Some Black, Male Teachers’ Perspectives of Structural and Cultural Conditions that Contribute to Underachievement Problems for Black Male Students

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines some structural and cultural problems that can contribute to the problem of underachievement facing Black, male students in the educational system. A phenomenological approach was used to gain the perspectives of six Black, male educators on this problem.

Underachievement problems for these students have garnered much interest in the research literature and in pedagogical debates. It is a problem with a long history from the Royal Commission on Learning (1993) to TDSB Urban Diversity Strategy (2008) the problem continues to baffle educators. Data also presents a dismal picture, with 40% from this group underachieving. Black, male teachers’ perspectives are significant because presently their voices are limited in the literature. Their perspectives are also influenced by race, ethnicity and gender, and these are issues that impact on the problem being investigated. The main questions of the study are:

- What are some Black male educators’ perspectives of the role of structural and cultural factors that contribute to the problem of underachievement and school
failure for Black, male students? Were these the same barriers they faced and how did they overcome these barriers as students?

- How might the narratives of these Black male educators both challenge and support multicultural approach to curriculum that purports to particularly address the problems facing Black, male students?

The result of the research indicates that there are structural and cultural factors that can cause underachievement problems for Black, male students. It suggests that an integrated approach which acknowledges the influence of both structure and culture could be used as a means for improving learning outcomes for this group of learners.
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I assume full responsibility for any deficiency in the writing and presentation of this thesis.
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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background Information

Black Male Students and Underachievement

Underachievement and school failure rates for Black students of African ancestry, including students in the Toronto District School Board have reached crisis level. The term students of African ancestry encompasses a wide range of students, including students with parents from different countries in Africa, the various Caribbean islands, students born in Canada of parents from the areas mentioned above, as well as children of first generation Black parents in Canada and of bi-racial parents as well as other Black immigrant students. Thus, when the term Black students is used it does not refer to a homogeneous group. The term Black is also used to denote visibility. Throughout this dissertation, the term Black will also be used when referring to the students and the participants. This term comes with much complexity, including the fact that many Canadian born Black children preferred to refer to themselves as Canadians and not as African – Canadian or West Indian-Canadians.

This problem of underachievement has garnered much emphasis in research and pedagogical debates (Dei, 1995, 2000,); (Ford, 1996); (Gardener, 2001); (Ladson-Billing, 1994); (Jones, Myhill, 2004, 2007); (Ogbu,1986, 2003); (McWhorter, 2000); (Noguera, 2008); (Solomon, 1992). Data suggests that male students are especially affected by this problem. Jones and Myhill (2004) confirm: The identity of the underachiever has become synonymous with the stereotypical identity of boys” (p.531). The literature points to school factors contributing to underachievement for boys include: suspension, expulsion,
Zero tolerance legislation, lack of honours and advanced level placements, dropping out; and under-representation by lack of role-models among school staff. Such serious problems require in depth investigation.

This serious problem faces public scrutiny as Ministry of Education statistics indicates four in ten students of African ancestry do not finish high school. The Toronto District School Board’s Urban Diversity Strategy (2008) highlights the systemic underachievement: The board’s data showed that “less than 50% of students in grades 7 and 8 from the English speaking Caribbean and from East Africa in our schools can read, write or do math and science at the Provincial standard. (p.1)

Students from the English-speaking Caribbean had a 40% drop-out rate, and East African students had 32%. Male students in grade 9 and 10 perform lower in all secondary indicators – grade 9 Credit Accumulation, Grade 9 Science, Geography, Mathematics, English and the Grade 10 Literacy Test. (TDSB Grade 9 Cohort Study, 2006). These troubling data and current realities led the TDSB School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) to conclude: “… the crisis of confidence that hangs over the TDSB relates to the Board’s inability, thus far, to successfully address the needs of the more marginalized youths who are not engaged and who are not succeeding academically” (Volume 1, p.1).

This Panel describes these students as: in ‘risk’ positions, “on-going casualties”, with regard to neglect born of racism, poverty or interactions with the justice system, marginalized youths, a term used to highlight the class, racial and achievement gaps these youths face, and “complex-needs youths”. Terms used in this report such as, ‘at risk’ and ‘complex-needs youths’, situate the students in a subordinate position and make
underachievement an inequity issue based on racial status. Educators try to mask the problem by situating it as inadequacies in the learners (Nieto, 2005), and (Butler, 2003). These ‘at risk’ labels look at variables such as ethnicity, social class, family situation, and give some educators the impression that such students are uneducable. They view them as being predestined to fail academically, thus compromising their academic development. Educators also assume the existence of a clinical problem. This assumption leaves the educational system blameless (Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 2003). These terminologies also systematically conceptualize this group of students negatively and vaguely. While problematizing the difficulties of students, terminologies do not address the causal nature of the problem or suggest routes for remediation. Positive change requires a thorough examination of curriculum, equity polices and funding. It also requires an investigation of inclusive curriculum, and multicultural principles.

Students’ achievement is also linked to school and student safety. DeLissovoy (2008) from his studies in schools in America argues that, in the current atmosphere of hyper-discipline, differences become a form of crime, and education is increasingly experienced as a form of punishment as students are confronted with restrictive practices. Delissovoy further contends, “marginalized youths cannot be punished and suspended into becoming engaged.”

This research study will therefore examine some school based factors that can contribute to underachievement and academic disengagement. Since students spend an estimated five thousand hours of their lives in the school setting, it is necessary to interrogate that setting to understand its real impact on their educational outcome. Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, Zine (2000) aptly sum up: “The alienation of
minority youth in our schools means that the public education system, the hallmark of liberal pluralism, is failing to provide an equitable environment for the delivery of education for all youth” (p.270).

**The Role of the Educational System in Fostering Underachievement**

As I struggle with the experiences of these students, it points to the need to keep the problem current in the educational field and that teachers and administrators’ attitude and practices are central to overcoming the problems students face. In examining the pattern of underachievement, I want to understand the role of equity. To what extent is under-achievement “inequitable achievement”? When under-achievement is centred on one group of students, it must be viewed as an inequity issue. Furthermore, when the problem of under-achievement for this group of boys is ignored, it becomes an inequity issue. Burris and Garrity (2008) remind us that “the performance of a school’s highest achievers will always be a source of pride, but their high achievement must not come at the expense of other students. (p.14)

This study also situates the underachievement and disengagement patterns of Black, male students and grounds the arguments and explanations in the larger discourse of the role of the educational system and educators as agents in the socializing patterns for this group. This does not imply that all Black male students are underachievers. Neither does it imply that the educational system is totally at fault, as there are other external factors that affect achievement. Bleach (1998) states: “We should be wary therefore, of portraying ‘boys’ as a homogeneous group of under-achievers who are all ‘victims’ of the educational system in terms of pedagogy and practice” (p. xv). However, there are structural factors within the educational system that present challenges for
Black, male students. These structural factors must be interrogated and addressed to improve the educational outcome of these students. Thus, underachievement should be viewed as an explanatory concept which involves the students and the school. As Branden, Avermaet and Houte, 2011 state:

… the situation of persistent underachievers in compulsory education appears to be characterized by a mismatch between interests, ambitions, talents, background, and capacities on the one hand and various features of the educational environment (teachers’ style, and expectations, the curriculum, the school context and culture) on the other hand (p.10).

These are practices that need to be challenged if they prevent some students from gaining academic success. Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) contend that these structural factors also lead to inequity and these inequities affect racial minority students in the way their academic potentials are evaluated, the type of curriculum they receive and the social relationships and career choices that are made. These authors further argue that, “public education requires that our structures, curriculum, and practices at every level are informed by, reflected of, the diversity of human knowledge and experiences in Canadian society” (p. x).

