include fine arts, business applications, technology, foreign language, and an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) elective.

The context of this community offers a unique opportunity to defy the norm. At the time of this research study, CMS was a Title I school that serves approximately 937 unique learners who exhibit diversity in race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, exceptionality, and language proficiency. Students' diversity was reflected quantitatively using the following racial and ethnic distribution: 68.84% African-American, 17.9% Caucasian, 9.8% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian, and 2.6% Multiracial. Three years prior to this study, this racial and ethnic distribution remained similar. However, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students - those students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program - demonstrated a growth trend from 75% to 79% to 84%, respectively, over that same time period. With respect to exceptionality, 11.1% of the student population

receives special education/Tier IV support through a variety of tailored models, including self-contained (6th grade), resource, and inclusion offerings to support student learning. Moreover, 12% of students were identified as Gifted, and they received instruction through self-contained and collaborative models. While Limited English Proficient enrollees had declined, CMS supported the achievement of these learners, which comprised 2% of the student population.

The Constructivist Middle School community landscape reflected other unique characteristics. While there were a variety of zip codes served within the CMS attendance zone, American Community Survey data by the U.S. Census Bureau reported a median annual household income of $46,319 for CMS families within the zip code where the school resides, 30012. Slightly over 74% of individuals within this zip code had an educational attainment of high school graduate or higher, and 24% of families with children of 18 years old had income below the poverty level.

Early Development of the Project

As a teacher at Constructivist Middle School, I saw the achievement gap at the school widening when it should have been closing. This was of concern to me because I felt that the faculty and staff at the school could do additional work to help close the achievement gap. I began engaging key stakeholders at the school and they had the same concern that I did. After reviewing the literature about the achievement gap and African-American boys, I developed a deeper understanding of the problem and solutions that had been tried in the past. My colleagues and I initiated conversations about our African-American male students and the achievement gap and at this point we formed an initial Action Research team.

Table 10

Timeline

Action Research	
Phase I (August 2014-May 2015)	
Action	*Timeline*
Submit IRB	October 2014
Form Action Research Team	October 2014
Get RCPS Approval	November 2014
Discuss Achievement Gap and possible solutions with AR Team	November 2014
Start collecting data on achievement gap	November 2014-
Reconvene and get approval to begin Phase II	April 2015
Phase II (April 2015-December 2015)	
Action	*Timeline*
Submit Revised IRB (If needed)	May 2015
Meet with final AR Team	May 2015
Discuss Achievement Gap with AR Team	June 2015
Develop and implement interventions for Achievement Gap	June 2015-December 2015
Phase III (January 2016-March 2016)	
Action	*Timeline*
Evaluate effectiveness of methodology and interventions	January 2016-March 2016
Determine future of project	April 2016
Write up results	January 2016-March 2016
Data Generation	
Phase I (August 2014-May 2015)	
Action	Timeline
Document Analysis	November 2014
Observation of AR Team	Duration of Project
Initial data collection for intervention	November 2014
Phase II (April 2015-December 2015)	
Action	*Timeline*
Observation of AR Team	Duration of Project
Observation of intervention/data collection	Duration of Phase II
Intervene with intervention and document performance	Duration of Phase II
Analysis of interventions	Duration of Phase II
Phase III (January 2016-March 2016)	
Action	*Timeline*
Observations of AR Team	Duration of project
Analysis of Interventions	Duration of Phase III
Final data collection	January 2016

As the quarterback of the Action Research Team, it was my responsibility to guide the squad. A quarterback's leadership is essential to the success of every offensive play. Each quarterback has his own way of leading his team. Some lead with an iron fist, and demand respect from their teammates. Others lead by being very personable and taking a vested interest in every single teammate. Most lead by example. They show the team or organization, through their actions, how to motivate people and develop a culture that is conducive to success. Words mean very little, actions and results matter.

Similarly, I was responsible for leading the Action Research team down the field to success. An effective leader inspires all levels of an organization to work together toward a common goal. It was the goal to of the Action Research Team to successfully close the achievement gap through the work of the mentoring program. It was up to me to lead the team to achieve that goal.

Good time management is important to playing the quarterback position. In a football game, timing is everything -- the timing of a throw, the timing of a play, the game clock and play clock; even the quarterback's cadence is timed. I believe that time management is an art. It is like being the conductor in an orchestra, perfectly timing each aspect of the performance.

Likewise, in order for the Action Research Team to be successful, I had to manage time well and take it very seriously. When we were scheduled to have meetings, I made sure to start and end them on time. I also made sure that meetings were productive and not wasting team members' valuable time. I would have everything in place the day before the meetings so that when we met, meetings ran smoothly.

Quarterbacks are known for being methodical in their preparation. They are frequently the first to arrive at the facility and the last to leave, spending extra hours watching film and

preparing for the next opponent. Every detail matters to a quarterback. Studying exotic personnel groups, different down and distance situations, as well as multiple defensive tendencies, are just a few of the film cut-ups studied regularly as a quarterback.

Similarly, the best leaders are focused on the details of their program, especially how to use their teams' strengths to benefit the program. I had to know the ins-and-outs of the students, the school, the mentoring program, and the research behind the mentoring program to help build a successful team.

Despite everything that goes on behind the scenes, quarterbacks are mainly judged on the decisions they make on Sundays. During each play they are given a set of reads and progressions to execute. With only a split-second to decide, the quarterback is responsible for making these decisions correctly, time after time, while 300-pound linemen are running after them. It is when quarterbacks deviate from the reads or a progression that usually gets them in trouble.

As the leader of the Action Research Team, I was required to make decisions, both easy and difficult, all of the time. Much like a quarterback, I had to trust my preparation and judgment. In my opinion, the ability to make swift and decisive decisions is the most important quality for a quarterback or a leader because those calls can make or break you.

At the end of the day it takes a special kind of person to be a quarterback and a leader. In addition to leadership, time management, background knowledge and decision-making, it takes passion, dedication and a desire to be great. You don't have to be a quarterback to be a leader, but the qualities that encompass being a great quarterback go hand-in-hand with great leadership.

The Action Research Team[1]

Having worked at the school for five years, I felt that I knew the faculty and staff pretty well. As colleagues, we prepared lessons, met with parents for conferences, participated in professional development, and attended faculty meetings together. We went to CMS basketball, football, softball, and other games together. We also chaperoned dances and field trips. As coworkers, we celebrated birthdays, holidays, weddings, babies, etc. We were a big part of each other's lives and our school truly had a family atmosphere.

When it was time to recruit staff members for the Action Research Team, I had to be strategic. I knew that we shared commonalities as well as differences. While the staff at CMS is diverse, the AR team was not. The AR team consisted of members of the African-American race. I did invite White colleagues to join the group initially, but they respectfully declined. I think that my White colleagues were uncomfortable with the subject of the achievement gap between African-American and White students. A few of my White colleagues stated that they were too busy to participate in the research, and if they did not want to participate, I knew that their hearts would not have been in it. Everyone on the team has advanced degrees in education and most were in school or going back to school in the near future. Most members of the AR team were married, while two members were actually dating each other. I knew that I wanted an administrator to be a part of the team, but I also wanted teachers to participate from various grade levels and subject areas.

I had informal conversations with co-workers about the research that I was interested in doing at the school. If colleagues were interested, I asked them to come to an interest meeting one day after school. The first interest meeting included about 15 staff members. After that

[1] All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

meeting, I had eight faculty members that made a commitment to be a part of the Action Research Team.

Participating in the Action Research Team was different than the way we normally work collaboratively. Usually we worked in sync to complete tasks that were already laid out for us. Action Research was unlike anything that we had ever participated in before. We were able to craft our research to meet the needs of our specific students. If something did not work during the first cycle, we had the ability to change it. We were excited and nervous at the same time. We never had that type of autonomy at CMS to truly make research based decisions. We wanted to help our students become more successful and learn more about the action research process simultaneously.

The Action Research Team started out as a group of eight faculty members, including myself. There were two math teachers, two English teachers, a science teacher, a technology teacher, an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher and one of the assistant principals on the team. During the first few meetings, I introduced the action research process to the team. They were very interested in this type of research because they had never participated in it before. They had been a part of research before, but they were just answering questions on surveys, not able to fully engage in the research process.

After the team felt comfortable with the action research process, we began discussing a theoretical framework that would match our problem of how to close the achievement gap for African-American males. We had a robust conversation about this topic, and made many changes before agreeing to social learning theory by Albert Bandura. His ideas about self-efficacy were pertinent to our research.

Introducing the Starting Lineup of the Action Research Team

The assistant principal, Aaron, was the lone administrator on the Action Research Team. He was new to CMS and it was his first year in an administrative role. Previously, he had worked in the business sector as a builder and a self-proclaimed computer geek. Aaron came to CMS from the high school that CMS feeds into. He had ten years of classroom experience, but the reason that I recruited him for the Action Research Team was because he helped create and run a mentoring program for African-American males at the high school with success. I was hoping that the team could use his expertise in this area to build a strong mentoring program. Aaron was well liked by teachers, as far as administrators go. He was excited to be a part of the team, and the team welcomed him with open arms.

Naomi was a sixth grade math teacher with 14 years of experience. She was the sixth grade chairperson and was the lead for the Response to Intervention (RTI) for her team. She had worked at CMS for the past eight years and was also working on her doctorate in Educational Leadership through a distance learning program. She had seen a great deal of changes in her time at CMS, yet she was still an advocate for her students. She was well liked by administrators, staff, and students. She sponsored the basketball cheerleaders, was a part of the AVID site team, and was a member of the building leadership team. Due to the fact that Naomi was active in so many activities at CMS, I thought that her insight would add value to the action research project.

Alexander was a connections technology teacher with 13 years of classroom experience. He had been a teacher at CMS for the five years. Alexander was working on his Education Specialist degree in Instructional Technology at a local university. He was an assistant football coach, the head basketball coach, and a member of the building leadership team. Students and

staff alike appreciated his calm, cool spirit and his laid back attitude. Alexander was eager to join the team, and he stressed the importance that his coaches and mentors played throughout his life.

Alana was a seventh grade English teacher with 18 years of experience. She had been a teacher at CMS for ten years at the time of this study and had seen a lot of changes in the school's faculty and students. She was one of two teachers that have been at the school for ten years or more. Alana was an energetic, outspoken, spontaneous teacher. One never really knew what was going to come out of her mouth, but she truly had a heart for kids. She grew up in poverty living with her maternal grandmother and believed that a good education could take students far in life. She grew up without her mom and dad and she knew of the importance of positive role models in the lives of her students. Alana was well liked by her students, but administrators did not appreciate her frankness and in the past she had been called into the office for being insubordinate. Alana was thrilled to take part in the action research process because she wanted to have her voice heard in this process.

Sherrie was the baby of the bunch with four years of classroom experience, all at CMS. She was a sixth grade math teacher that her students adored. Her students loved coming to her class because she was always thinking of new ways to engage them. She was a track coach, math team sponsor, and Beta Club sponsor. Sherrie was also an integral part of the building leadership team and the school's RTI team. Sherrie was well liked by administrators, staff, and students because of her fun, loving, positive attitude.

Evelyn was the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher at CMS with sixteen years of classroom experience. She had been at CMS for six years and truly loved working with middle school students. Evelyn was described as the teacher that everyone needs

once in their lives. She made students not want to leave her classroom once they entered. When people observed in her classroom, all students were engaged, whether they were leading a group working on tutorials, working on class notes, or listening to a guest speaker. Evelyn made the AVID program feel like a family and most teachers called her about discipline or grade concerns before they contact AVID students' parents. She was the leader of the AVID site team, connections team leader, step team sponsor, and a member of the building leadership team. She was well liked by administrators, staff, parents, and students.

Alvin was an eighth grade science teacher with 12 years of classroom experience. He had been working at CMS for five years. He was working on his Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership and wanted to become an assistant principal. Alvin was the boys' assistant basketball coach at CMS and had a great rapport with the students that he works with. Most of the time, Alvin was quiet and reserved, but if he was passionate about something, he was very forthright.

As the final member of the team, I thought it would be of importance to explain my role at CMS. I worked at CMS for five years at the time of this research, teaching gifted, regular, and special education sixth and eighth grade Language Arts and Social Studies. I had fourteen years of experience in grades 2-8. During my time at CMS, I coached softball, basketball, and track. I was a team leader and the Language Arts department chair. I was the Response to Intervention (RTI) contact person for my team. During those five years at CMS, I witnessed a significant amount of changes in leadership and staff. I was well liked by administrators, staff, parents, and students.

Some of our characteristics made us closer to one another, while some pushed people out of their comfort zones. I would have to say that working together on a daily basis attempting to

do what is best for kids at CMS unified us in a way that is difficult to explain. We started working as eight individuals and ended the work as a team. We did not always agree on everything, but we had respectful discourse and everyone's opinions were valued. Researchers, therefore, need to ensure that all stakeholders-people whose lives are affected-participate in defining and exploring the problem or service under investigation (Stringer, 2014).

Practice

The AR team met for the first time on Monday, January 5, 2015. This was a teacher workday after the holiday break, and our principal gave us time to meet during the day. During this initial meeting, we set group norms, defined action research, and discussed the achievement gap at CMS. The group norms that were agreed upon follow: to start and end on time, to encourage active listening, to hold what is said during meetings in confidence (this was critical because we had a school administrator on the team), to deal with conflict respectfully, and to be fully engaged during meetings (including limiting cell phone use).

When we got started, we were not sure where we wanted to focus in order to close the achievement gap. In the course of this particular meeting, several ideas were tossed around: cultural competency for teachers, tutoring programs for students, professional development for teachers centered on differentiated instruction, focusing on student achievement in Reading and/or Math, programs for families related to achievement for students, and a mentoring program for students.

As Naomi began to write our ideas down on the board, we paused and looked at the list. There were a lot of ideas to discuss and ponder over. Aaron suggested that we group them into a graphic organizer. Alexander started typing them into groups and came up with the following graphic aid.

Table 11

Initial Ideas to Close the Achievement Gap at CMS

After discussing these ideas with great passion and enthusiasm, the AR Team could not develop an agreeable idea. Some members thought that it would be good to focus on teachers, a few thought that focusing on parents would be a novel idea, and some members thought that focusing on the students would be best. We decided to have a quick debate to hear everyone's point of views on the topic. That debate let everyone know that this was not business as usual. Everyone had an opinion about what was best and it didn't seem like they would be swayed anytime soon. We decided to table the dialogue until the next meeting. Every team member was engaged and looking forward to the next meeting.

The team decided to meet weekly on Mondays, and the next week the team was focused on deciding which strategy that we would implement in order to attempt to close the achievement gap at CMS. Evelyn suggested that we focus the work on the students because we all work closely with them and could get the most "bang for our buck." (Personal Communication, January 12, 2015)

The group pondered this idea for a while and they thought that it made sense to focus on the students. Sherrie raised the following question, "What if we combine all of ideas for working with students through the lens of the mentoring program?" The room got eerily quiet. Then, all of a sudden, everyone started talking at once. Everyone loved the idea and it was decided that we would create a mentoring program with a focus on academics.

The next steps were to plan out what the mentoring program would resemble. We had an existing mentoring program, but we acknowledged that it would not work for the purposes of our research. We had to decide what the parameters of the program would be.

Effective mentoring seeks to establish a positive and trusting relationship between the students and the adult with focus on the specific needs of the student. We knew that all students participating in this study do not need the same things. We wanted to set the program up so that it would be structured enough to be effective, yet unstructured enough to allow mentors to do what was best for their mentees. Investing sufficient time for regularly scheduled, formalized meetings with documentation of objectives and outcomes, record keeping appropriate to the activity, consistent monitoring, and evaluation are vital for an effective program (Webster, 2005).

According to Campbell-Whatley (2001), "Guidelines for the length and frequency of mentor-student contact must be determined. One to three hours per week is suggested. Mentors should be prepared to make a commitment for the entire academic year. Group and after-school activities must be planned in advance, placed on a calendar of activities, and shared with participants." (p.78)

The AR Team wanted to ensure that the program was well organized, since we knew that mentoring programs that had taken place at CMS in the past were not. Coupled with Hinchey's

(2008) first definition of action research, she went on to add, "Its goal is to identify action that will generate some improvement the researcher believes important" (p.4). The AR Team believed that we needed a specific focus in order to create that important improvement. We wanted to build a mentoring program that was research based, and effective for the population of students that we serve.

A key factor to consider in establishing mentor/mentee relationships is to match mentors and mentees on criteria such as gender, similar interests, personalities, and cultural or linguistic background (Webster, 2005). Particular attention to the mentees' experiences, boundaries, and gender differences is advised: Mentors need to exhibit cultural awareness and respect their mentees as both individuals and members of larger social constructs (Crutcher, 2007). In working with middle school African-American male populations, building the relationship, providing extra motivation, and firmer limits and accountability measures have been found to be of key importance to success (Bowman, 2002). Additional factors contributing to a successful mentoring initiative include active participation and recognition of success. Problems must be identified and resolved early on, requiring assurance of feedback and support between mentor and student (Webster, 2005).

The CMS mentoring program was designed to develop student strategies (e.g., goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-reflection, strategic planning, and organizational strategies) to increase motivation with regard to school tasks and academic achievement. Thus, Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy would play an integral part of the mentoring program.

The present study shows the effects of a school-based intervention program (e.g., Edmondson & White, 1998) assuming an academic mentoring format (Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusic, 2006). Following Eby et al. (2008), academic mentoring is an

educational process in which an educator, frequently a teacher, counsels one or several students about issues from academic (e.g., study support) and nonacademic areas (e.g., relational problems with their classmates). Academic mentoring habitually focuses the intervention on academic achievement, and adjustment to academic life (Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Jacobi, 1991; Sambunjak et al., 2006).

Initially, a pool of 30 faculty and staff members (19 female, 63%; 11 male, 37%) from Constructivist Middle School attended a half-hour information session delivered by the mentoring program site coordinator (myself). The facilitator (a) defined and described the at-risk target population and their needs for intervention, (b) detailed the school-based mentoring model and supporting research for it, and (c) defined and explained the role of the mentor including the time commitment, training, and evaluation procedures expected from them. Faculty and staff members who were interested in volunteering as a mentor were asked to attend a half-hour follow-up session during which the program facilitator reviewed (a) mentor characteristics, (b) effective mentoring practices, and (c) evaluation procedures. At the end of this session, faculty and staff members who were no longer interested in participating left, leaving ten faculty and staff members to serve as mentors for ten student mentees.

Since this was a new program at CMS, the AR Team wanted to recruit students in a different way than in the past. Formerly, students were assigned to mentors based on teacher recommendations. Some students had no idea why they had a mentor or how they got selected. Others that were selected had no desire to be a part of the program and quickly dropped out. The AR Team decided to post flyers around the school for students that were interested in the program. I was the point of contact for the mentoring program and I had over 50 students that were interested in having a mentor (boys and girls). I had to explain to the girls that we weren't

doing a mentoring program for them at the time and they were not happy about that decision. I told them that we would look into it in the future. I took the list of interested students to the AR Team and we whittled the list down to ten students that we thought could benefit from the program academically. Since most of the AR Team had been at CMS for years, we knew the students pretty well, which was another benefit of action research in your own organization.

The AR Team met to discuss training of mentors and the specific components of the mentoring program. Guidelines were established and the following schedule was created (see Table 12).

Table 12

Mentoring Schedule

CMS Mentoring Program Schedule	
Week 0	September 21, 2015-*Make initial contact with mentee* **AR Team Meeting with the mentoring group**
Week 1	September 28, 2015-*Meet with mentee for at least one hour*
No School	October 5, 2015-Fall Break
Week 2	October 12, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour* **Monthly Mentor Training with AR Team**
Week 3	October 19, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour* **Ice Cream Social with the mentoring group**
Week 4	October 26, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour*
Week 5	November 2, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour*
Week 6	November 9, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour* **Attend the CMS Football game with the mentoring group** **Monthly Mentor Training with AR Team**
Week 7	November 16, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour*
No School	November 23, 2015-Thanksgiving Break
Week 8	November 30, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour* **Monthly Mentor Training with AR Team**
Week 9	December 7, 2015- *Meet with mentee for at least one hour*
Week 10	December 14, 2015- **Culminating activity with the mentoring group (Trip to an Atlanta Falcons game)**

Introducing the Starting Team of Mentors[2]

Billie was a seventh grade math teacher and had been teaching at CMS for three years. He was quiet and reserved, but well respected in the school as being a great teacher. He helped coach the football team and the young men liked him as a teacher and as a coach. Billie was well liked by his co-workers and administrators. He was originally from Alabama and grew up with his mom, dad, and seven siblings.

Phillip was an outspoken sixth grade social studies teacher who never met a stranger. He had been an educator at CMS for six years. He had a real passion for history and his students called him a walking dictionary. Phillip had a good rapport with his students, and they enjoyed coming to his classroom. He was originally from New York and grew up with his mom and two brothers.

Junior was the physical education teacher and the head football coach at CMS. His students called him the fun teacher because he was always playing sports with his students. The boys were always challenging him to basketball games and Junior made a point to beat them each and every time. Junior loved working with the students in physical education, but his real passion was football. He led the CMS football team to a district championship two years in a row. Junior was well received by students, colleagues, administrators, and parents. He grew up in Georgia with his mom and his sister.

Daniel was a quiet and reserved technology teacher for all grades at CMS. He had been working at CMS for four years and even though he was quiet, his students respected him. They liked coming to technology class because he made it fun and if they were good he would let them play games for the last few minutes of the period. He was an assistant wrestling coach at CMS

[2] All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

and the wrestlers appreciated his laid back style. He grew up in Mississippi with his mom, dad, and three siblings.

Patrick was an outspoken eighth grade math teacher. He had been at CMS for five years and received good reviews from his students. Students enjoyed his teaching style, and they knew that he wanted to help them be great. He helped with the AVID team and was always willing to lend a helping hand. He was the unofficial school disc jockey and would play music for all of the events that the school had, including dances, basketball games, and pep rallies. He was pleasant to be around and was well like by his colleagues and the administrators. Patrick was originally from Philadelphia and grew up with his mom and two brothers.

Steve was the comedian of the bunch. He taught seventh grade special education at CMS and had been at the school for 3 years. He loved working with his students and always had a joke or a funny story to tell. His students loved coming to his class because he made learning enjoyable and fun. Steve was well liked by colleagues, students, and administrators because of his light-hearted spirit. He was originally from Georgia and grew up with his mom and two sisters.

Larry was a fun loving business education teacher for all grades at CMS. He had been an educator at CMS for three years. Students enjoyed his class because he taught them about being entrepreneurs from the beginning to the end. For many of the students, this was their first time learning about business principles and Larry made the class pleasant for them. Larry encouraged his students to dress up, especially when they had presentations, and on those days his students stood out from the crowd and represented themselves well. He would also take them to business events in the community and students enjoyed applying terms and ideas learned in class to real life. Larry was originally from Texas and grew up with his dad, brother, and stepmom.

Paul was a physical education teacher who had been at CMS for five years. He was always encouraging his students to lead healthier lifestyles through exercise and watching what they ate. He sponsored the running club and some of the participants ran 5K races with him around the community. In physical education class, he would participate with students, but not to the extent of Junior. He would play around for a while and then supervise students in their activities. Paul loved teaching and also helped coach the CMS girls' basketball team. He grew up in Missouri with his mom and sister.

Tiwon was a sixth grade language arts teacher at CMS. He had been the teacher of the year and always put his students first. He loved everything about teaching and he was a real inspiration to his students. Tiwon was adored by students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. He was one of those teachers that went above and beyond for his students and taught them from the heart. He sponsored the debate club, the robotics team, and the reading bowl team. He was originally from Georgia and grew up with his mom, two brothers, and a sister.

Tony was a reading teacher for all grades at CMS. He had been teaching at CMS for seven years. He enjoyed teaching reading and seeing growth in his students. His students enjoyed his class because Tony helped them with some of the foundational skills that they were missing. His classes normally had between 5-7 students, so they weren't embarrassed in the small setting to struggle and make mistakes. Tony was respected by his colleagues because he cared about his students' performance in their core subject areas, often tutoring them after school during his free time. Tony was originally from Texas and grew up with his mom and brother.

The AR Team carefully selected these mentors because of their backgrounds and their love for their students. These men were all African-American, but most importantly, they were

teachers in the building that already had positive relationships with their students. These men unofficially mentored students each and every day, so the AR Team felt that they would be perfect mentors for the inaugural CMS Mentoring Program.

Introducing the Starting Team of Mentees[3]

Lincoln was a fun loving sixth grade student at CMS. He played soccer and baseball on select teams in the community and had been playing both sports since he was three years old. He was outgoing and made it a point to work with students that don't always get picked. When he was in elementary school, his grades were mostly A's with a few B's. He lived with his mom and a sister.

Elijah was a typical sixth grade student at CMS. He loved video games and having fun with his friends. He was in band and loved playing the drums. When Elijah was in elementary school, he made all A's and B's in his core content classes. When he entered middle school, he did not do well academically. On his first progress report, he earned C's and a few D's. He lived with his mom, grandmother, and two younger sisters. His dad was in jail and was not expected to get out until 2019.

Noah was a quiet sixth grade student at CMS. He would typically sit in the back of the classroom and not want any attention called to himself. He loved to draw, and would often draw in class when he was supposed to be working. In elementary school, Noah made B's and C's and his teachers reported that he was often distracted but never a behavior problem. When he received his first progress report from CMS, he had C's, D's and two F's. He lived with his mom and his dad was in and out of the home.

Nathan was a distinctive sixth grade student at CMS. He was often in trouble and he acted

[3] All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

as if he didn't care about anything. He was one of those students that would talk nonstop and moving his seat just wouldn't help. He argued with other students about any and every thing. The only class that he liked was physical education and he was a natural athlete. In elementary school, his grades were mostly C's. He had behavior problems early in elementary school and he attended five different elementary schools. He lived with his mom and four brothers.

Joshua was a precocious sixth grade student at CMS. He got along with his classmates and had never been in trouble. His favorite subject was math because he liked that there was only one right answer. When Joshua was in elementary school, he made straight A's. On his first progress report at CMS, he received A's, B's, and two C's. He lived with his mom and dad and two brothers.

Korey was a loquacious sixth grader at CMS. He was often called a class clown and kept his classmates laughing. His favorite subject was Science because he liked to blow things up. When Korey was in elementary school, he made mostly B's with C's in math. On his first progress report at CMS, Korey received C's, D's and one F. He lived with his mom and his sister.

Theo was known as the mayor of sixth grade at CMS. He was the kind of student that never got in trouble because of his charm. He could charm his way out of any situation and have someone eating out of the palm of his hand. He could not pick a favorite subject because he liked all subjects and all of his teachers. In elementary school, he made straight A's. On his first progress report at CMS, Theo received A's, B's, C's and one D. Theo lived with his mom and his sister.

Marlon was one of the shyest students in sixth grade at CMS. He was a loner that was always by himself. There was a silent lunch table that most kids at CMS dreaded because if they sat there, they couldn't eat and talk with their friends. Marlon placed himself there every day because he didn't want to deal with the other students. In elementary school he made A's and B's. On his first progress report from CMS, Marlon had B's and C's. He was an only child that lived with his mom.

Jawan was a fun-loving sixth grade student that enjoyed coming to CMS every day. He really liked social studies and he loved watching the history channel. He loved reading and learning about wars, especially the Civil War. In elementary school, Jawan made A's, and B's. On his first progress report from CMS, Jawan received C's, D's, and one F. He lived with his grandfather, his mom, and his brother.

Les was a popular student in sixth grade at CMS. He had a multitude of friends that would hang onto his every word. His favorite subject was physical education because he didn't have to worry about tests and assignments for that class. In elementary school, he made A's and B's. On his first progress report from CMS, he made C's and D's. Les lived with his mom and his brother.

Mentor training. In discussions about effective mentoring programs, another area that has received some attention is mentor training. The process of mentor training should be ongoing (Utsey, Howard, & Williams, 2003), starting with educational training covering topics such as how to develop a group experience, working with mentees who have a history of abuse or neglect, as well as dealing with emotive and developmental issues facing mentees. In addition, not only is it crucial that mentors be able to express their expectations to the mentees they mentor, they must also be aware of hardships and experiences their mentees may have endured.