It is critical that we take a serious look at the crisis where our students are disadvantaged by the educational system. We need to shine the light in the classrooms since that is where we have lost our students. Many of these students have developed distrust for the system of schooling and the school is viewed as a hostile, unwelcoming environment. Schools can be “environments that are not designed for and that do not accept, validate, or channel the ways these male children think, speak, or behave into
constructive learning and developmental experiences and skills” (Zamani-Galleher and Polite (2011, p.13). As such serious work needs to be done to build trust. Price (2008) cites Steele (1992), referring to Black students and being valued, succinctly states:

A culprit that can undermine black achievement as effectively as a lock on a schoolhouse door. The culprit I see is stigma, the endemic devaluation many blacks face in our society and schools. This status is its own condition of life, different from class, money, culture …. [I]ts connection to school achievement among black Americans has been vastly underappreciated. (p.30)

Noddings (1992) argues for organizing education around centres of care as part of the focus for universal education. This sense of community brings cohesiveness, care, comfort, and motivation to learn. Peterson (1992) aptly sums up the utility of the community experience in the classroom. He states: “When community exists, learning is strengthened – everyone is smarter, more ambitious, and productive. Well-informed ideas and intentions amount to little without a community to bring them to life.” (p.2) As students are valued for their potential and assurance that they are worthy and able to succeed, then the possibility for a new culture of achievement will develop.

Schools are valuable learning communities where student success is promoted through inquiry and practice. My definition of student success for these Black, male students would involve helping them to develop the academic and cultural capital that will help them successfully navigate the educational system, while developing the cultural capital that will help them succeed in a diverse, multicultural Canadian society.
This inquiry into practice must be viewed as an effort to find ways to improve teacher effectiveness and ultimately improvement to student success. It is therefore necessary to recognize that the educational system is not some abstract, untouchable, unchangeable institution ruled by unbeatable, deterministic mechanisms; to change its level of output, the educational system will need to be actively constructed by all parties involved in joint collaboration.

(Branden, Avermaet, & Houte, 2011, p.11)

This study focuses on school related factors because these factors can be controlled by educators. Only as educators work to change the systemic, structural and cultural factors, as well as the belief system that controls their practice will academic improvement and better achievement results will be realized. Dei (1997) contends: “We cannot look at the ‘crisis’ plaguing Black/African-Canadian youth today, with respect to education and achievement and unproblematically accept the status quo.” (p.6)

**The Thesis Journey**

Telling my story gives me something to celebrate

Iyanla Vanzant, *Yesterday, I Cried*

The impetus that drives this study on the topic of Black male students and underachievement has not evolved from any great need to fulfill any scholarly requirement, although I have always been motivated to continuously improve my scholarship. This desire for increased learning is aptly summarized in the words of Dr. Myles Munroe: “Unless you continually try to reach higher, go farther, see over and grasp something greater than you now know, you will never discover your full potential.”
The need to understand why for almost three decades educators, government, parents and the Black community have struggled with this serious problem of underachievement for Black, male students has motivated me to revisit the issue, by examining Black, male educators’ perspectives on this issue. As I try to be a voice for these youths and try to keep their problem in the forefront of the educational agenda, I am inspired by the words of Justice Murray Sinclair, (2011): “We need to ensure that our young people are given a sense of validity’ that they know where they come from, they know where they are going, they know why they’re here, then they’ll know who they are. (p.111)

Furthermore, the fact that the educational landscape is constantly changing, and the student population is of diverse background, and has multiplicity of needs and different ways of learning makes it imperative that a teacher constantly interrogates her practice. Thus, the teacher must constantly grow and change in order to better understand and facilitate the outcome of schooling for her students. As a result, this thesis journey is in essence a search for understanding and clarity to the challenging problem of underachievement that has plagued the schooling experience for many Black, male students.

There are many students and many experiences over many years of teaching that have helped to foreground this study. As a result, my personal, professional experiences are deeply embedded in this study, as I view underachievement as a phenomenal obstacle; because, as a student in Jamaica, schooling and education were given high priority status and had no negative connotations for me. Furthermore, I never thought I couldn’t achieve and I have never doubted my ability to achieve. In spite of the many
challenges that faced the educational system in Jamaica, getting a good education was always and hopefully continues to be a motivating factor for many poor students. As a result, many of my peers were bright, aspiring, hardworking and academically motivated students. Even struggling students who faced challenges with learning exerted tremendous effort to achieve, since education was the main path to upward social and economical mobility. Writing in Canada, Lincoln Alexander (2006), confers that he recognized from “a very early age that education was the path to limitless possibility” (p.14). Alexander (2006) attributed the title of his book, Go to School You’re a Little Black Boy to his mother who consistently admonished him on the value of education as she was “convinced that education was the certain path to a good future …” (p.24).

Parents today still hold high hopes of the possibility of education for their children. Although parents want their children to be successful in school and in life they may not have the skills and the experience to help their children to succeed. However, the desire is still strong. In conversations with colleagues, one mother laments that this is the first generation that will not surpass their parents academically.

This creed about education and success is also echoed by Trevor Sewell. Referring to his experience of schooling in Jamaica he states; “I grew up under conditions in which many internalized the belief that one’s destiny was determined by ability, effort or personal integrity but was limited by socioeconomic circumstances” (Shapiro, Sewell and Ducette, (1995), p. xviii). Going to America, Sewell became somewhat disillusioned by barriers he faced. Thus, it does take more than education to succeed in a society such as Canada where race and culture do play significant roles in the educational and hiring
practices; and, as such, it is easy to empathize with these students as they try to navigate the difficult terrain of schooling.

As I reflect on the experiences of these students, I have observed that there are underlying complexities that help to compound their learning experiences; and as these experiences are tied together, they can become very significant in the lives of these students. In many aspects this study will be a reflection of my experiences as a classroom teacher, both in Canada and in Jamaica. Giroux (2012) emphasizes the value of reflecting on practice: “Teachers who think reflectively, ask uncomfortable questions, challenge the scripts of official power, and promote a search for the truth while encouraging pedagogy…” should be viewed as helping to find solutions to the issues facing public education. (p. x)

I have invested most of my professional life in the classroom and I am deeply indebted for such experiences. My experiences also include Curriculum Leadership roles in Student Services, Special Education and Cross-Curricula School Initiatives. These roles help me to work closely with colleagues, develop professional development workshops and provide support for both teachers and students. I believe that education has a very significant role to play in the life of students and that schooling and what happens in school significantly impact on the lives of students. Through these experiences or what Dewey (1938) called “experiential continuum” my perspective continues to grow and develop. Dewey further maintained “that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35). I am therefore confident and hopeful that this new evolving self will continue to improve my practice.
My leadership roles and teaching experiences have also been influenced by my spirituality. This spirituality has been a dynamic part of my educational journey, and one way to help me achieve excellence in performance and leadership. Brubaker and Cobble (2005) describe the leader’s spiritual journey as ‘the leader’s ability to be hopeful, keep the fire, have determination as well as gratitude, value private victories, follow a moral compass, and have the power to coach and mentor’ (p. ix). The value of spirituality is embedded in its potential to unify and build community and help in connecting to others. It underscores the value of openness to new possibilities, to feel compassion, empathy and love; while acknowledging a new evolving self. This attention to self is described as “being a spiritual being” or understanding your most authentic self. As a leader, I must also endeavour to be my most authentic self. Houston and Sokolow (2006) states, it is necessary to “pay attention to core values, to your sense of purpose, to your impact on others, and when you lose track of those things, you have stopped paying attention to your being” (pp.29-30).

Dent, Higgins, and Warff (2005) posit the point that “Leaders who bring their spirituality to work transform organizations from merely mission-driven activities into places where individual and collective spirituality are encouraged and spiritual development is integrated into day-to-day life” (p. 627). Spirituality helps to place the focus on people first rather than on task completion. Since education has its work centred on service, trust and acceptance become integral parts of the work ethics.

Utilizing a spiritual perspective in my work makes it more holistic. According to Dentley (2005), no longer can we be ‘content with the variety of bifurcations, i.e. body/soul, visible/invisible, I/thou, within which our Western thinking is grounded” (p.
6). I must therefore work to create structures that are collaborative, and practice mutual respect for different perspectives. When people work together ‘synergistically and holistically’ they increase their power, develop capacity to achieve goals and have a shared sense of purpose. This approach will help to foster democracy and social justice. I am therefore more able to pay more attention to inhumane practices and to issues of gender, sexuality, racism that marginalizes and stigmatizes some workers. Dentley (2005) aptly summarizes this aspect:

Leaders of this ilk see themselves called to learning sites not merely to perpetuate the status quo but to engage race, class and gender issues that obfuscate marginalized and oppressed people’s hopes to participate in a just and equitable school setting. (p. 15)

Thus, as a spiritually led leader I must project an agenda of hope. This requires me to do daily acts of caring, planning, reflecting and relating to others. As a proactive leader, spiritual principles characterize every act of my work and demonstrate my care for others. Spirituality makes me hopeful that the educational structures can be free from systemic racism, undemocratic practices and other forms of injustices, as it moves from the parameters of the ‘as is’ to the vistas of the ‘not yet’ (Dentley, 2005).

Another impetus that characterizes my work is the idea that I am also driven by the fact that my son, my only begotten child is a Black male. As I worked to help him with his struggles with the school system and observing the struggles other Black male students encounter in school, I can concur with Tatum (2005) that I want “to speak on behalf of all those young black males who yearn for understanding as they journey through rough terrain” (p.3). As a marginalized group, these students are generally
excluded from the main-stream society. I also agree with McCourt (2005) who believes that a good teacher worries about all the students, but especially those who are hard to reach and is challenged by the hard to reach ones. The teacher carries the students’ dreams, worries, and voices around with her. McCourt states, “[t]hey follow you to dinner, to the movies, to the bathroom, and to the bed” (p. 183). It is as if you are living in two worlds, your world and that of the students you teach.

Most of the students have been influenced by cultural shifts which create a sense of disorientation, of not belonging. However, they can share a common identity of being black and this intersects greatly with their gender. As these students struggle to understand and centre themselves in their own cultural norms, they must at the same time try to find a common ground with people from other cultural groups. This need to develop new cultural capital is necessary for survival. This does not imply the negation of their deep cultural roots, their essential selves. Effort must be made to help them nurture and protect the experiences that have made them who they are, while at the same time helping them to adapt new values from the Canadian society that will help them to forge ahead. Foster (1995) succinctly describes this integrative approach as “the need to take on a new voice in the hope of integrating, but also the importance of not silencing the old faithful voice. Of learning to waltz like Canadians but still being able to wind the waist in pleasant outlandishness like West Indian, like Africans” (p. 325). Such issues of cultural and genetic capital, along with effort and motivation impact on what the students bring to the classroom and what they do in the classroom, and the educational outcomes. Tatum also cites Anderson Franklyn (2004) who asserted:
What schools often provide for boys of African descent is a slowly
nurtured understanding that being somebody is more directly attached to
the peer culture than the classroom. [Black, male students’] potential and
ability are robbed by the climate in the school’s thoughtlessness. …Such
attitudes cultivated among black males by school environment play into
racially coded expectations that become a self-fulfilling prophecy. (p.94)

Thus, the reasons for the underachievement patterns of these Black male students
merit further investigation.

In spite of the statistical data of high failure rate and underachievement, I must
articulate a case for the belief that all students are capable of using high levels of
cognitive skills for academic success. Dewey also argued that we do not need to work
with students with superior capacity; what we need is to use superior stimuli to reach the
students. Also, it must not be forgotten that there are over fifty percent of the students
from this group who are succeeding and doing well in spite of the challenges they face.
Byfield, (2008) found that “there are a large number of young black males with high
aspirations, who have a focus on learning and who succeed.” Still, there is the need to
challenge “the institutional failure of the education establishment to end
underachievement …” (p. ix).

Furthermore, I must also be willing to interrogate my own practice as I endeavor
to become a critical intellectual who is willing to develop “critical pedagogical
competence” and a transformative intellectual who must decide to what ends does she
wants to empower her students. Finn (1999) aptly summarized: “Transforming
intellectuals take sides. They are on the side of democracy and social justice.” (p.188) As
a reflective practitioner I must also see the examination of my practice as systemic
inquiry which is fundamental in affecting and improving learning outcomes for students.
At times it is also important to revisit learning from past experiences, since people codify
experiences. The teacher while reflecting on her own practice, must also help students to
examine their own experiences and understand that some codes can be flawed, and must
be changed. Thus, this study of self and experience is necessary to more thoughtfully help
students achieve positive results from schooling.

Throughout the years I have encountered many experiences and examples in the
educational system that affect my life, but more importantly that impact on the lives of
Black male students. I will highlight some of these experiences to add validity and clarity
to this study.

Seeing myself as part of the research instrument comes with subjective overture.
As a result I will have to filter data using my experience, knowledge, history, class,
gender, values and assumptions. These are factors that of necessity will limit the
parameters of the study. I was drawn to this research topic by the significance and
puzzling impact of the phenomenon of underachievement for male students of African
ancestry. I do not have any preconceived answers to this problem, but I am optimistic that
answers can be found if one genuinely searches for them. As a part of what is being
studied, I feel privileged to enter this challenge. In examining the perspectives of the
participants, I will have to be alert and critically aware of any personal biases and
interpretations. This study will hopefully add to the archival sources of knowledge as it
gives voice to this particular group of educators.
How can a teacher nourish and encourage hope in students when she also sees her own hopes and dreams constantly being crushed? How can she make promises to students which they may have a long shot of fulfilling? Personal experience tells me that at times these can be empty promises. The reality was brought home to me just recently in 2009.

I applied for a position, to which I was the most qualified applicant, with two graduate degrees in two of the areas posted in the job application. I have also done all the professional development courses offered by Toronto District School Board in these areas. Years of experience and recent pedagogical knowledge should have been access enough. I spent hours researching the job and preparing for the interview. Yet, to be bypassed by someone with inadequate qualification in the areas outlined in the job posting, and limited leadership experience is a sign that inequity and race still have a stranglehold in promotion. Proefriedt (2008) makes an apt statement that exclusionary practices “…are deeply rooted historical attitudes within our culture that have had extraordinary negative impacts on “outsider populations” (p. 45). This is particularly true when this position is in an area that has consistently excluded minority teachers, even in a school where the student population reflects predominantly minorities.

What is more crushing is the fact that at times minority leaders also fail to make the changes that will help to promote other minority workers. At times they are so insecure in their positions, that they are willing to endorse the status quo of inequity by practising reverse racism. One teacher participant in this research study shared his concerns about some minority leaders:
When you have people in positions where they are supposed to be agents of change and they don’t recognize the need for change, there will be no change. You have a lot of Black educators who are in position to make changes and they are not changing situation at the local level.