Also important is having regularly scheduled training sessions to discuss with the AR Team the progress of their mentees and obtain guidance and leadership on any obstacles facing their mentees.

Mentors participated in three two-hour training sessions prior to beginning the mentoring phase of the study. During the training, the AR Team reviewed highlights from literature on school-based mentoring, communication techniques, trust-building activities, and program procedures. The AR Team provided specific examples and non-examples of mentor qualities and effective mentoring practices including examples and non-examples of: positive character traits, effective communication, and trust building (National Mentoring Center, 2003), as well as how to report their interactions in their mentor logs. Mentors were also briefed on cultural competence, legal issues, and reporting suspected abuse (Bein, 1999).

Before completing the training, mentors were required to role play at least five active listening skills (i.e., eye contact, open body language, resistance to distractions, paraphrasing, clarifying or mirroring questions and positive comments) and name at least four trust-building strategies (e.g., icebreaker activities, encourage humor, punctuality and consistency, include mentee in decisions and demonstrate respect for mentee opinions). In addition, mentors described how they would use the trust-building strategies with their mentees.

The mentoring intervention was implemented during the second school quarter. Prior to beginning mentoring, the AR Team collected information on grades, referrals and absences from the first quarter. Mentors were selected and trained within four weeks prior to the second quarter, and students completed the CMS Mentoring Program Survey one week prior to the second school quarter. During the first week of the second school quarter, mentors were given their mentees' class schedules and were asked to contact them and develop a weekly schedule of

meeting times immediately before or after school, during lunch, or during some other nonacademic time during the school day. The mentors provided a copy of the schedule to the AR Team, parents and the school principal for approval.

At the beginning of each session, the mentors and mentees discussed all possible mentoring activities available. The mentoring pair did not leave the school campus during mentoring sessions. If the mentors could not meet for a scheduled session, they notified the mentee and the program coordinator before their scheduled mentoring session. Only one mentor canceled a session during the nine week program. That mentor scheduled an extra session with the student the following week. The AR Team provided training refreshers and idea sharing via e-mail correspondence. Training refreshers included shortened definitions of effective mentor strategies and examples and non-examples of techniques learned in training. Idea sharing consisted of forwarding to all mentors examples of successful techniques or activities used by one or more mentors. At the end of the semester, the AR Team collected information on grades, referrals, and absences for the first and second school quarters. Students completed the CMS Mentoring Program Survey again during the last week of the second quarter.

Mentor logs. Mentors completed a session log after each meeting with their mentee. The mentors reported the length of the session, described what they did during the session, and indicated if they might repeat activities again or do something different in the next session. Mentors also noted when sessions were missed and why. Logs were analyzed for common themes in the comments made by mentors about mentoring sessions. Next, logs were coded in terms of the activities that happened during mentoring sessions.

The mentoring intervention incorporated four components; time commitment, pro-social behavior, effective communicating, and trust building. First, the mentors committed to at least

one mentoring session per week over nine weeks and to providing the program coordinator with a mentor log following each session. Second, the mentors were asked to model only appropriate, pro-social behavior during all mentoring interactions. That is, their behavior adhered to educator standards of the school district: modeling and encouraging positive behavior and demonstrating and promoting honesty and ethical behavior. Third, mentors were taught to use verbal and nonverbal communication skills such as active listening and open body language (National Mentoring Center, 2003). For example, mentors were taught how to ask clarifying questions and paraphrase or provide positive comments in response to mentee comments. In addition, they were taught how open, relaxed arms and comfortable eye contact might be used to improve communication. Finally, mentors were taught to use trust-building techniques such as involving the mentee in determining session activities, communicating respect for mentee opinions (e.g., "that's an interesting idea"), using humor during interactions (National Mentoring Center, 2003) and using icebreaker exercises (King et al., 2002). Icebreaker exercises included activities like "Getting to Know You" worksheets and "Finish this Statement" dialogs. Mentors described what activities they wanted to use in their mentor logs.

The First Game (September 21, 2015)

The initial meeting of the mentors and mentees on September 23, 2015 was a huge success. The mentors had contacted their mentees prior to the meeting and everyone met in the back portion of the school's cafeteria. Mentors and mentees sat together and waited for everyone to gather in the meeting area. The AR Team was in awe of the relationships that had already formed, with several groups high-fiving and giving each other quick hugs. The AR Team spoke to the group about the purpose of the mentoring program and about how students were selected. The students were beaming with pride when they were told that they were the chosen 10 out of a

group of 50. The AR Team spoke to the group about weekly meetings, whole group meetings, and the final outing, which would be the trip to an Atlanta Falcons game. The boys were so excited about participating in the group!

Then, the AR Team passed out snacks that were provided by the cafeteria and mentors and mentees played a variety of games together. Games that were selected included chess, checkers, Battleship, Connect Four, Jenga, Scrabble, Uno, and Apples to Apples. It was interesting to see the groups working together, some of the mentors stated that they hadn't played board games in years and they were having as much fun as their mentees. This initial meeting was pleasant for all parties involved. It was an enjoyable introductory meeting. After the mentors and mentees left, the AR Team met briefly to discuss how everything went. They agreed that everything ran smoothly and that there was excitement in the air.

Individual Team Meetings (September 28-October 12, 2015)

Mentors met with their mentees individually two times after the initial meeting. Mentees were supposed to complete and turn in the Constructivist Middle School Mentor-Student Meeting Agenda (see Appendix D) weekly. The AR Team decided that they would be due by Friday at the end of the day to allow individual teams time to meet and discuss items weekly. By Friday of the week of September 28, 2015, all mentors had turned their Meeting Agenda in. The AR Team was excited because they had data to work with from mentors. These logs provided rich data for members of the AR Team to peruse.

Coaches' Meeting (October 12, 2015)

Mentors and mentees were still meeting, but this week all of the mentors were meeting with the AR Team to participate in mentor training and to discuss how everything was progressing with their mentees. These meetings would be crucial to the success of the team

because of the training portion of the mentoring program and the feedback that would be given from the mentees about the program. The AR Team decided to have these meetings on Mondays after school so that we could have the training sessions before the mentors met with their mentees. This particular coaches training was about working effectively with their mentees. During this session, participants developed their communication skills, practiced conversation and relationship-building techniques, examined approaches for building trust with their mentee, and learned to set appropriate boundaries and activities with their mentee. Members of the AR Team helped to facilitate the trainings in teams of two. They did rotations with the group that worked really well. After the training sessions, the mentors met together in one room and discussed how the first two weeks of mentoring went. They seemed to enjoy being mentors and getting to know their mentees. The AR Team took notes about what they mentors were saying to use for future trainings and discussions.

The Season

The rest of the season went as planned. The mentors and mentees met weekly and completed the Mentor-Student Meeting Agenda forms. The AR Team trained the mentors monthly, and the group met as a whole to have an ice cream social and to attend a CMS football game as a group.

The culminating activity was a group trip (The AR Team, mentors, and mentees) to an Atlanta Falcons game. When the AR Team initially created the CMS Mentoring Schedule, we did not think to look at the Atlanta Falcons' schedule. The Falcons were not playing at home again until December 27, 2015, during the semester break. We discussed this with the mentors and they said that they wouldn't miss the game for the world. We never would have imagined the CMS Mentoring Program being so powerful that mentors would want to give up part of their

break to be with their mentees, but that is exactly what happened. The mentors and mentees had a blast at the game and created memories that will last for a lifetime because for many of the mentees, it was their first professional football game.

Post-Game Talk (Reflections)

Reflecting on my efforts as a facilitator of the AR Team and well as the mentoring group, several key group dynamics have emerged. The AR Team was committed to seeing that the CMS Mentoring Program was successful. They collaborated as a team to ensure that mentors and mentees had a positive experience as participants in the CMS Mentoring Program. As far as action research is concerned, the AR Team did a phenomenal job relating mentoring activities back to social learning theory and the tenets of action research that we discussed beginning with our very first AR Team meeting. I thought that it would be challenging to be the site coordinator for the CMS Mentoring Program as well as the facilitator for the AR Team, but both groups worked diligently to ensure that the program ran like a well-oiled machine.

When reviewing the notes on the AR Team, I noticed that being a leader that was familiar with the action research process was especially helpful in the beginning stages of the research process. Stringer (2014) stated that "The primary purpose of action research is to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness (p. 6)." In the beginning stages of designing this action research study, I shared this tenet with the AR Team. The AR Team decided to write this quote on chart paper and referred to it several times during our project. As a group, we helped each other get better with the action research process through discourse, cooperation, and learning.

When revisiting notes from the CMS Mentoring Program training sessions, I realized how

much the AR Team was dedicated to the action research process. They made sure to speak with mentors about social learning theory and the fact that their mentees were looking up to them to help them build up their self-efficacy. The AR Team also made a real effort to keep the mentoring focused on academics, making sure that mentors kept up with their paperwork weekly.

Press Conference (Conclusion)

The action research process was a challenging, yet rewarding experience. It led to building a strong AR Team and an improved CMS Mentoring Program. During the course of the implementation of the CMS Mentoring Program, the AR Team collaborated to ensure the fidelity and quality of the program remained intact. The AR Team purposefully designed activities and training sessions to align with the mission and vision of the CMS Mentoring Program as they related to the action research plan.

A definite advantage of having an administrator on the AR Team was that the administrative team bought into the CMS Mentoring Program, and wanted to expand it due to the success of the students that participated. I don't believe that would have happened if Aaron had not been on the team. He spoke about the CMS Mentoring Program at staff meetings and shared with other schools in the county about our program. Other schools in the county want to start a program similar to ours, thanks in part, to having Aaron participate on our team.

As I reflected, I recognized that leading the action research process required me to think differently than I had in the past. It required me to be a true leader and I found out a lot about my leadership style in the process. I have had leadership roles in the past, but this was the first project that I have been responsible for from start to completion. This process taught me to be a change agent within my organization, which, now looking back, I realize was the point of it all.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social learning theory and mentoring enhance the achievement of African-American male middle school students. The following research questions framed this study: In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males? The following related questions guided the study:

1. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?
2. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?

This chapter presents findings from interviews of study participants and faculty members who participated in the action research project at Constructivist Middle School. The findings are organized by research question with categories and sub-categories that emerged during data analysis. Table ten provides an overview of each category and sub-category.

Table 13

Research Findings

Research Question	Findings from Data
1. In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males?	Focused interventions helped mentees focus on their grades and academics Focused interventions led to grades improvement Focused interventions led to mentees becoming more confident students
2. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?	***Academic Barriers*** Mentees saw teachers as gatekeepers Mentees had a difficult time adjusting to seven different teachers Mentees tested more often in middle school
	Structural Barriers The number of classes mentees had Generational poverty affected mentees Cultural differences between teachers and mentees Mentors helped mentees with scheduling concerns
	Personal Barriers Most mentees live in single parent households Mentees wanted to be "cool" in front of their peers Mentees didn't have a sense of belonging when they entered CMS
3. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?	***Action Research*** The AR Team learned about social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement of African-American males by playing an integral role in the complete action research process Interventions were individualized based on mentees' needs
	Social Learning Theory Mentors helped to increase the self-efficacy of mentees Mentees learned how to self-regulate from their mentors
	Mentoring The AR Team planned training sessions for mentors The AR Team planned monthly meetings for mentors and mentees to build stronger relationships
	Enhancing Achievement Weekly grade monitoring assisted mentors and mentees by tracking mentees' progress Mentors helped mentees become better students through personalized interventions

Research Question 1: In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males?

This question was posed to determine the degree to which the 2015 CMS mentees might attribute their participation in the CMS mentoring program to making a positive difference in their academic performance. More specifically, the focus was connected largely to their

academic performance and the degree of effort they put forth during the second quarter of 2015. The responses from three particular survey questions from the CMS mentees (Appendix F) provided useful information to support this question related to the academic benefits of the program. Written responses from the open-ended questions on both the student surveys also rendered meaningful data of a qualitative nature. Finally, responses from a sample of the young men who participated in the student survey, given in interviews, also rendered qualitative information regarding the impact of the CMS mentoring program. Five overarching themes related to the mentees' academic, structural, and personal barriers on their achievement materialized. These themes included (a) focusing on grades and academics, (b) study skills, (c) motivation, (d) a caring adult, and (e) navigating the school system. Table 11 shows the findings.

Table 14

Impact on Mentees

Research Question	**Findings from Data**
1. In what ways might participation in the Constructivist Middle School mentoring program benefit underachieving African-American males?	Focused interventions helped mentees focus on their grades and academics Focused interventions led to grades improvement Focused interventions led to mentees becoming more confident students

Question numbers 6, 7, and 8 on the CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness-Student Questionnaire (Appendix F) provided relevant feedback to address the first research question. The responses were collected using a Likert-type scale with the following choices: 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree. The CMS Mentees were asked to respond to the following: "As a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring Program…"

Student Survey Question # 6) I focused more on my grades and academics.

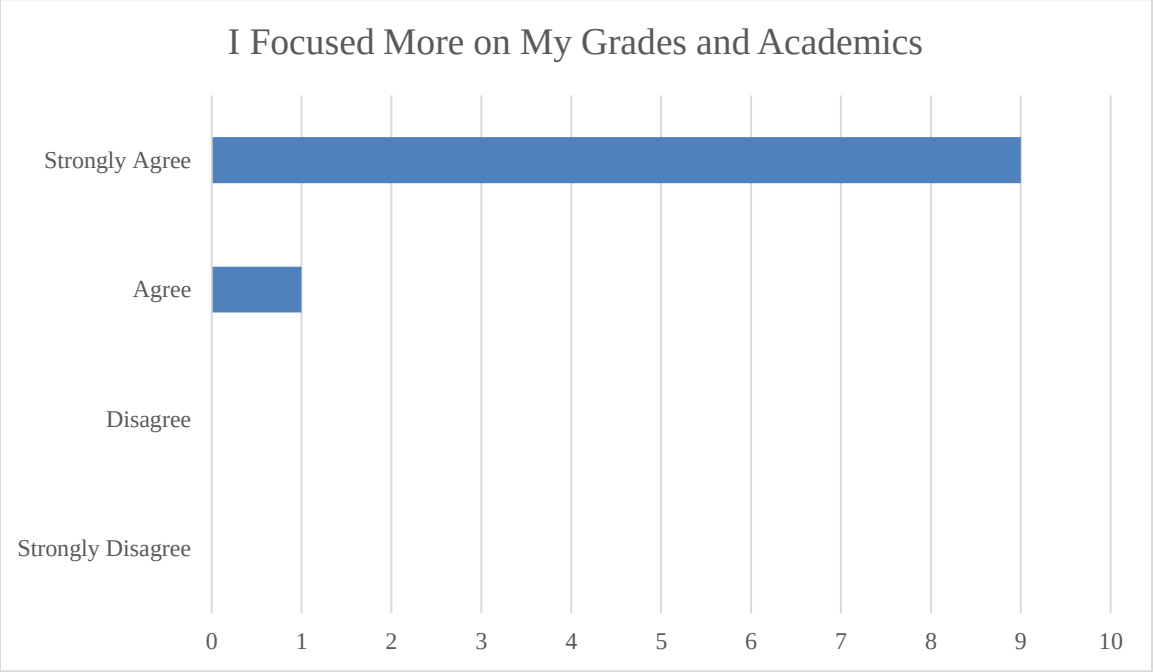
Student Survey Question # 7) My grades started to improve.