Admittedly, Ralph Ellison and the Agony of the Token (2008) reminds us that these minority leaders reside in a state of tension as they must appease two sides at all times. “In such a precarious situation, the token must constantly be looking over their shoulders for rivals gaining on them.” (p.62)

So what can a teacher do? Can she continue to send students out with ‘un-open letters”? Letters that she knows the students will carry with high expectations; but which are in effect, like giving a person in need a blank cheque to take to the bank, which they know that they will not be able to cash. As Proefriedt further states: Teachers make promises to our students about effort and reward for merit, but send too many of them into the marketplace with unopened letters. (p.90)

As an adult, professional immigrant to Canada, I came filled with expectations and at the same time experiencing a measure of fear and uncertainty. However, at the back of my mind was the mantra that had nourished me for years: education is the key. It will open any door for you. Within two weeks of arriving in Canada I began graduate work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Buttressed with two degrees, a M.ED and an M.A., from this prestigious educational faculty of the University of Toronto and expecting doors to be opened wide, (but they were not) I was left with feelings of great disappointment. This was a rude awakening for me since in Jamaica a
person’s level of education is the chief criteria for most professional positions. There it was difficult to feel marginalized if you have the academic qualifications.

Interestingly, one of the administrator participants in this study echoed the same feelings of disappointment and struggle as he tried to gain recognition and respect as a qualified professional with equal status as other colleagues. He recounted an experience of achieving a certain level of qualification, and in his excitement he tried to share his success with colleagues. “Then I realized how naïve I was. I thought they would be happy with me for having this, but some of them resented it. From that time my life became hell in that department…” He therefore performs his duty with a special sense of care as he sees his experiences as a kind of mirror of the experiences of the Black, male students in the school.

At times as a teacher employed in the system, I am also forced to take an oppositional stance on certain issues. This however, can leave you with a sense of isolation. As I reflect on my experiences, I am reminded of a workshop leader who states that he makes himself a part of the system by developing an imaginary cat or dog so he can relate to the social inquiries of other staff when they talk about their pet animals; only to abandon these ‘imaginary pets’ after the conversation. As part of my authentic self it is necessary for me to express my feelings on issues on which others might prefer to remain silent. A case in point will illustrate.

At a recent equity workshop, the presenters developed some exercises that asked teachers to move around the room to show their stance on certain issues. I remained in my seat, because I could not see the value of reducing serious issues of Equity/Equality to games of musical chairs. I freely expressed my views that the issues were being
trivialized and explained that deep rooted beliefs about the issues could be easily masked by pretending. What I felt was needed was honest conversations about how the issues impact on victims and how classroom teacher can include and challenge such issues in the classroom in a meaningful and sensitive way. After the session one colleague remarked that I was very brave to openly take such a stance and isolate myself. Although he was in agreement of my position, he remained silent. This was also the thought expressed to me on other incidents when I tried to be brave and expressed my view on the negative impact of police presence (school resource officers) in schools. A couple of colleagues came to me after the presentation and expressed their support for my views, but they were not willing to openly share these views. However, I realize that I must at times be willing to marginalize myself to be heard. This is not taking the high road, but must be seen as a willingness to be vulnerable and to be heard. This is a necessary step, because “not to give voice to these [issues] signaled implicit support of an educational system that produced (and tolerated) inequity” (Lieberman and Miller, 2001, p.154). It does take courage to speak up when whatever is voiced may “fracture the relational bonds” that are necessary for collegial support; but remaining silent would have led to denial of truth. It is really difficult to ask hard questions and to engage in ‘courageous conversations’ around issues that impact on minority populations. So, “we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more recent stories.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)

So my story is intricately involved with the stories of these Black male students. From the youth who boldly told me, “Miss, I have a right not to learn” after many attempts to get him to do some work, to the student who challenged every argument
discussed in the history class, and returned one day to thank me for allowing him to freely express his opinions and to let me know that he was in law school in British Columbia; and all the others who stayed behind after school to play dominoes; to help and support others with their work, to bond and form community and from whom I learned how to raise my son in a challenging and at times unfriendly environment, these are the students labelled ‘at risk’ and ‘underachiever’.

The bond developed with these students can be described in teaching as “other mothering”. Other mothers refer to “women who work on behalf of and take personal responsibility for members of the Black community through their expression of caring.” Price, (2009) describes this relationship:

For many Black women, the work of teaching and leading Black Children is a “spiritual calling, a connection to family, community, activism, and uplift.” (Foster and Tillman, 2009, p. 61)

This does not imply that these students do not receive adequate mothering at home. It describes a caring relationship and a support system necessary for their survival and success. Thus, when a colleague refers to these students as “your boys” he is referring to the bond that I try to establish with them and the sense of trust and community. This close relationship with these students, has developed because I am fully aware of who they are, know what interests and concerns they must struggle with daily and express full acceptance of them in spite of their needs.

However, others do try to play the mother role. An interesting scenario presented itself recently. A Black, male student visited the department staff office to speak with a teacher. Another teacher mentioned this student’s regular visits to this office. The student
responded by referring to the teacher he was visiting with this statement, “she thinks she is my white mother”. There was apparent puzzlement to his statement, so he provided further explanation by stating, “I already have a Black mother.” I viewed his statement as very loaded as it points to the intentional or unintentional messages from teachers. Intentionally, the teachers may be demonstrating care and support, but unintentionally, the teacher’s attitude and assumption may imply that this student is not receiving adequate care and support from his parents. A caring relationship between teacher and student should not leave a student feeling conflicted about his relationship with his parents. Neither should it be an attempt to re-culture the students as was demonstrated in further experiences between this teacher and these Black, male students.

Further investigation showed that one of this teacher’s classes was with a group of Black, male students. She had developed an open door policy with these boys. At first glance it would appear that this teacher was also culturally competent in dealing with this group of boys. However, what transpired was a deliberate attempt to create new identities for these boys and to disconnect them from their communities. Ladson-Billings (2001) states, culturally competent teachers “do not spend their time trying to be hip and cool and “down” with their students” (97). Ladson-Billings further explains, the emphasis should be on knowing and learning about the students’ culture in an effort to improve communication with the students. This is premised on the notion that the student’s culture is valuable and worth knowing about. This cultural knowledge provides the building block to help students succeed academically. This critical understanding of the role of culture in education should help the teacher to be flexible in the “use of students” local and global culture. (p.98)
The administrator mentioned previously, has a keen understanding of this problem. He reflects in a non-critical attitude that some White teachers are “coming from a context which does not allow them to apply … the psychological understanding to deal with males who may be restful.” As a result “Black, male students will be double victimized ….”

This teacher was also determined to open up her cultural experience to these students. She selected a list of books based on her cultural experience to use with these students. In discussion with her curriculum leader, a list of texts that reflects Black experience was suggested but the teacher was reluctant to move out of her own cultural milieu to develop a better understanding of these students. These students were also expected to visit places of interests that were out of their cultural background. There was nothing wrong with this idea, however the students needed more preparation. Resistance to the new information eventually developed. It must be understood that many of these boys also exist on the borderline of the Canadian culture, which is a very slippery place to be.

Some of them also lack knowledge of the culture of their motherland. One teacher participant notes that many students who were born and raise in Canada “do not identify themselves as of African descendant. It is not even clear how much they understand what it means to be black.” Students’ knowledge of self and identity should be a vital part of their learning experiences. Knowing and respecting students’ cultural experience is a logical way to help them break-down their anti-school and anti-establishment aversion. There was no attempt by this teacher to introduce this new cultural knowledge by connecting it to prior knowledge. Gay (2010) articulates the point that, “new knowledge
is learned more easily and retained longer when it is connected to prior knowledge, frames of references, or cognitive schematas” (p. 176).

Teachers must therefore be willing to become teacher and student at the same time. Learning about and valuing students’ culture is a positive way to build relationship. Students also need to balance their own cultural experiences with other cultural knowledge, but the foundation begins with acknowledging students’ culture. The experience of this teacher would have gone unnoticed, except for the student’s statement about ‘white mother’ and the later break-down of the relationship between the teacher and these students.

Interestingly, during the research for this thesis, one of the teacher participants expressed his concerns about white mothering of Black, male students. He aptly summed up the situation:

“There are some white, female teachers as well as many other teachers who do not understand boundaries and do not know when they are crossing the line and when the students are crossing the line. Surely, you have some situations where these teachers, if you want to say white, female teachers; I think they feel like a surrogate mother and they don’t understand the idea of tough love. They want to take on the mothering role.”

My teaching experience is an integral part of this study, since dealings with the educational system have taught me that the school system can be hostile to boys. I remember once I bought a particular brand name shirt for my son, not for any special reason, but that it was on sale. His third grade teacher commented on the fact that he was wearing a designer shirt and the way she said it must have given him the impression that
that shirt was too good for him. I came to this conclusion because he related the incident to me and more interestingly, the incident stayed with him. Recently, he was wearing a shirt with that brand name and he reminded me of the first time he wore that particular brand and the way the teacher had reacted.

Another incident happened when I went to a grade four parent teacher interview and the teacher commented that my son had a funny way of looking at the girls. She became very flustered when I asked her what she meant by funny look. She could not explain to me what she meant by funny look. Since there were mainly Caucasian female students in the class I became very uncomfortable by her implications. I invited my son to be a part of this discussion and the teacher became more flustered and did not want me to have my son participate in that discussion. The end result was a feeble apology from the teacher about her perception about my son. That my son was being marked because of his gender and race with certain negative references that puts him in the ‘bad boy’ category makes me become more sympathetic to these Black, male students.

This same attitude was also experienced by other boys at a high school where I taught. A group of boys came into my class one day and they were very upset. In an effort to calm them, I asked them to explain what was bothering them. In the science class, the teacher had given them an acronym to help them memorize some scientific elements. The acronym goes something like this: Black boys rape our white girls …, the text I cannot fully recall or locate, although I have kept a copy. I tried to find the text to include it here, since I had photocopied the page reference but was unsuccessful. The outcome was that I took the matter to the principal and his comment was that he was not aware that the teacher was racist. Eventually, the teacher apologized to the boys.
As a resource teacher, I came across two incidents that also throw further light on the situation with boys. In the first semester of the school year after the new grade nine students arrived at the school I had the opportunity to review the Student Education Plan (IEP) for the students with special education designation. There was one male, Afro-Canadian student who had some special challenges. One day one of his teachers remarked to me that she could understand why this student would be problematic. As I listened to her story, she related that the child was from a home where there were several children, and absence of a father figure. At the time I responded that it was interesting that she was able to find out such information and her comment was: “What can you expect from such a student with such a background.” The incident continued to puzzle me for sometime because I know that the student was already prejudged by this teacher and her expectation from him would be very low. After meeting the student and working with him in the resource room, I found him to be a very intelligent youth, who had the potential to succeed and capable of working on his own and who had a well-organized binder; however he was also displaying signs of disengagement. In the end the student failed that teacher’s class, but was successful in two of his other classes with good marks.

This student’s story would have ended here until another student, this time a Caucasian male came to me requesting that I check his OSR because he was entitled to certain accommodation. I was impressed with his sense of self-advocacy. A review of the OSR revealed that about three years ago a recommendation for accommodation was made, but no action was taken. I wrote a letter to the student’s teachers requesting that he be given the suggested accommodations. What was surprising, was that the same teacher above who did not expect much from the Afro-Canadian student was surprised and
puzzled that this Caucasian student would need accommodation, since his parents were highly educated and one of them was a lecturer at a university. She actually implied that I could have been mistaken since that student was one of her better students. Here her expectations were much higher for the Caucasian student because of his background. Yet, both students had some of the same challenges as shown in the OSR. This teacher has taken a deficiency approach to the Afro-Canadian student, where the student’s home and background is blamed for his achievement progress (Jana, 2008). Conversely, the Caucasian student’s background was not blamed for his problem. To what extent does a teacher’s a priori knowledge of a student’s academic background, social class and family history determine that teacher’s expectations for that student? Importantly, students may perform according to the teacher’s expectations.

Incidents such as these are some examples that made me realize that male students of African descent may not always receive fair treatment. Furthermore, such incidents gave me a voice as I realize that I could not be silent; especially in the face of bigotry, racism and any other forms of discrimination. I have embedded my work with these actual experiences and anecdotes as a teacher, mother and mentor, to make it more holistic (Spradley, 1979). As I examine my personal and professional experiences they provide a way for me make sense of these boys seemingly disengagement from school.

The connections between the experience, literature and research also provide a sense of validity. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe the three stages of the development of the narrative inquiry as: working in the field (where one experiences the experiences), from the field to field texts, and from field texts to research texts. It is also a way to incorporate justice with pedagogy as I try to visualize future changes.
The vision is one of hope embedded with the belief that these boys in crisis are not hopeless. It is also buoyed on by a continuous hope, conviction and firm belief that education holds the keys of possibilities that these students need to forge ahead in the society.

By telling my story, I am making sense of my experience through the story of my journey (Burnsford, et al, 2001). This self-knowledge will help to improve my professional growth. Although this calls for “necessary subjectivity”, it is important to include my experiences, knowledge of group and cultural aspects to help inform the study (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, Dei et al (2004) aptly summarizes; “We are all socially/politically located, situated and positioned and we bring these various subjectivities to any and all, of the work that we do” (p. 2).

Statement of the Research Problem

The pivotal problem that this dissertation will address is the high ratio of underachievement for Black, male students. It is a problem with historical significance as the Royal Commission on Learning (1993), noting the failure rates for Black students recommended:

… in jurisdictions with large numbers of black students, school boards, academic authorities, faculties of education and representatives of the black community collaborate to establish demonstration schools and innovative programs based on best practices in bringing about academic success for black students. (section 2:03).
In 2005, the Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy stated, “… the government is in the process of setting a ‘clear target’ for reducing the nearly one in three grade 9 student who does not finish high school ….” (The Toronto Star, May 18, 2005).

The Toronto District School Board also has as its mission statement: “… to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society.” This is based on the assumption that any student can achieve academic, social and economic mobility and equality of opportunity through constant and standardized curriculum and educational practices. However, this assumption is worth challenging. McLaren (1989) argues that the curriculum introduce students to a particular form of life as “it serves to prepare students for dominant and subordinate position in the existing society.” (p.183)

In many instances, the experiences of these students remain invisible and are not honored, and they become further disadvantaged, since if they are to achieve the measure of success mentioned by the Toronto District School Board, they must integrate and assimilate the values and norms of the main cultural and social structure. However, the playing field is not as level for minority students, especially those who may be hampered with circumstances that affect learning outcomes. There is also the assumption that if students apply themselves and have the abilities and work hard in school they will achieve success, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. However, the statistics have proven this assumption to be wrong, as students continue to fail and underachieve at alarming rates. Furthermore, schools may also default students as “schools tend to ignore differences and diversity by treating the students as equals and by
not adjusting their teaching methods or criteria of assessment to individual differences” (Branden, Avermaet and Houte (2011, p.10).

This problem of underachievement has also gained currency with the Toronto District’s Urban Diversity Strategy Report (2008). As a part of this strategy the Toronto District School Board plans to improve achievement by five percent per year for the next five years for secondary schools. The plan aims to provide strategic interventions and supports to achieve this target for students who are not achieving. As the board moves to remediate this situation, it is important that focus be placed on this group of students so that faces are put to the data and specific help be given where needed. No longer can we allow these students to remain just numbers and percentages. Based on these negative statistical data, it is easy to assume that no one loses anything in the failure of Black students. Thus, there is a need for more societal impetus to drive the conviction that all students can learn. More than two decades of neglect makes this a crisis situation.