Student Survey Question # 8) I became a more confident student.

The CMS mentee student responses for Question # 6, "I focused more on my grades and academics," are illustrated in Table 12. Of the CMS mentees (n=10) who participated in the survey, all of them either agreed or strongly agreed to Question # 6. More specifically, nine of the young men strongly agreed that they focused more on their grades and academics as a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring program, and one of the respondents agreed.

Table 15

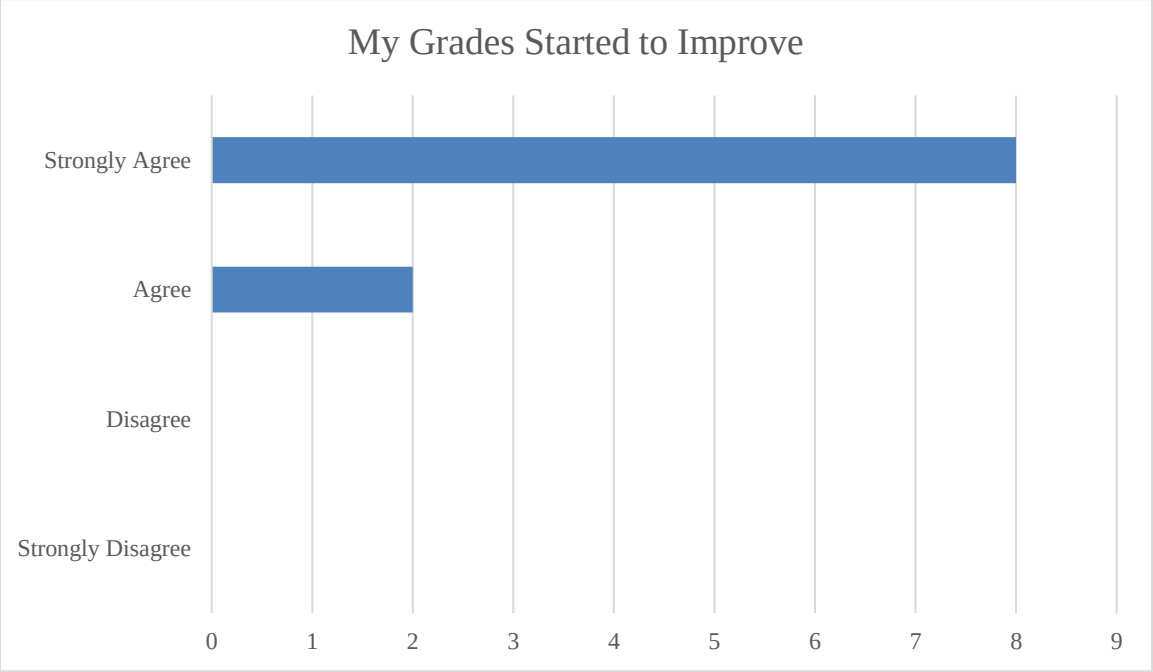
Student Question #6



The responses to Question # 7, "My grades started to improve," are reflected in Table 13. Similar to the responses for Question # 6, all of the young men responded to Question # 7 by only selecting "agree" or "strongly agree." In addition to the young men reporting that they focused more on their grades as a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring program (Table 13), most respondents revealed that their grades started to improve in some way as well (Table 13). The number of young men who agreed and strongly agreed to this question was similar to Question # 6. For question # 7, eight young men strongly agreed, and two agreed. More specifically, while all of the young men seemed to identify with some degree of grade improvement, more of the respondents emphasized they "strongly agreed" than those who replied with "agree."

Table 16

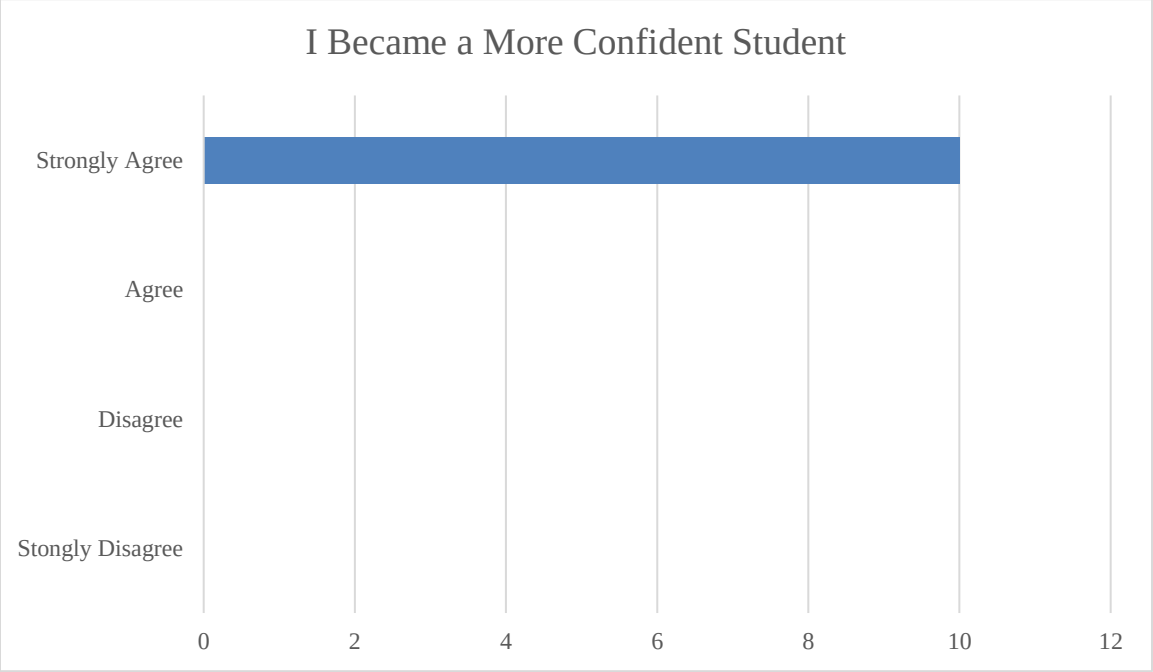
Student Question #7



Finally, the responses from Question #8, "I became a more confident student," can be found in Table 14. The student responses for Question #8 fell solely into the strongly agree category. While the number of young men who agreed and strongly agreed about focusing more on their grades and their grades actually improving was relatively even given the sample size, when asked about their confidence as a student, all ten mentees strongly agreed they became more confident students as a result of CMS Mentoring Program.

Table 17

Student Question #8



The three CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness student survey questions that were just reported (items 6, 7, and 8) were the most likely to yield results related to the impact of the CMS Mentoring program on the students' academic performance in the second quarter of 2015. The fact that all of the responses for the three questions fell into either the "agree" or "strongly agree" categories overwhelmingly suggested that the CMS Mentoring Program did have a positive academic influence on the participants.

To help support the results of the Likert-scale survey data, more qualitative data was also collected from the surveys that the young men completed. The first open-ended question (Question #24) on the CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness student survey supported the results of questions 6, 7, and 8 about the ways their academic performance was enhanced by being mentored through the CMS Mentoring Program. A vast majority of the written answers, like the Likert-scale responses, supported the notion that some aspect of their academic practices

was enhanced as a result of being in the CMS Mentoring Program. Question #24 asked the students: "How successful was the CMS Mentoring Program in helping you become a better student in middle school?"

Student Responses[4]

Some of the written responses from the young men included the following:

Noah. *The CMS Mentoring Program helped me to focus on my grades more and taught me what I had to do to improve my grades.*

Joshua. *The CMS Mentoring Program was really cool! My mentor helped me to become a better person and a better student*.

Korey. *My mentor held me accountable for my grades by looking at them each week. If I did well in my classes, he would give me some type of treat. That meant a lot to me.*

Theo. *The CMS Mentoring Program was a success because it helped me open my eyes to the reasons why I need to do well in school.*

Jawan. *The CMS Mentoring Program was successful in helping me become a better student in middle school because my mentor helped to motivate me to do well in school. We talked about his challenges in school and that helped me.*

Les. *The CMS Mentoring Program was successful in helping me to become a better student because I had someone at the school who cared about my success.*

In addition to the results taken directly from the survey, additional qualitative data came from the structured interview questions used with the mentees that participated. Much of these results, like the previous responses from the young men, supported the notion that participation

[4] All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

in the CMS Mentoring Program had a positive impact in their lives, particularly academically, during the second quarter of 2015.

One of the first questions posed in the interviews paralleled Question 23 of the student survey. The participants were asked the following: "Did your participation in the CMS Mentoring Program impact your academic performance during the Fall Semester of 2015 in any way? If so, explain."

Below are some of the responses from the mentees:

Lincoln. *It made me understand how important it was cause when I first started middle school I really didn't care as much. I was having problems getting used to 7 different teachers when I was used to having just one in elementary school. Being in the program made me realize the importance of being successful in school. I honestly didn't like some of my teachers, but my mentor made me understand that it didn't matter if I liked them or not, the only thing that mattered was completing my work to the best of my ability and getting good grades. I never really thought about my future because I am so young, but when I spoke to my mentor, he made me realize that the skills that I learn now will be the foundation for my future.*

Elijah. *The CMS Mentoring Program, it taught me about using manners at times and like in class, in school. Like coming to class early, saying good morning to my teachers, helping them around the classroom, talking to them after class, and it helped me in the community too. I have always been shy and kept to myself, but through this program, I have become more talkative. My teachers have even commented about my participation in class since having a mentor. My mentor showed me that the little things do count, and if you are nice to your teachers, they will look out for you. For example, I failed a science quiz terribly. In the past, I would have said oh well. I have been showing my mentor my grades weekly, so when I showed him that my Science*

grade had dropped, he was concerned. He asked me what happened and I told him that I failed. He told me to ask the teacher if I could study and take the quiz again one day after school. I asked my Science teacher about retaking the quiz, and to my surprise she said I could take it over. My mentor helped me study for the quiz and I ended up getting a 90% on it. So yes, the mentoring program has helped me learn and helped improve my grades.

Noah. *I think the weekly grade checks helped me a lot. When I met with my mentor, I didn't want to disappoint him, so I was forced to work harder in my classes. He believed in me and he helped me believe in myself. When we met as a big mentoring group and discussed how important relationships with teachers were, that was a bit surprising to me. I didn't know that teachers would give you extra credit if you asked them for it, or that they would let you retake a quiz if you needed to. I even asked one of my teachers to drop my lowest quiz score, and she did. That improved my grade from an 84 to a 90. My mentor was so proud of the fact that I brought all of my grades up.*

Summary of RQ1 Findings

The findings associated with the first research question indicate that the participants' Summary of RQ1 Findings grades improved as a result of the CMS Mentoring Program. The mentors provided mentees with encouragement and motivation to improve their grades. In addition, developmentally focused interventions including workshops and coaching further enhanced participants' self-efficacy and helped them socialize and led to deeper interconnections to the CMS Mentoring Program. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as one's expectations of how well one will accomplish desired tasks. People with higher self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves and strive for success, leaving them with better self-confidence. As a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring Program, participants' self-efficacy was enhanced; they

began to make deeper meaning of their involvement at CMS, and identified connections to other members of the program. As participants enhanced their self-efficacy and made deeper connections to the CMS Mentoring Program as a whole, they were empowered to start making the necessary behavior changes to move from being good students to great students, which was demonstrated by their enhanced ability to study more, try harder in their classes, and get prepared for the future.

Research Question 2: How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?

This question was posed to determine the degree to which the 2015 CMS mentees might attribute their participation in the CMS mentoring program to making a positive difference with academic, structural, and personal barriers of students. The students that participated in the mentoring program discussed how the mentoring program affected these particular barriers during interviews. A vast majority of the participants' answers supported the belief that some facet of the barriers to success was helped through the CMS Mentoring program. One question in particular asked students: "How does the mentoring program affect your academic, structural, and personal barriers?" Table 15 depicts the findings from this question.