Notably, in October, 2011, the Toronto District School Board developed the TDSB Opportunity Gap Action Plan – Our Call to Action: Student Opportunities and Success Realized, which seems to subsume the Urban Diversity Plan which has not yet completed its five years. Neither has the Urban Diversity Plan been assessed or evaluated to see if it has successfully accomplished its mandate. Now the TDSB Opportunity Gap Action Plan gives a mere mention of the problem for Black students and combining it with a generalized description: “There are clear achievement gaps for JK – Grade 12 sub-groups of students, specifically Aboriginal, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, Portuguese and male students” (p.1). Importantly, the former Senior Advisor, Director’s Office, Lloyd Mckell in February 2011 states:
Schools cannot resolve the racial achievement gap and the poverty without specific plans and actions to address the gap. Current student achievement initiatives in schools need to reflect an intentional demographic framework (race, gender, social need, etc.) for planning implementation and review. (Draft Report of The Achievement Gap Task Force and The Anti-poverty Task Force).

A puzzling question for me is: Is there a belief system that it is okay for some groups to perform below other groups? Certainly it is time to utilize an equity lens to determine the necessary steps to be taken to provide successful learning experiences for all students.

The literature on underachievement indicates an apparent lack of consensus as to the reasons for this phenomenon of underachievement for Black, male students. As a result, there is a basic lack of coherent statement or explanation for the prevalence of this underachievement pattern for this group of students. Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Campbell (1995b) examine the structural context that impact on achievement. Eboni, Zamani-Gallaher and Polite (2010) also see underachievement as relating to structural inequalities. They stipulated that these “structural inequalities refer to the differences in access, experiences, exposure, and enrichment that exist between schools and schooling at the middle and lower socioeconomic levels” (p.8). These are structural variables that can negatively impact on achievement.

Another factor contributing to underachievement purported in the literature is the cultural discontinuity which is evident in the differences in home and school culture and the culture of the teachers. Fordham and Ogbu (1996) suggest an acting white hypothesis
whereby students’ belief that they must trade their cultural behaviors to succeed academically, may lead to rejection of academic success and the development of an “anti-achievement ethic”. Between these two conflicting forces, a new integrative approach has emerged which emphasize the need to examine the relationship between academic goals, school structures and students culture (Bascia, 1996), Solomon (1992).

This research study will examine the importance of the integration of structure and culture as significant in understanding the underachievement problems faced by Black, male students. The study draws on the work of Dei, Solomon and Noguera. These scholars view the problem of underachievement for Black, male students through an integrated structural-cultural lens. This will be discussed more fully in the literature review chapter. Their understanding of the problem is instructive because they are using a more balanced approach of structural and cultural factors. Importantly, these structural and cultural factors also intersect with issues of gender, class and racism within the educational system and in the society to privilege certain groups, while marginalizing other groups in the school system and the society.

The problem will be viewed from the perspectives of six Black, male educators, by asking them to examine what they have experienced and from reflecting on their practice. While the voices of Black, males continue to grow in the literature on Urban Education (Solomon, 1992); (Braithwaite and James, 1996); (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, Zine, 2007); (Noguera, 2008); McCready, 2010); locally in my day to day interactions in the school system I perceive the tendency of female colleagues to discuss and define the problem of underachievement for Black male students; however, the narratives of Black, male educators are significantly limited in these discourses. Through this thesis I want to
solicit and include the voices of my valued male colleagues from my local setting and bring their perceptions of the problem to the forefront of the educational system.

Specifically, the central questions that frame the development of this study are:

- What are some Black male educators’ perspectives of the role of structural and cultural factors that contribute to the problem of underachievement and school failure for Black, male students? Were these the same barriers they faced and how did they overcome these barriers as students?

- How might the narratives of these Black male educators both challenge and support multicultural approach to curriculum that purports to particularly address the problems facing Black, male students?

The first research question aimed at examining the ways structure and culture may contribute to underachievement and the way Black, male teachers perceive these factors. It is assumed that Black, male teachers understand how and what structural and cultural factors contribute to underachievement. It is also assumed that these teachers are able to perceive these in-school factors based on their experiences. The aim of the second research question is to make a case that the perceptions of Black, male educators are important for the understanding and re-mediating of the problem of underachievement problems faced by Black, male students. It also purports that a re-theorized version of multicultural education is necessary to make the educational system more equitable.
Significance of the Study

This research study offers an opportunity to address some of the structural and cultural problems that affect achievement outcome for Black, male students. The study evolves from my experience working with Black, male students and from observing the potential they have to overcome problems with support and positive encouragement. I remember clearly when one of my classes was interrupted by a tall, strikingly handsome, young black male, who boldly walked in the class and hugged me. I was a bit flustered as I did not recognize the young man, but his engaging smile made me curious. He said, “Miss, you don’t remember me?” I did not. He reminded me of who he was, and explained his current status as a law student. As a former student of mine, he had many challenges in the class and after his family moved from the area, I lost track of him. His new confidence and success reminded me, that there is always hope for these students. It is this strong belief that Black males, like all other students can be academically motivated to succeed, that forms the basis for this study. It is further informed by my struggle as a single, working Black mother who supported my son through the educational system and university.

The research study also further the discussion of the value of teacher experience and especially adding to the scholarship of educational development, the unique voices of some Black, male educators.

There is the possibility that the findings from this study might describe some negative structural practices, but these can be viewed as a way to inform practice and cause improvement and change in the organization of the educational system. The educational significance of this study is in its ability to draw from the perspectives of a
specific group of teachers and their responses to a particular problem in the quest for improvement in the educational system. It is hoped that the perspectives of these Black, male educators will provide new lens through which to view the problem of underachievement of some Black male students.

**Overview of the Chapters**

**Chapter 1: Introduction and Background Information**

This chapter presents the introduction and background information for the thesis. It outlines my personal mission in doing the study, as well as its purpose and the statement of the research questions. The significance of the study is also given. An overview of the chapters is also given.

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework**

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for the thesis. Theories of underachievement will be examined and specifically the work of Dei, Solomon and Noguera and their understanding of structural and cultural factors will be used to provide a framework for understanding the problem of underachievement of Black, male students.

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

Chapter three will describe the approach used in the study, the participants and highlights an examination of the interview process.

**Chapter 4: Results**

The chapter outlines and describes the results of the data from the research.
Chapter 5: Implications of the Study

Themes from the findings of this research study in light of the main questions of the research study will be examined. The implications and limitations of the study will also be discussed.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

Structural and Cultural Dynamics in the Educational Landscape

Certain institutional structures, policies and practices can contribute to educational inequity. Rios and Stanton, (2011) mention some of these factors, namely; “tracking, a Eurocentric curriculum, standardized exams …, retention in grades, disciplinary policies, school climate, and even the physical structure of the school” (p. 52). Added to these are other issues such the disempowering of students and distancing of parents and community partners from meaningful connections with the schools, along with constraints placed on teachers to meet curriculum demands in a set and timely manner.

According to Rios and Stanton, epistemology also becomes part of the structural norm. This refers to the nature of knowledge – “what counts as knowledge, whose knowledge is valued and worth knowing, how knowledge is shared and acquired, how people come to know, and how knowledge is assessed” (pp. 52-53). Such epistemological framework is critical as it is used “to justify and explain institutional policies and practices so that they appear natural, normal, neutral, fair and logical ….” Unless, the knowledge base is deconstructed, become more inclusive, responsive and expanded, they can be viewed as discriminatory, and prejudicial.