Table 18

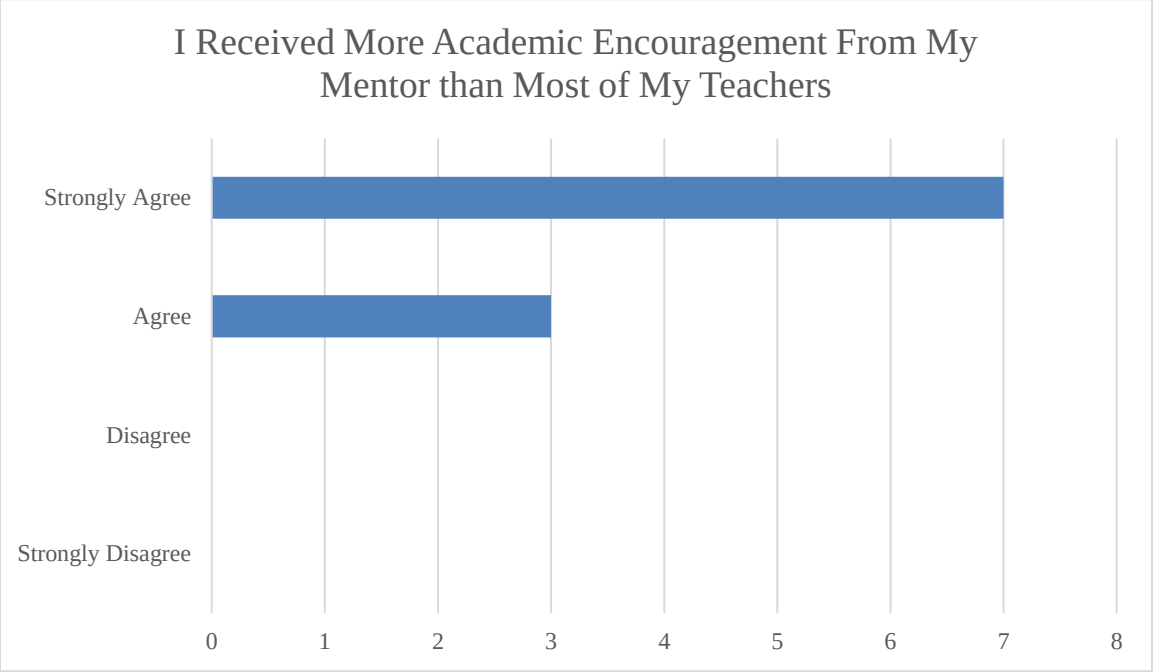
How the CMS Mentoring Program Affects Academic, Structural, and Personal Barriers of Students

Research Question	**Findings from Data**
2. How does the mentoring program affect the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency?	***Academic Barriers*** Mentees saw teachers as gatekeepers Mentees had a difficult time adjusting to seven different teachers Mentees tested more often in middle school
	Structural Barriers The number of classes mentees had Generational poverty affected mentees Cultural differences between teachers and mentees Mentors helped mentees with scheduling concerns
	Personal Barriers Most mentees live in single parent households Mentees wanted to be "cool" in front of their peers Mentees didn't have a sense of belonging when they entered CMS

The responses to Question #9, "I received more academic encouragement from my mentor than from most of my teachers" are reflected in Table 16. All of the young men responded to Question #9 by only selecting "agree" or "strongly agree." For question #9, seven young men strongly agreed, and three agreed. More precisely, while all of the young men seemed to identify with some degree of academic encouragement from their mentors, more of the respondents emphasized they "strongly agreed" than those who responded with "agree."

Table 19

Student Question #9



Responses from the students included the following:

Elijah. *The mentoring program helped me in so many ways. See, before I had a mentor, I didn't really care about my grades that much. My mom and grandma would get onto me about them, but that was about it. My mom works a lot to support our family, including my grandma, by herself. My teachers didn't seem to care if I passed my classes or not. Honestly, that hurt me when I first got to middle school. I was used to one teacher that really cared about if I succeeded. Being in middle school with 7 different teachers has been a hard adjustment. The way middle school is set up is tricky. My mentor helped me to understand the way middle school is set up. He taught me how to talk to my teachers respectfully and just to be nice to them. He told me that being nice goes a long way, and it really does. It has been nice to have a mentor that can talk to me about stuff like that, especially since my dad has been in jail. I don't get to see him that much because no one will take me to see him. Plus, he made some bad choices and*

I don't want to end up like him. My mentor and I talk about my dad sometimes, and it is good to talk to him about my home life.

Joshua. *My mentor is great! Being in this program has been good for me. When we meet as a whole group, I get to see that other students go through the same things that I go through, which is a relief to me. Kids just don't talk about stuff like school for real. We talk about videos, girls, and sports. In the mentoring meetings, we talk about ways to improve our grades, like studying. I'm not going to lie, I never studied before. I didn't see the point in it. When we talked about the differences in grades between students that study and those that do not, I was surprised. Then we talked about Lexile levels and reading and I really understood what my teachers have been trying to explain. Working with other kids like me helped me out a lot. I used to think that making good grades wasn't cool but now I don't care what other people think about me. I want to do my best no matter what.*

Marlon. *Man the mentoring program has been awesome. I think that it is cool that they matched me up with a mentor who understands me. We talk about a lot of things together. I was worried that I wouldn't make a lot of friends when I got here because we had just moved from Chicago. My mentor helped me to make better choices of friends. For example, there is a dude in my fifth period that is so hilarious and he rides my bus. At first, I was trying to hang out with him and I was getting into trouble. My mentor talked to me about the company that I keep and even if I am not doing anything, I will get into trouble just by associating with the funny dude. I thought about it and I decided to be friends with kids that were doing their work. I started talking to other kids that are in the mentoring program and we started competing with our grades. I went from making B's and C's to making A's and B's. My mom is so proud of me and she is planning a trip for us to go to New York over Christmas break. I've never been there*

before and if it wasn't for my mentor helping me with my grades, I don't think that I would be going now.

Les. *This program has been great. I used to be concerned with how my friends viewed me a lot more than I am now. I used to try to fit in and be cool with everybody. My mentor taught me that good friends want me to be successful in school, not act like a clown. My mom told me something like that before, but I really believed it coming from a man. My mom fusses at me for a long time and I stop listening to her after a while. One day I was complaining to my mentor about one of my teachers. She is an older White woman and I didn't think that she really liked me. My mentor helped me to realize that it didn't matter if she liked me or not, the only thing that mattered was me completing my work to the best of my abilities and passing the sixth grade. I went into her classroom, started completing my work, and I ended up bringing my grade up from a D to a B. I was surprised at how my mentor was right about that.*

The students that participated in the mentoring program spoke about how the mentoring program affected these particular barriers in academics during interviews.
Student responses to the question included:

Marlon. *My mentor really helps me through a lot of stuff. I didn't really like middle school at first. I was used to having one teacher all day, and coming here was a big adjustment. I felt that some of my teachers didn't get to know me when I first got here and I felt that I didn't fit in. In elementary school, a big part of our time together was getting to know you games and activities. When I got to CMS, it was all work. I am ok with the work, but I thought that we would do things together in our classes. When I asked one of my teachers about, she told me that this isn't elementary school. I am quiet and shy so it is hard for me to make friends. My mom has to work a lot of hours and I am an only child, so most of the time I come home to an*

empty house. My mom asked me if I made some friends and I told her that I did, but I really didn't. I was feeling lonely and sad. After two-three weeks of school, nothing had really changed. I just went to school and came home. I was feeling sad for myself. One day I found my mom's gun and sat on my bed thinking about killing myself. I couldn't think of anybody that would miss me except for my mom. I put the gun away and went to bed. A few days later, I saw a sign up about a mentoring program. I asked my mom if I could join the program and she said yes. A few weeks later we had a meeting and I met my mentor. It was a good match. We liked some of the same things and he was easy to talk to. The first day that we met as a group, I met some other students that are in the program as well and they were cool. I ended up meeting my two best friends that day. They are different from me, but in a good way. They challenge me to do better in school and everything. My mentor is supportive. I can talk to him about stuff outside of school and he is very understanding. He has helped me to understand how middle school works and how to make the best of my time here. I look forward to our weekly check-ins because I know that my mentor is always going to brag on how great I am doing in class. He helps me set goals too. For example, I wasn't that great at reading before I got to CMS. My Lexile level was 550, which is below grade level. It's not that I can't read, I just chose not to. I got really lazy with my reading and I got behind. My mentor spoke to me about my reading and we picked some books out together that we are both reading. I had never heard of Hoops by Walter Dean Myers, but we really both liked it. After reading that book, I read a lot more books that were interesting to me. My Lexile level went up also, and now I am reading at an 850, but my goal is to be at 1000 before the school year is over. Now I like reading for pleasure again and it's like my mentor says, if you don't practice, you won't get any better. So yes, my mentor has helped me a lot.

Jawan. *The mentoring program has helped me to get back on track. I was always a good student in elementary school, making mostly A's and a few B's. When I got to middle school, something changed. I don't know what it is. My mom said that I was trying to be cool, but I wasn't. It was just different. Like I had all of these classes and homework and classwork that I wasn't completing. I didn't know what to do. When I would try to catch up on the weekends and turn my work in late, my teachers wouldn't accept it. I was really frustrated because I just couldn't keep up. After a while, I just gave up on my assignments and didn't worry about it. Then my first progress report came-I had all C's, a D and an F. I thought that my mom was going to kill me. She didn't, but she did set up a conference with all of my teachers and the counselor. One of the teachers thought that it would be a good idea if I joined the mentoring program because it could help me with my grades. At first, I didn't want to join because I didn't know if anyone else that I knew would be getting a mentor. I walked into the cafeteria the first day and I was surprised to see a lot of my friends and classmates there with their mentors. I looked around for my mentor and he seemed cool. He was a 7th grade teacher that I had seen in the hallways but I had never met. We talked some and played some games together. By the end of the first session, we knew a lot about each other. He told me that we would meet weekly and that he would be there for me if I needed him. He asked me what I wanted to work on the most and I told him my grades. I told him that I didn't do a great job during the first quarter but he told me not to worry about it, that it would get better. I met with him weekly, and sometimes twice a week. I liked having someone at school that I could relate with and depend on. My mentor started helping me get organized by buying me a planner. I had to write all of my assignments down in it and get it signed by my teachers and mom every day. It seemed childish at first and I didn't want to be embarrassed by my friends going up to the*

teachers and having my planner signed. They worked it out so that I could leave it on their desk at the end of class and they would give it back to me after the bell rang. Once I got organized, this helped me a lot. I was able to complete my assignments when they were due, I even turned my science fair project in early. At the end of the semester, I had pulled all of my grades up and I made the A/B honor roll. My mentor gave me my certificate during awards day and he said he was proud of me.

Summary of RQ2 Findings

The CMS Mentoring Program helped these students in a variety of ways. The CMS Mentoring Program made an impact on academic, structural, and personal barriers on students' academic proficiency by helping students focus on the importance of grades, studying, and turning assignments in on time. The mentees reported that their mentors helped them improve socially and academically. The mentees stated that their mentors helped to keep them on track with their grades by checking in on them and making a positive impact in their lives.

Research Question 3: How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?

This question was posed to determine how the action research helped key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males. Key stakeholders in this process were the members of the Action Research Team and mentors who participated in the CMS Mentoring Program. All stakeholders answered Likert survey questions and participated in interviews about the CMS Mentoring Program. The results are shown in Table 17.

Table 20

How the CMS Mentoring Program Affects Academic, Structural, and Personal Barriers of Students

Research Question	**Findings from Data**
3. How does an action research process help key stakeholders make meaning of social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males?	***Action Research*** The AR Team learned about social learning theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement of African-American males by playing an integral role in the complete action research process Interventions were individualized based on mentees' needs
	Social Learning Theory Mentors helped to increase the self-efficacy of mentees Mentees learned how to self-regulate from their mentors
	Mentoring The AR Team planned training sessions for mentors The AR Team planned monthly meetings for mentors and mentees to build stronger relationships
	Enhancing Achievement Weekly grade monitoring assisted mentors and mentees by tracking mentees' progress Mentors helped mentees become better students through personalized interventions

The primary objective of the CMS Mentoring Program was to close the achievement gap through focusing particularly on the academic portion of mentoring. Findings from other mentoring studies reported that the ability of mentors to properly implement communication, participation and support in mentoring activities had increased mentees' self-efficacy and could lead to an enhanced mentees' psychosocial and academic performance (Vieno, et al, 2007). The mentoring research literature is consistent with the notion of Bandura's (1993, 2000) social cognitive theory where it highlights that self-efficacy is a motivating factor that may involve an

individual's beliefs about his/her capability in organizing, regulating, and executing his/her behavior to meet certain levels of performance.

Question numbers #1, 2, 3, and 4 of the CMS Mentoring Program Survey for the AR Team and Mentors provided relevant feedback to address the fourth research question. The responses were collected using a Likert-type scale with the following choices: 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Stakeholders were asked to respond to the following: "As a result of taking part in the CMS Mentoring Program and Action Research…"

Survey Question #1) I am more knowledgeable about action research.

Survey Question #2) I am more knowledgeable about social learning theory.

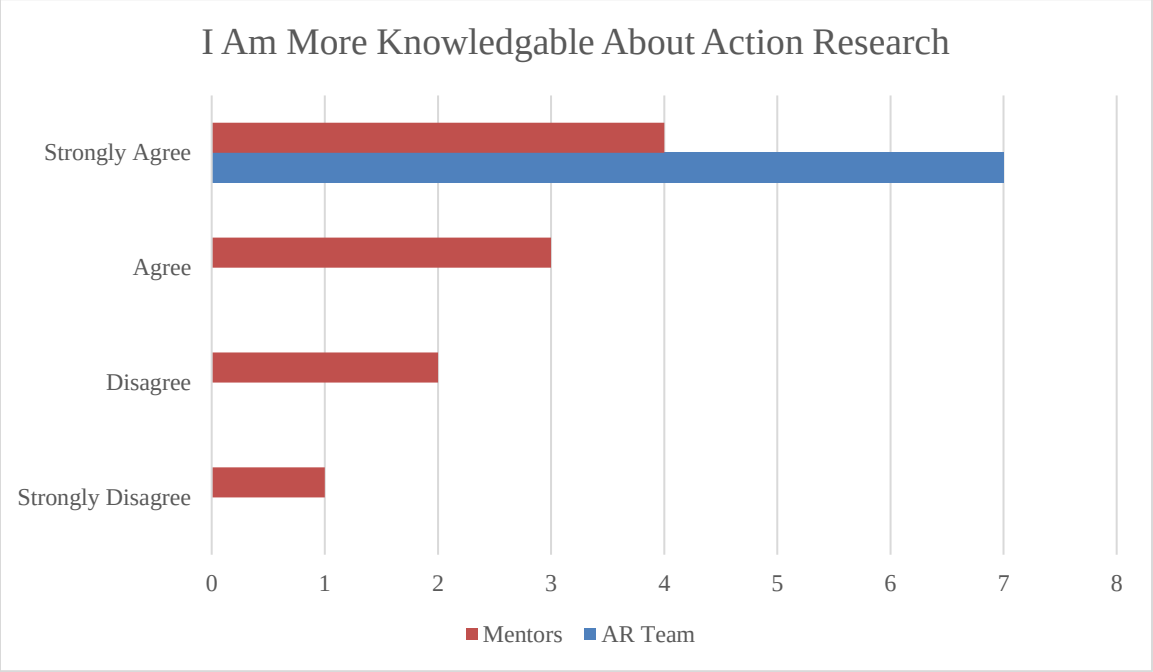
Survey Question #3) I am more knowledgeable about mentoring African-American males.

Survey Question #4) I am more capable of enhancing the achievement of African-American males.

The CMS Mentoring Program Survey responses for Question #1, I am more knowledgeable about action research are illustrated in Table 18. Of the stakeholders who participated in the survey, results for this question varied. All seven members of the AR Team responded that they were more knowledgeable about action research, while seven of the mentors agreed or strongly agreed about the same question. It is thought-provoking to note that three of the mentors disagreed or strongly disagreed to this question.

Table 21

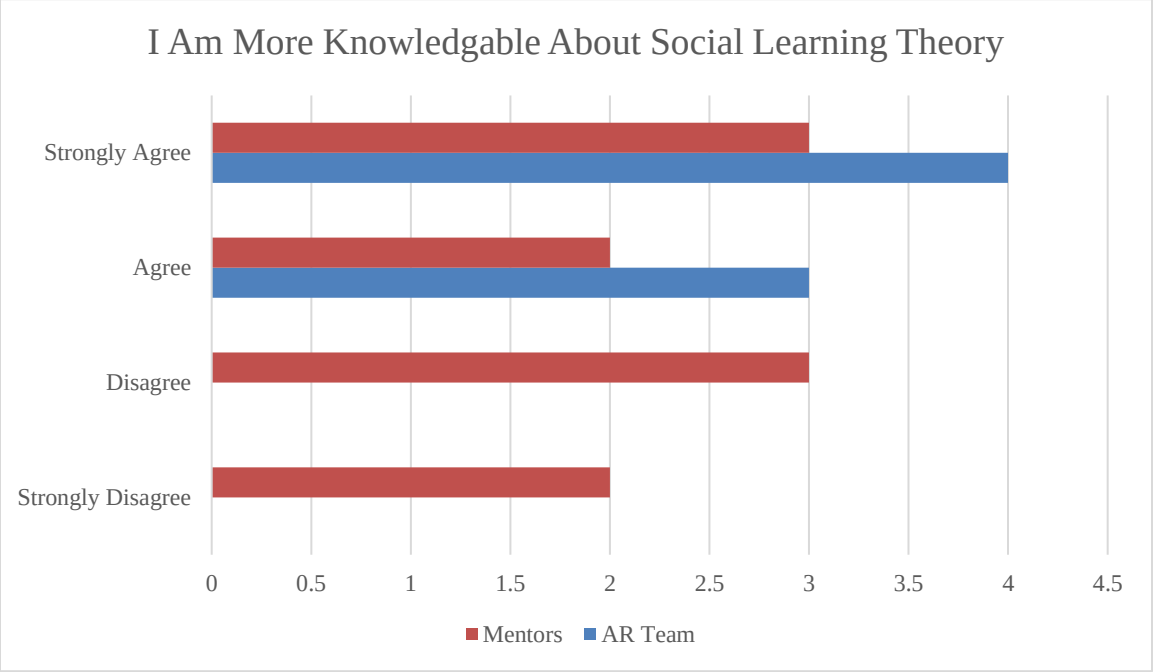
Stakeholder Question #1



The responses to Question #2, "I am more knowledgeable about social learning theory," are reflected in Table 19. Similar to the responses for Question #1, all of the members of the AR Team responded to Question #2 by only selecting "agree" or "strongly agree." It is important to note that four out of seven strongly agreed with the statement when in the previous question all members strongly agreed. In similar fashion, the results from the mentors' response to this question were mixed. Five mentors responded that they "agree" or "strongly agree," while five of the mentors responded that they "disagree or strongly disagree" with this statement. The AR Team received more formalized training in the areas of action research and social learning theory than the mentors did, and these results reflect that fact.

Table 22

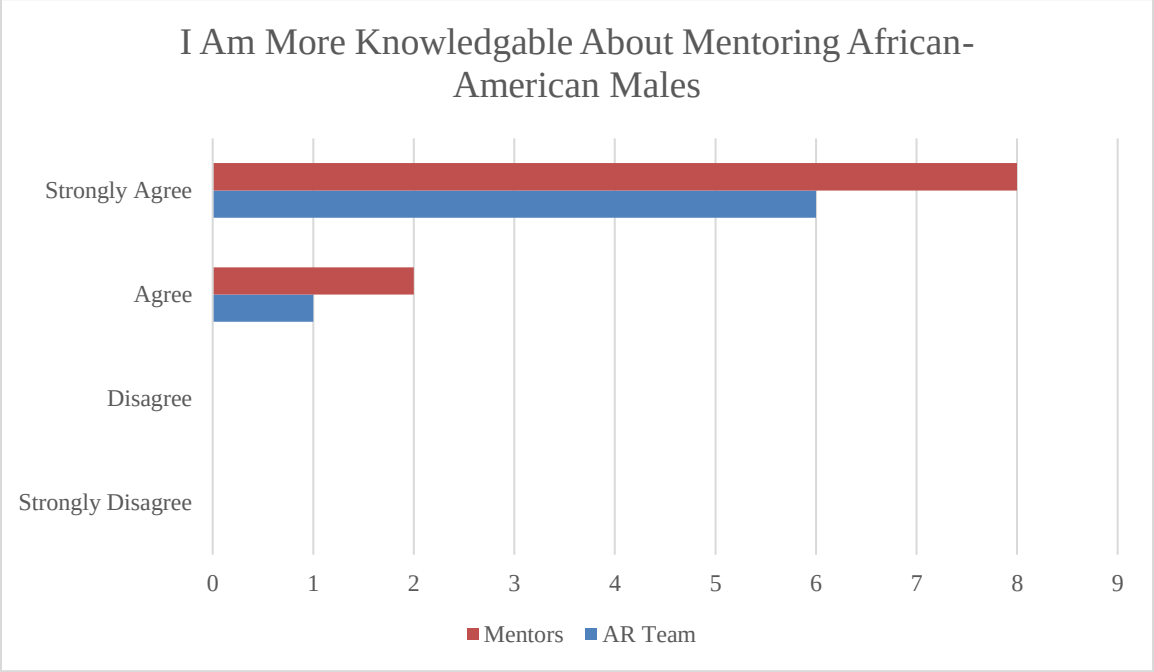
Stakeholder Question #2



The stakeholders' responses to Question #3, "I am more knowledgeable about mentoring African-American males," are reflected in Table 20. These responses were different from those in Questions #1 and #2 because all stakeholders involved in the CMS Mentoring Program selected "agree" or "strongly agree" as their answer to this question. Similar to the responses for Question #2, all of the members of the AR Team responded to Question #3 by only selecting "agree" or "strongly agree." More respondents strongly agreed than agreed to this statement. Six members of the AR Team strongly agreed while one member agreed with this statement. Of the ten mentors, eight mentors strongly agreed while two members agreed with this remark.

Table 23

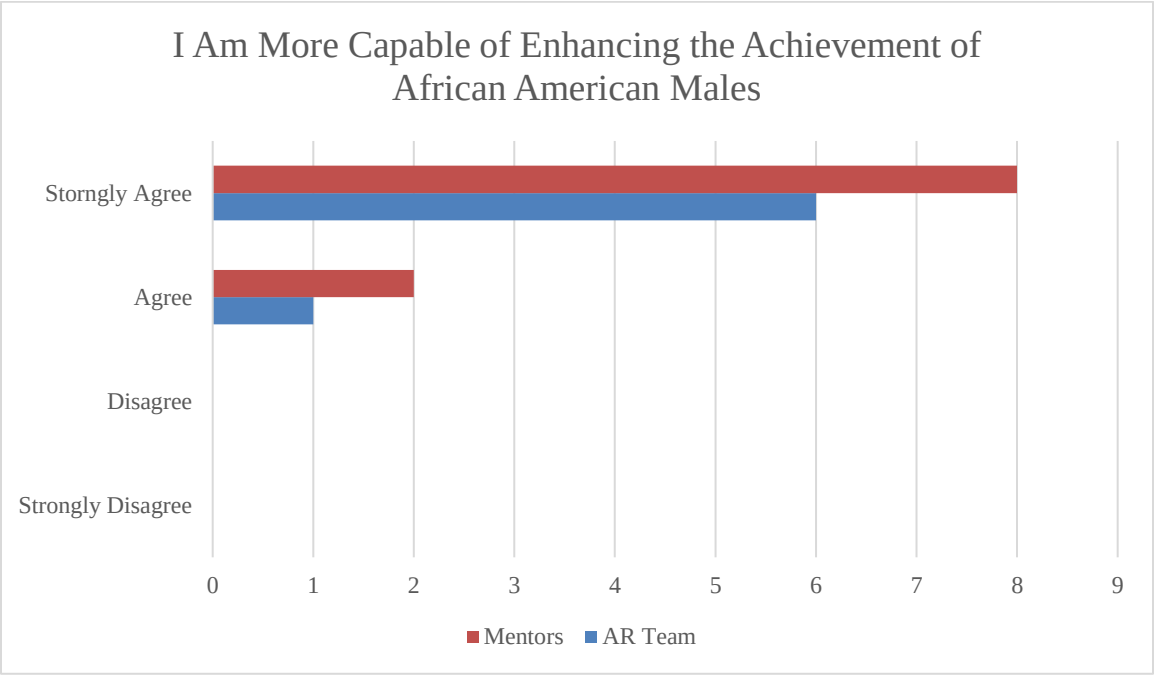
Stakeholder Question #3



The stakeholders' responses to Question #3, "I am more capable of enhancing the achievement of African-American males," are reflected in Table 21. These responses were identical to those from the previous question; Question #2 because all stakeholders involved in the CMS Mentoring Program selected "agree" or "strongly agree" as their answer to this question. Similar to the responses to the previous question, all of the members of the AR Team responded to Question #3 by only selecting "agree" or "strongly agree." More respondents strongly agreed than agreed to this statement. Six members out of seven of the AR Team strongly agreed with this statement, while one member agreed. Eight of the ten mentors strongly agreed, while two members agreed with this remark.

Table 24

Stakeholder Question #4



Mentor Responses [5]

In formal one-on-one interviews, mentors were asked about their experiences in the CMS Mentoring Program.

Junior. *Being a mentor forces me to do better, provides chances for involvement beyond my typical role as a teacher at the school, and provides me with a sense of mattering and belonging. My mentee is proud to tell his friends that I was his mentor, and that made me feel like I was making a difference.*

Steve. *Being a mentor is important because it allows students to see people like themselves in a different light. It is hard to be a mentor to all of these kids in this building. I am*

[5] All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

a different person one-on-one than I am in that classroom. In the classroom, I am more controlled and engaged in making sure my lessons are successful and that my students learn the material. I was able to be my true self as a mentor and talk to my mentee like I would talk to my son.

The responses from key stakeholders mirrored Bandura's social cognitive theory. Reactions from mentors on the open-ended questions on the survey and in one-on-one interviews showed that they helped their mentees academically.

Billie. *Once I met my mentee, I was excited about taking part in this program. My mentee is really great. We met and we instantly connected. The initial meeting was in the cafeteria and as I was waiting for my mentee to show up, I got nervous. I really want to be the best mentor that I can be to really show him the ropes. As time went on, I think that I enjoyed our meetings just as much if not more than my mentee. We talked about all kinds of things, but what helped me as a mentor were our meetings with the other mentors. I was able to get ideas from them about what to do with my mentee and about how to keep his grades on track. Honestly, I think just being there for my mentee helped a lot. Sometimes our kids just need a little extra love and attention to be successful. Each week I looked at my mentees' grades and we discussed how he was doing in each class. The mentor guide helped to hold myself and my mentee accountable. When my mentee started coming to me, he didn't really see the point of making good grades. Once we spoke about how each grade level builds on the next, he got the point. My mentee's grades improved from B's and C's to A's and B's, but most importantly, he started believing in himself.*

Patrick. *I actually taught my mentee's brother two years ago, so we already had a small connection. My mentee just wasn't organized. We went to his locker one day and he had*

everything in there and the kitchen sink. I ended up buying him a locker organizer and an agenda and working with him weekly to stay organized. We worked out a system where he wrote his assignments down daily and gave the agenda to his teachers to sign and for his mom to see daily. This organization helped him tremendously. I have been working with him on improving his grades and he was surprised at how being organized can go a long way. He was doing his homework, but at times it would get lost between home and school due to his lack of organization. We are an A.V.I.D. school, and I have been to the A.V.I.D. training so I used some of their organization techniques with my mentee. We also talked about the importance of trying his best and being a leader in class and not a follower. As we spoke, I could tell that he wanted to do better but that he didn't feel that anyone in the school was in his corner. Once we got to know each other better, he really opened up to me and expressed that he was happy to be working me. He also told me that having me in his corner meant a lot to him and he wanted to do better in his classes because of my influence. That really made me feel good-like I was making a difference with him socially and academically.

Tiwon. *When I signed up to be a mentor, I didn't know what to expect. It is my first year teaching, and honestly, I didn't feel that I could devote the time to a mentee the way that I would have really liked to. When I saw my mentee in the cafeteria, I knew that I had made the right decision. He sat there looking up at me with very sad eyes. His clothes looked old and tattered and I could tell that he tried to stay under the radar at school the few times that I had seen him in the hallways. When we started talking, he told me about his mom that works all of the time and about how he is always by himself. We talked about the future and what he wanted to be when he grows up. I thought it would be good to set short term and long term goals together. He said that he really liked to draw, but his connections classes were technology and gym. I spoke to the*

counselor about switching one of his connections classes for art. He was switched within a week and it made the biggest difference. He was able to express himself through his art and actually won a local art contest. I'm not going to say that it happened because of myself, but I am glad that I was able to help him get into a course that met his particular needs. Once he won the contest, other students started noticing him and wanting him to draw things for him. As my mentee's popularity grew, we talked about the qualities of a good, true friend. I didn't want the other kids to use him for his artistic ability. He told me that he was just happy that other kids were being nice to him. The joy that he got from talking about his art was amazing. His teachers noticed his abilities as well and they asked him to draw things for them. It was so funny to see how his art really brought him out of his shell. In the first quarter, my mentee's grades were all over the place. He had every grade except for an F on his progress report. He explained to me that he wanted to do better but that he was overwhelmed with all of his classwork and that he was a bad test taker.