Importantly, epistemology can also be racist and gendered. The curriculum system for example, is very Eurocentric and patriarchal in structure in spite of some cosmetic changes. It is no wonder then, that with these structural deficiencies, that certain groups such as Black, male students may “underachieve academically and are alienated
and disaffected by the content and process of schooling” (Solomon, cited in Brathwaite and James, 1996, p. 217). This point is also clearly noted by Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) who argue that; “structural inequalities of education affect the racial or ethnic minority students in several ways, including the evaluation of their academic potential, the curriculum they receive, the social relationship they develop with teachers and the career and life opportunities to which they are exposed” (p.5).

Cultural issues are also involved in every organizational structure and the understanding of these cultural issues are critical in the study of any organization. These cultural issues are not demonstrated equally in terms of power and prestige. Added to the cultural issues, there is also the multicultural context as is found in the educational setting. McLaren, (1994) states:

“School life is understood as a plurality of conflicting languages and struggles, as a place where classroom and street-corner cultures collide and where teachers, students and school administrators often differ how school experiences and practices are to be defined and understood’’ (p. 229).

Such complexity allows individual to develop different subsets of culture from the society. Culture is also acquired when a person shows up regularly in certain settings such as the school. Such ‘showing up’ also provides an opportunity for learning, which is “distinct, site specific and person specific”. Ecrickson (2005) argues that is such sites as the schools; “the content of cultural knowledge and practice within the specific life situations of the persons or groups by whom such knowledge is held and such practices are undertaken” must be given serious consideration” (p.30).
Thus, a school’s culture with its norms, routines, values and belief system impacts the way individual in the organization relate to and work with each others. Donmoyer (2005) contends:

A substantial and growing body of empirical evidence, derived from vigorous research in schools and other educational organizations, indicates that the effectiveness of these organizations, in terms of student learning and development, is significantly influenced by the quality and characteristics of the organizational culture. (p. 205)

Dean and Peterson (1990) link effectiveness of learning outcome to school culture. They argue that some school culture may negatively impact students’ achievement as staff may “become as attached to mediocrity, negative symbols and harmful rituals as they can to positive heroes, symbols of achievement, or celebratory rituals” (p. 14). Since culture can negatively or positively affect achievement outcomes, it is necessary to carefully examine school cultural formations and the way they influence learning outcomes for certain groups.

It is hoped that through this study educational policies and structures that consistently fail to improve the academic achievement for many Black, male students can be examined and improved to provide better learning outcomes. I will conclude this section with a response from one member of a seminar group to which I made a presentation on: Issues in the Education of Black Students. She wrote: “If our schools are to be inclusive and foster learning for all our students then the issues facing Black students, and other minority groups, are of paramount importance and require a collective
effort. Surely, solutions must be sought within the learning community, namely, the school with the students and all individuals that support students’ education.”

**Theories of Black Student Underachievement**

The theories developed to explain the reasons for the high failure rate and underlying pattern of underachievement for students of African ancestry are varied and they have garnered much controversy. In spite of this diverse discourse, the main emphasis is toward a search “to understand the underlying causes and to provide policy makers and educators with reliable and useful information” (Obgu, in foreword to Solomon, 1992, p.vii)

In describing the underlying causes of Black male underachievement, scholars tend to emphasize whether structural or cultural factors cause this phenomenon. Some scholars like Pedro Noguera, Patrick Solomon, and George Dei are attempting to theorize Black male underachievement through an integrated structural – cultural lens. The structural – cultural framework is a useful lens through which to view the theories that inform my work. For that reason, I will explain the structural – cultural perspectives more fully. The structural – cultural perspective is more of a heuristic to understand a bunch of theories such as student alienation from the school system, and the widening achievement gap of racial minority students. The impact of both factors must be balanced, while determining the part played by choices students make to overcome these factors. Importantly, choices must be viewed on the limitations of external factors which the students cannot control.
Historical Theory

One perspective is that underachievement is historically informed and impacted by the effects of slavery. Education was one of the fundamental rights denied to the slaves. During slavery, the slaves could be killed or punished severely, if they were caught reading or having reading material in their possession, but this did not deter them from learning to read. Interestingly, the end of slavery did not see much change in the situation for the freed Blacks. This system severely “severed Africans from the models in their indigenous cultures of black people living lives of the mind” (McWhorter, 2000, pp.137, 138). McWhorter further explains that no cohesive cultural traditions survived. He states:

Typical circumstance of slavery … so hindered the transmission of specific African cultures that the African heritage survived only as a subtle, generalized, background element in a new American-based mix processed as ‘black’ … .”

He continues that such forced mixing leads to resistance and since slavery operated in an atmosphere of dominance and subordination in terms of the master/slave relationship, antagonism and opposition were very evident. Slavery also contributed to a tacit agreement to racial and social forms, as is indicated in the master and slave relationship. Weiss, (1985) argue that; “These oppositional practices have been lived out and elaborated upon over the years, and constituted core cultural elements in the urban black community today” (as cited in Solomon, 2002, p.5). Oppositional attitude has also infiltrated the school system. Black students will oppose a system that is unsupportive to their needs. In spite of this, Blacks had and continue to have a positive attitude towards
education. Parents have also actively and consistently encouraged their children to use the educational process as their ticket to success in the society.

It is the twenty-first century and many generations away from slavery, so it is problematic to accept that there are still some psychological, historical chains which tend to keep many Blacks still shackled. Many students may not be able to conceptualize the idea of reward for long-term sustained effort. Experience has taught them that they may not receive the same benefits as other groups for their effort, and as a result they may disengage from school. Tatum, (2007) argued that students may psychologically adopt “a projected identity” in terms of “what they can become” based on their lived experiences (as cited in Beers, Probst, and Rief, (eds.) 2007, p. 82). Students must however, be taught the skills that will help them to resist these identity formations, and develop the knowledge and skills to gain power and also to confidently take the world in a new direction. Thus, historical understanding although shedding some light on the evolution of the problem of underachievement remains unconvincing.

**Deficiency Theory**

Another theoretical view that has garnered some input in the literature is the idea of diminished intellectual capacity. The idea that Blacks have inferior, inherited intelligence still persists; in spite of the scholastic achievement and high academic acumen of many scholars of African ancestry. Proefriedt (2008) refers to this as, “… an assumed incapacity for learning complex ideas in African Americans, and about the inherited inferiority of intellect in the children of the poor …” (p.2). The concept also colours current debate. Cudjoie, (2007) argues:
This perception of Blacks as academically genetically inferior is reinforced in the minds of some educators and the public at large because of the achievement levels of Blacks in the school systems and the overemphasis in the literature of school failure and underachievement (p.138-139).

Although such views have been disproven, the ideas still persist in the minds of many people. McWhorter, (2000) aptly contradicts this position when he says, “… I have seen nothing in my life suggesting that black students are cognitively incapable of performing as well as anyone else in school …” (p.257).

**Theory Of Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities**

Ogbu (1978) also examines the notion of voluntary and involuntary minorities. Ogbu states: The self-definition of minorities as “foreigners” or “citizen” has important implications for the way the minorities perceive and respond to their treatment in school and society” (as cited in forward to Solomon (1992, p. ix). Ogbu views Blacks as an involuntary, ‘castlelike’ category of minority because their historical experience as slaves placed them in a subordinate role. Even after the end of slavery, this group did not have the economic support structure to help them advance in the society. As a result, social identities, opposite to the dominant white group, developed. Blacks suffered a sense of displacement since they had no homeland, and they experienced what Ogbu called ‘cultural inversion.’ This “involves the identification of certain forms of behaviour, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for the group because they are white American characteristics” (Taylor and Whittaker, 2009, p.28). Cultural norms affect all
aspect of a person’s life, so it is not surprising to see oppositional stance to the school system.