Middle School Behavior

While the mentees' academic performance and improvements during the second quarter of 2015 were analyzed closely, the program's influence on their behavior was examined as well. Albeit through only one Likert-type survey question and one question was posed to the mentees during interviews, behavior in middle school also seemed to be an area where the young men reported the CMS Mentoring Program served them well.

On the student survey, the young men were asked to respond to the following: "As a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring Program…"

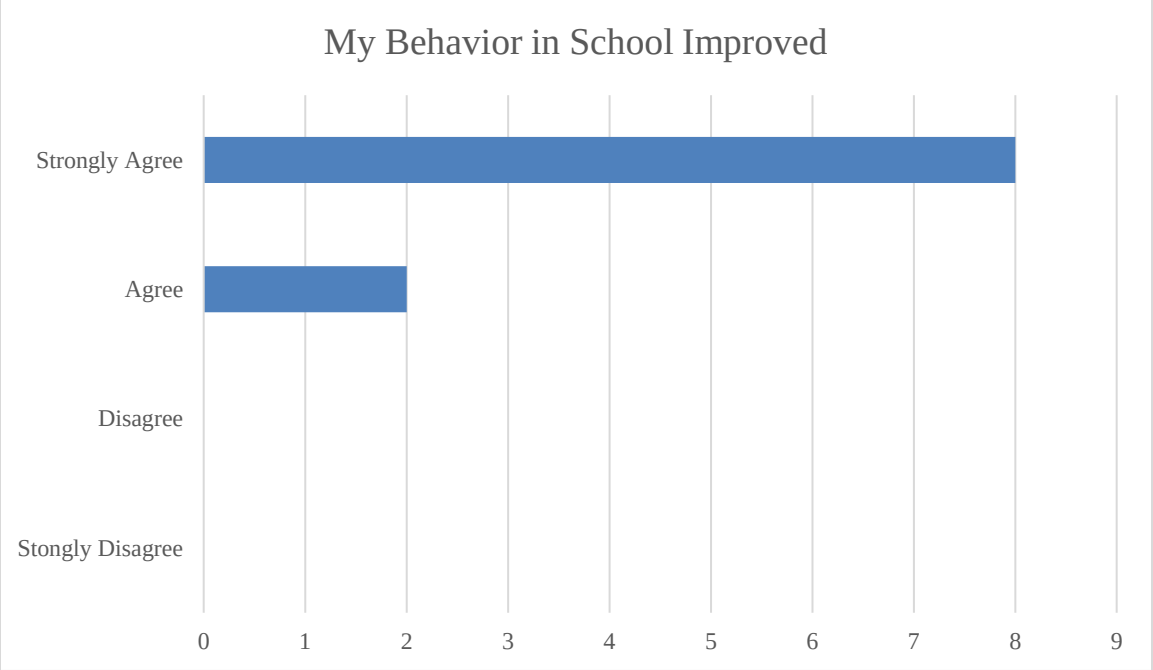
Student Survey Question # 5) My behavior in school improved.

Question # 5 on the CMS Mentoring Program student survey and question # 4 from the student interviews each solicited feedback to determine whether or not respondents felt the CMS Mentoring Program helped to improve the behavior of the young men in any way.

The results of student question # 5 are illustrated in Table 22, which shows that the mentees strongly agree and agree that the mentees' behavior in school improved.

Table 25

Student Question #5



In addition to the Likert-scale questions, more feedback taken from the mentees during the interviews supported the survey results indicating the CMS Mentoring Program had a positive influence on behavior of the participants during the second quarter of 2015. The question posed to the young men during interviews asked the following question:

Sometimes young men in middle school get into trouble, whether it's detention, in school suspension, out of school suspension, getting into a fight, insubordination, yelling at the teacher, or just causing classroom disruptions. Have you been in trouble in school since you've been in the program? Have any of those things happened, and if so, did you learn anything from it as a result of the CMS Mentoring Program? If not, did participating in the CMS Mentoring Program influence you to stay away from trouble?

Representative responses follow:

Lincoln. *During the first quarter I was always getting in trouble. I just couldn't stop talking and instead of being respectful to my teachers, I am embarrassed to say that I was disrespectful to them. If I wanted to talk in class, I did, then when teachers asked me to be quiet, I would get smart with them. I got into a few fights when school started because people kept picking on me and I was tired of it. Since I have had a mentor, he has been there to talk to me about my behavior and my choices. I haven't been perfect, but my behavior and my attitude towards adults has been better.*

Nathan. *I used to get in trouble all of the time for things like skipping class, being tardy for class, getting smart with the teacher, and playing around a lot. This program has really changed me a lot. When I met my mentor, we talked about my behavior in class. He was the first person at the school to actually talk to me about my behavior without taking sides or blaming me. I was really able to talk with him without being judged. He told me that his behavior was similar to mine when he was in school, but he almost waited too long to change it for the better. He told me that he didn't want me to make the same mistakes that he made. I listened and I really got myself together. The crazy thing is that when my behavior improved, my*

grades did too. I am happy to say that I made the honor roll for the semester and I know that I would not have done it without my mentor.

Jawan. *I have been a trouble maker since the second or third grade. My mom has been coming to the school for my behavior problems since then too. I don't know why, but teachers don't really like me. I don't do anything to them but they always say that I have a bad attitude and that I don't listen. I think that's true sometimes, but not all of the time and when I try to change, they only see the old me. I spoke with my mentor about it and my mentor decided to have a meeting with my mom, myself, and all of my teachers. Boy was I scared. The meeting was good though. I spoke first and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. I told everyone that I was making positive changes in my life and I wanted to let them know about it. After speaking with my mentor, I was able to talk to each teacher about my behavior in their classes. I apologized for my past behavior and asked the teachers to please forgive me and I promised in front of everyone that it wouldn't happen again. My teachers were cool with it. They accepted my apologies and some even said that they were looking forward to the new me. My mom started crying during the meeting. With the help of my mentor, I have stayed out of trouble since having that talk. It hasn't always been easy, but I've been doing my best.*

Measuring possible improvement in the behavior of the CMS Mentoring Program participants was not the main focus of this study and was not explored in great detail. Greater emphasis was placed on extracting more academic benefits of the program. Since the student survey results and interviews reflected positive changes in school behavior because participation in the CMS Mentoring Program, the results were shared.

Conclusion

Each research question was addressed throughout the course of this chapter. Based on the results that stemmed from the survey questions (Likert-type and open-ended) as well as through the mentee interviews, the data supported the message that the CMS Mentoring Program had a positive impact in the lives of the participants. Students that participated in the program shared information affirming that the CMS Mentoring Program helped them in a variety of ways. When given the option to choose the degree to which the CMS Mentoring Program helped them in these particular areas, most of the students either replied with "strongly agree" or "agree," suggesting their satisfaction with the program.

The data that was provided in this chapter strengthened the notion that the students deemed the CMS Mentoring Program worthwhile and positive, particularly in the area of academic improvement. This was evidenced through the responses from the open-ended survey questions completed by the students, as well as the responses revealed during individual interviews in which all of the participants took part. While the tables provided a useful visual account of the participants' feelings about a specific question, the remarks taken directly from the students allowed for their distinct expressions to be permeated into the study.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the academic achievement gap between African American and White students with a focus on a mentoring program focused on academics. There continues to be an abundance of research making an effort to explain the causes of the achievement gap between African-Americans and Whites. This collected work shows that overall African-American students lag behind their White counterparts in terms of academic achievement (e.g. Roach, 2004) including achievement and motivation. This chapter provides a discussion of the study and clarification of the data presented in the previous chapter. In addition this chapter provides a discussion of proposed implications as well as recommendations for future research.

At the commencement of this study, my goal was to measure the effectiveness of the CMS Mentoring Program for African-American teenage males from the perspective of a sample of the participants and their teachers. I specifically wanted to gauge the impact the program had in the areas of academic achievement and closing the achievement gap. I sought to understand if participation in the CMS Mentoring Program over the course of one school quarter had any influence on the young men's academic performance in middle school, if participation affected the impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers on mentees' academic proficiency, and finally how the action research process helped key stakeholders make meaning of Social Learning Theory, mentoring, and enhancing achievement among African-American males.

The responses from the mentees who participated in the program and the responses from their teachers and mentors were used to help determine the CMS Mentoring Program's success. This chapter provides a summary of the overall study including what was achieved, the research limitations, recommendations, and other information about what the study revealed and why it mattered.

Summary of Findings

Time has revealed that academic and social performance go hand in hand and to ignore the social development of adolescent African-American males usually means losing any academic improvements as well (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). There is a quote anonymously written that states, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." These students needed social guidance in order to help their academic growth. By using groups as a framework for two of the program's main components, CMS mentoring program participants have been able to make both academic and social gains (Bailey et al., 2006). Critical to the success of these mentoring groups is recognizing the importance of building positive relationships with group members through a show of commitment, clearly defined boundaries with consequences, and a willingness to listen to feedback from program participants (Bailey, 2005).

Mentors acting as group leaders can encourage African-American males to look at other areas in which they excel (i.e., sports, art, band, etc.) and apply the same strategies to improve academically and socially. This means encouraging them, and in some cases, pushing them to acknowledge where they are and to improve by first developing strong foundations in the core academic areas. This will require the mentors to see these young men as they are, behind academically, but to envision them as they could be, academically sound. For some schools,

districts, communities, and families, this means creating a climate of success instead of a climate of excuses for remaining behind. Being intentionally focused on the strengths of these young men, instead of their weaknesses, and identifying their academic gaps can result in recapturing lost potential. The results of these steps and strategies may lead to academic success, not only for group members, but for the entire school and community.

With a large body of existing data narrating the academic struggles of African-American males, information recommending successful strategies to help address these concerns is not as readily available. This study identified mentoring as an option to combat some of the struggles African-American males face while in middle school. According to Brinter et.al, (2006), youth who participate in mentoring relationships attend class more often, have fewer school absences, are less aggressive, take part in more college preparatory activities, and have a better chance of engaging in higher education. The results of this study supported research such as that of Britner (2006) and revealed that the CMS Mentoring Program positively impacted the young men who participated in the program academically and behaviorally.

The data reported in Chapter 4 (Findings) demonstrated and summarized the students' thoughts about the impact of the CMS Mentoring Program. Survey and interview methods were applied to help determine if the young men's participation in the program impacted their academic performance in middle school. Furthermore, the study measured how influential the CMS Mentoring Program was in affecting academic, structural, and personal barriers of students.

When addressing the first category, I discovered that an overwhelming number of the CMS Mentoring Program participants and their mentors noted that their academic performance and behavior were positively impacted as a result of the program. Specifically, when answering the four survey questions related to this particular area of the study, the participants all responded

with either “agree” or “strongly agree” fully acknowledging the benefits of their mentoring experience on their middle school academics and behavior. Within the group of mentor respondents, over the course each of the same four survey questions, all answers were in line with the “agree” or “strongly agree” trend of the mentors. Instead, for those four answers, “disagree” was selected.

Conclusions

This research study has provided findings that may be transferable to another school context. This study contributes to the literature by providing support for the effectiveness of an academic mentoring program in fostering academic success and achievement of middle school African-American boys. The most significant contribution of this research is the official academic mentorship model that was developed including; training mentors, identifying mentor requirements, and developing and implementing survey instruments and research questions for the purposes of this study. The aforementioned contributions of this study provide a blueprint that will assist schools and institutions looking to positively impact the perceptions and self-efficacy of their African-American male students through the utilization of an academic focused mentoring program.

Limitations

While many of the results of this study had positive results, a number of limitations existed. One limitation was the small sample size (10). Typical to many studies of youth mentoring relationships, small sample sizes (often samples of convenience) tend to lack statistical power, and limit the researcher’s ability to generalize the findings confidently to larger populations (Dubois, Doolittle, Yates, Silverthorn, & Tebes, 2006). The potential insight that could be gathered from a study of more mentors and mentees could offer a distinctive

opportunity to improve the understanding of the true impact the program might have made in their lives as well as the lives of other participants.

Another limitation was the close connections I established with the young men in the study. Without a doubt, a strong bond between youth and mentor is an important factor for positive outcomes to occur in mentoring relationships (Dubois, et al., 2002). However, that same bond between youth and the site facilitator can interfere in the process of the site facilitator acting as a researcher, attempting to gather unbiased information from the youth. Since I served as a teacher for some of the young men in the study or their siblings, in addition to being their site facilitator, I had established very close associations with them. In a positive way, this familiarity helped enable the process of collecting of data from students, however, on the adverse side it may have influenced their ability to respond honestly to the survey and interview questions in an attempt to help my research look good and produce advantageous results on my behalf.

As with the students, limitations may have existed in my ability to generate unbiased responses from the mentors. I have worked with many of the mentors for years at CMS, and many of the mentors have positively impacted the culture of CMS. Many have expressed feelings of gratitude and have appeared indebted to me as a result of working with me but also being personal friends. Their gratefulness could have amplified their probability to respond in favorable ways to the survey and interviews irrespective of what their true feelings may have been about the program. Although I encouraged them to provide unbiased opinions based on their genuine beliefs and not any feelings of obligation to me, their desire to assist me may have succeeded in some instances.

Addressing the Theoretical Framework

This goal of this research was to find out the influence of mentoring and its impact of academic, structural, and personal barriers of students, as well as their self-efficacy. Social learning theory was the theoretical framework that guided this study. This framework added meaningfully to the perspectives of this study including; the design of the mentorship program, design of the study, analysis and interpretation of data. Social learning theory postulates that knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences (Bandura, 1988). This theory further evolved when it was suggested that if there is a close identification between the observer and the model and if the observer has a good deal of self-efficacy learning will most likely occur (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1989) stated that self-efficacy is one's expectations of how well one will accomplish desired tasks. People with high self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves and strive for success, leaving them with better self-confidence. In my research, I found that due to their participation in the CMS Mentoring Program, the mentees increased their self-efficacy and had higher rates of success in school than they had previously.

Future Research

Determining if mentoring programs can be a viable way to address some of the academic and behavioral issues African-American males experience is worth exploring in greater detail. Based on the positive results of this study (while taking the limitations into consideration), several areas of research can develop and provide more information about the benefits of mentoring African-American males, and possibly other groups as well.

There are five recommendations for further research. The first is to analyze actual middle school grades and standardized test scores over the duration of mentoring. This study was able to measure academic improvement based on student and mentor reporting. Other measures generated "general" acknowledgements such as if grades improved, or if students focused more on their grades and academics as a result of the program. However, no specific analysis if the participants' actual report card grades or scores on state standardized assessments were factors used to decide if academic growth truly occurred, and if it did occur, to what magnitude. By exploring the possible academic benefits of mentoring African-American males through greater research, educators, parents, and those alarmed about the achievement of African-American males will understand if mentoring initiatives should be taken into serious contemplation as a possible resolution to the problem of the achievement gap.

The second recommendation is to conduct a comparative study of young men who participate in a mentoring program like the CMS Mentoring Program, with those from similar schools and with similar backgrounds not participating in such a program. This study measured the experiences of a small group of African-American males who had been involved in a mentoring initiative for nine weeks. These young men were exposed to specific and deliberate activities to help them focus on improving their grades and behavior during this time period. Emphasis was also placed on future career opportunities for mentees. By identifying another group of African-American males to study with similar academic and demographic backgrounds, but without the support of such a mentoring program, conclusions could be drawn based on their rates of success. The mentored and non-mentored groups could be paralleled based on middle school grade improvement and success.

The third recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal study of former mentoring program participants a number of years after completing the program. The interviews conducted in this study took place about 1-2 months after the young men completed the first quarter of the CMS Mentoring Program. Additionally, each of the young men had recently completed their first semester of middle school at the time of the interviews. Information provided in Chapter 2 submitted that African-American males are at risk due to struggling academically. Analyzing the group of mentored young men after the completion of middle school (and completion of the CMS Mentoring Program) could possible offer meaningful feedback about the possible long-term impact of their mentoring experience, and if their views about the program were long lasting or temporary. Such information could possibly inform researchers of mentoring about the duration or limits of program benefits, and if mentoring relationships might need to be sustained beyond middle school in order for the young men to continue to be successful.

The fourth recommendation is to research other school-based mentoring programs across the country to decide if those programs produce comparable outcomes. A building leader could sponsor similar initiatives throughout the country with young African-American males. While the CMS Mentoring Program proved to be successful in addressing a number of needs plaguing African-American boys, other programs might be achieving similar or even greater success with their young men. Since the CMS Mentoring Program took place at one site, similar research studies, especially those that yield comparable findings, will provide a deeper understanding of the successful elements of mentoring African-American males. The greater the number of programs boasting success in improving African-American male achievement, the more likely such initiatives will be rendered substantial and more enthusiastically implemented as a worthwhile option for helping redirect our young African-American males.

The final recommendation is to conduct a more exhaustive analysis of the CMS Mentoring program's impact on young men from (mother-led) single-parent households. Much of the information collected in this study focused on the CMS Mentoring Program's ability to positively impact the participants' academic performance. Only one survey question addressed the specific value of having a mentor as a male role model, and only one focus group question addressed the benefit of having a mentors. Since a number of the young men participating in this study resided in single-parent households with their mothers, their particular viewpoints (as well as their mother's views) about the value of the mentors in the CMS Mentoring Program would be worthy of exploring in more detail. One at-risk factor for African-American male youth, in general, noted in the Chapter 2 Literature Review, is the number of them living in fatherless homes and the negative impact that often has in their development as young men. Further research might focus explicitly on those young men without active fathers and without important male examples to measure if a positive impact exists as a result of having consistent contact with mentors present in their lives.

Conclusion

Across the United States of America, many African-American male students are not having the same success in middle school as their White colleagues, and they are falling further behind each school year. As a result of this, they are not active participants in their education and they aren't reaching their full potential as scholars. The academic struggles of young African-American males have been well documented, yet few widespread efforts to help their academic state have been discovered. As an educator, particularly an African-American female educator, it is my hope help generate solutions to combat the struggles facing African-American males through mentoring.

The mentors and mentees that took part in this study made an impact on Constructivist Middle School. The mentors understood that they have what it takes to make a difference in the lives of their mentees. The mentors were seen as positive role models and their mentees formed strong bonds with them in a short period of time. The mentees increased their self-efficacy through this mentoring program and all of them saw school in a more positive light. This study showed that mentoring can help transform today's generation into successful men in the future.

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APPENDIX A

Assent Script/Form for Participation in Research
Measuring the Impact of a Mentoring Program for Underachieving African-American Male Middle Students

We are doing a research study to find out if having a mentor will help you improve your grades. We are asking you to be in the study because your teachers think that your grades could improve if you had a mentor. If you agree to be in this study, you will allow us to match you with a mentor that will work with you one-on-one during the school day. You will talk with us about your experience with your mentor and your academic growth. Being in this study may help you improve your grades. We also hope to learn something about the mentoring program that will help other students in the future.

You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say "yes" or "no."

We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project. We will only use a number so other people cannot tell who you are.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, please feel free to call me at (678) 849-8807or send an e-mail to jennifer@uga.edu. You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Sheneka Williams at (706)542-1615 or smwill@uga.edu.

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes ☐ No**

*** (If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)*

***(For Written Assent)* Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____ **Date:** _____

***(For Verbal Assent)* Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX B

Consent Letter

February ____, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians of _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Sheneka Williams a professor in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at The University of Georgia. I am inviting your child to participate in a research study entitled Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Measuring the Impact of a Mentoring Program for Underachieving African-American Male Middle School Students that is being conducted. The purpose of this study is to find ways to increase the achievement of African-American Males through a mentoring program.

Your child's participation will involve answering questions on a survey and being interviewed. This research will take no time outside of regular school hours. Your child's involvement in the study is voluntary, and your child may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as your child's will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only.

The findings from this project may provide information on how a mentoring program can affect academic achievement in African-American Male Middle School students. There are minimal known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Students may feel uncomfortable speaking about themselves during the interview process. They can choose not to participate in the interviews and/or skip questions that they are not comfortable with. All participants will be anonymous in this study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (678) 849-8807or send an e-mail to jennifer@uga.edu. You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Sheneka Williams at (706)542-1615 or smwill@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 609 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning the questionnaire in the envelope provided, you are agreeing to let your child participate in the above described research project. Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

APPENDIX C

CMS Mentoring Program

Research Study

Research Study Details

Participants in the CMS Mentoring program can be a part of a research study about the effects of a mentoring program on academic achievement. Participants in this research study will be selected based on their academic achievement and parental permission. Benefits of participating in this study will be opportunities to reflect on your academic achievement and helping students like yourself in the future. The CMS Mentoring Program Research Study will take place during school hours.

To Learn More and to Get Involved

Contact Dr. Sheneka Williams, Assistant Professor at The University of Georgia at smwill@uga.edu or 706-542-1615. You may also contact Mrs. Toney at Jennifer@uga.edu or 770-483-3371 Ext. 23194.

*There will be an interest meeting in the near future during study skills class.

APPENDIX D

CMS Mentoring Program Log

Date:

Time:

Meeting Place:

Activity	**Notes**
"Good Things" & Celebrations	
Discuss concerns about student performance (Grades, attendance, discipline)	
Grade Check/Classes of concern	
Problem-Solving (issues with teachers, peers, etc.)	
Review, update, and revise student goals	
Fill out action plans	
Organize notebooks/backpack/locker	
Other	

Date and Time of next meeting: _____

APPENDIX E

CMS Mentoring Program Research Study Interview Questions

1. Can you tell us about the impact mentoring has had on your life?
2. Specifically, what things have you gotten out of it?
3. Would you recommend mentoring to your friends? Why or why not?
4. What are the best moments you can remember about being a mentee?
5. Have there been any bad moments?
6. What do your family and friends think about the fact you are a mentee?
7. Is your life better since you have been involved in mentoring? How?
8. Do you think mentoring should be made available to more people at CMS? Why?
9. What impact has the mentoring program had on your academic achievement? Have your grades and test scores gotten better since you have had a mentor?
10. Why do you think you were selected to be a part of this program?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to share about being in the CMS Mentoring Program?

APPENDIX F

CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness-Student Questionnaire

I am in the process of identifying ways that the CMS mentoring program benefits the young men who participate. My goal is to measure the ways that the program has addressed your needs as an African-American young man educationally and in other ways. Please take about 15-20 minutes to complete this 3 page survey regarding your participation in the CMS Mentoring Program. Your responses will remain anonymous, and will be used to improve future activities, and to help us prepare other young men for academic success. Please return this survey to Mrs. Toney when you complete it.

Directions: Please circle the number that indicates the level in which you agree to the following statements about your experiences in the CMS Mentoring Program. (Circle only one per statement)

As a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring Program…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I developed positive male peers.	4	3	2	1
2. I developed at least one adult male role model.	4	3	2	1
3. I became a role model to my peers.	4	3	2	1
4. I improved my leadership skills.	4	3	2	1
5. My behavior in school improved.	4	3	2	1
6. I focused more on my grades and academics.	4	3	2	1
7. My grades started to improve.	4	3	2	1
8. I became a more confident student.	4	3	2	1

9. I received more academic encouragement from my mentor than from most of my teachers.	4	3	2	1
10. I learned about the benefits of earning a college degree.	4	3	2	1
11. I developed a greater interest in attending college in the future.	4	3	2	1
12. I learned about future career opportunities.	4	3	2	1
13. I learned the value of community service.	4	3	2	1
14. I would recommend the CMS Mentoring Program to other African-American young men.	4	3	2	1
15. I enjoyed being a part of the CMS Mentoring Program.	4	3	2	1
16. I would like to have a mentor next year.	4	3	2	1
17. I felt comfortable talking to my mentor about things, either good or bad.	4	3	2	1
18. I learned new things from my mentor.	4	3	2	1
19. I think that meeting with a mentor was fun.	4	3	2	1
20. My mentor met with me at least one time per week.	4	3	2	1
21. I feel that I am a better student because of the mentoring program.	4	3	2	1
22. My attendance rate has improved since I have had a mentor.	4	3	2	1

Directions: For items #23-27, please respond by writing out your responses to the following questions.

23. List some of the activities that you did with your mentor:
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

24. How successful was the CMS Mentoring Program in helping you become a better student in middle school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

25. What did you like best about the mentoring program?

_____
_____
_____
_____

26. What do you think we should change or do differently next year?

_____
_____
_____
_____

27. Please share additional ways you have benefitted from the CMS Mentoring Program.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX G

CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness-Mentor Questionnaire

We are in the process of identifying ways that the Constructivist Academic Mentoring Program benefits young men who participate. Our goals are to measure ways that the program has addressed the mentees' needs educationally, socially, and emotionally. Your confidential and anonymous responses will be used to determine the effectiveness of our program and make improvements or changes where appropriate. Your comments are important to us.

THIS SURVEY IS ANONYMOUS AND WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Please return this survey to Mrs. Toney when you complete it.

Directions: Please circle the number that indicates the level in which you agree to the following statements about your experiences in the CMS Mentoring Program. (Circle only one per statement)

As a result of participating in the CMS Mentoring Program…	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
1. I helped my mentee develop positive male peers.	4	3	2	1
2. I developed a positive relationship with mentee.	4	3	2	1
3. I became a role model to my mentee.	4	3	2	1
4. I helped my mentee improve my leadership skills.	4	3	2	1
5. My mentees' behavior in school improved.	4	3	2	1
6. My mentees' grades started to improve.	4	3	2	1
7. My mentee became a more confident student.	4	3	2	1
8. I helped my mentee learn about future career opportunities.	4	3	2	1

9. I helped my mentee learn strategies to help him succeed in school.	4	3	2	1
10. My mentees' attendance in school improved.	4	3	2	1
11. I helped my mentee learn the value of community service.	4	3	2	1
12. I would recommend the CMS Mentoring Program to other African-American young men.	4	3	2	1
13. I enjoyed being a mentor in the CMS Mentoring Program.	4	3	2	1
14. I would like to be a mentor next year.	4	3	2	1
15. I felt comfortable talking to my mentee.	4	3	2	1
16. I taught my mentee new things/ideas.	4	3	2	1
17. I met with my mentee at least once per week.	4	3	2	1
18. I feel that my mentee is a better student because of the mentoring program.	4	3	2	1

Directions: For items #19-25, please respond by writing out your responses to the following questions.

19. List some of the activities that you did with your mentee:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

20. How successful was the CMS Mentoring Program in helping your mentee become a better student in middle school?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

21. Do you feel that the mentoring program was personalized for you mentee? Please share examples and explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

22. What do you think we should change or do differently next year?

_____
_____
_____
_____

23. Please share additional ways that your mentee benefitted from the CMS Mentoring Program.

_____
_____
_____
_____

24. How did your mentee like the monthly meetings that were held with the entire group? Please share examples and explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

25. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the CMS Mentoring Program? Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX H

CMS Mentoring Program Effectiveness-Key Stakeholders Questionnaire

We are in the process of identifying ways that the Constructivist Academic Mentoring Program benefits young men who participate. Our goals are to measure ways that the program has addressed the mentees' needs educationally, socially, and emotionally. Your confidential and anonymous responses will be used to determine the effectiveness of our program and make improvements or changes where appropriate. Your comments are important to us.

THIS SURVEY IS ANONYMOUS AND WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

Please return this survey to Mrs. Toney when you complete it.

Directions: Please circle the number that indicates the level in which you agree to the following statements about your experiences in the CMS Mentoring Program. (Circle only one per statement)

As a result of taking part in the CMS Mentoring Program and Action Research…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am more knowledgeable about action research.	4	3	2	1
2. I am more knowledgeable about social learning theory.	4	3	2	1
3. I am more knowledgeable about mentoring African-American males.	4	3	2	1
4. I am more capable of enhancing the achievement of African-American males.	4	3	2	1
5. I am more knowledgeable about African-American male achievement.	4	3	2	1

Directions: For items #6-10, please respond by writing out your responses to the following questions.

6. List some of the activities that took place between mentees and mentors:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. How successful was the CMS Mentoring Program in helping mentees become better students in middle school?

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Do you understand the action research process? Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. How can the CMS Mentoring Program expand and improve for next year?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. Please add any additional information that you would like to share about the CMS Mentoring Program here.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.