The voluntary minorities refer to the group of immigrants who made a conscious choice to emigrate, and are more readily able to adapt to the idea of achieving the American dream. They also have the idea of homeland, a place to which they could return. Reference is made to the difference in achievement pattern and school engagement as experienced by refugees from Southeast Asia, when compared to those of African American, or domestic or castlelike minorities.

The premise of Ogbu’s theory assumes that the educational measures are ineffective to help this group. Erickson (1996) believes (as cited by Taylor and Whittaker, (2009, p.45) : “The task is not only to analyze the structural conditions by which inequity is reproduced in society but to search out every possible site in which the struggle for progressive transformation can take place.” It is further problematic as it essentializes people of color as “one monolithic group” (Cleveland and Darrell, 2009, p. 170).

Many Black students do endorse the value of schooling and gain educational success. Neither is school resistance peculiar to this group. Japanese, and upper middle-class Jewish American students under certain conditions will resist schooling (D’Amato 1996). D’Amato also rejects the castlelike minority position since it does not explain why children of castlelike minority do not always reject their teachers. Ogbu’s theories continue to garner wide debate. Since there is no conclusive empirical support for the arguments, further research is needed.
Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) model also examines internal factors that could preclude some African American youths from achieving academically. It is also the assumption of Ogbu (1988) that school learning is equated with the learning and culture of the dominant group, and this type of learning can result in the rejection of black culture. This acting white hypothesis has become very controversial. Taylor and Whittaker (2009) describe this approach as a deficiency orientation, that focuses on what individual from a cultural or linguistically diverse background lacks. In this analysis, the dominant culture is used as a mirror to judge others. The implication is that, students must therefore adapt more Eurocentric values concerning education, if they are to succeed academically. Butler, (2003) disagrees with Ogbu’s analysis as it does not credit the students with any internal strength to achieve academically, but “promotes self-fulfilling prophecies of lowered expectation and academic failure” (p.2). Butler further argues, that this model is fatalistic, and premised on the idea that Blacks do not value academic achievement and it is necessary to adopt Eurocentric values for acceptance in the society. Further, it must also be acknowledged that these students have the strengths to balance academic success and cultural respect (Byfield, 2008).

**Theory of Victimology, Separation and Anti-intellectualism**

Viewing the problem from a different perspective, McWhorter, (2000) proposes that three closely connected mentalities are responsible for obstructing the achievement patterns of Blacks. These are the cult of victimology, separation as a coping strategy and anti-intellectualism. As these patterns develop, it becomes a “… continuous, self-sustaining act of self-sabotage …” (McWhorter, 2000: p. x). McWhorter argues that the cult of victimhood, is endorsed by Blacks who treat “victimhood not as a problem to be
solved, but as an identity to be nurtured” (p. xi). Victimhood allows people to develop “an unfocused brand of resentment and sense of alienation from the mainstream” (p.2). While it is healthy to call attention to victimhood where it exists, with a motive to try to find a solution; however, when victimhood identity is ‘necessarily exaggerated’, it is not viewed as a problem to be solved, but an aspect of identity. McWhorter contends, this mindset is historically informed by centuries of marginalization which resulted in a post-colonial inferiority complex.

Victimhood helps to narrow the thinking process, and does not allow for the examination and perception of all sides of an issue. McWhorter concedes, that it is understandable if people from the civil rights era hold to the position of victimhood, but students in the twenty-first century who are exposed to more opportunities, to still conceive of themselves as victims regardless of their actual experiences is irrelevant. Victimology is unhealthy because it condones weakness and failure. It does not encourage effort, success or honest living; and as a result it will invariably impact the academic progress. “Victimology also hampers any performance from the outset by focusing attention upon obstacles,” (p.45). In fact, victimhood should be viewed as a new form of enslavement.

An outgrowth of victimhood is separation, which is formulated as a way of responding to perceived victimhood. Separation can lead to “a restriction of cultural taste, a narrowing of intellectual inquiry, and most importantly, studied dilution of moral judgement” (p.51). Separation also limits the value and the richness to be gained from embracing cultural plurality. It disconnects the Black community from some enriching experiences. At the same time, separation encourages Blacks to settle for less, and
exempt them from competing equally in the society. When such conditions are nurtured, it perpetuates the view that Blacks are weak and unintelligent. To counteract this view, students must be given help to overcome their wariness of school, and to develop new skills, or they will continue to be regarded as second class citizens. Separation also manifests itself in ant-intellectualism. This is a lack of dedication to intellectual pursuits, and a ‘cultural disconnect’ from academic endeavours. This disconnection from school cuts across class, and is nurtured from early and teaches the youths to not embrace school work too whole-heartedly.

McWhorter’s perspective points to the need for students to take more responsibility for their learning. However, the educational system, especially the present modes of education must be examined to understand why some students think of themselves as victims. McWhorter is against the idea of Blacks forging a separate identity, one that will prevent them from accessing the very form of education that they need to improve their social and economic status. He discounts the underlying fear of Blacks who do not want to be perceived as becoming ‘whites’. While McWhorter supports some form of “cultural hybridization”, he believes the Black culture has a strong, core distinct value which can be maintained without the three currents.

The idea that many Blacks do not buy into the utility of education as a means for social and economic mobility must be further investigated. Cultural factors do not present the full reason for student underachievement. McWhorter has identified some crutches that some students use and which are hampering their progress. However, the educational experience for many Black students has not been very positive, and students will resist a system that they believe is failing them.
Since not all students have bought into this resistance pattern it would be useful to study why some are able to overcome this legacy, while others are unable or unwilling to do so. McWhorter, (2000) found that the subtle remove from school was not evident in Caribbean students and only became so after having spent considerable years in the American system. This could be attributed to underlying systemic conditions over which the students do not have control and may leave them with feelings of hopelessness.

Furthermore, academic excellence has always been applauded and respected in the Caribbean. For example, students who have been successful in the local scholarship examination and are awarded places in high school would have their names printed in the local newspaper. This is regarded as a symbol of achievement and students feel rewarded for their effort. Students who are academically successful will also be rewarded with better jobs and other status symbols in the society, where their race is not a major deterrent. They also have positive role models who have achieved under similar circumstance as themselves, so they know that the society will reward their effort. Such surety of reward for hard work is not as easily achieved in the Canadian society.

**Structural Factors and Underachievement**

Noguera and Wing (2006) define structure as: “operations and procedures such teacher assignment, course selection and placement, and resource allocation, which profoundly influence student experiences” (p.30). Structures also include: school organization, centralization or decentralization of the decision making process, distribution of authority and responsibility among administrators, accountability factors, and the operation and physical location of programs such as ESL and special education.
Other structural policies include the Eurocentric curriculum, evaluation system, social relationships with teachers across race and cultural lines, and potential life and career opportunities (Solomon and Levine, 2003). Also included are the “low track curriculum, dominant group norms and values, explicit top-down school policies, and codes of conduct that emphasize subordination to authority” (Solomon, 1992, p. 97). Noguera, (2008) states: “School structures such as the master schedule have the effect of reinforcing existing patterns of racial segregation and play an important role in reproducing patterns of academic success and failure” (p.84).

School structures are based on white, middle-class values, and closely tied to socio-economic needs of the society (Dei, 1995, Solomon, 1992). Structures work to track, instruct and socialize students into specific socio-economic positions. Solomon (1992) notes; “It is an accepted fact that tracking and the stratification of knowledge prepare students for different stations in life” (p.13). These external structural conditions mediate with the school system, producing the same social order found in the society within the school. Dei, (1995) articulates; “This connection is essential for understanding the school experiences of Black students” (p. 10).

Since school policies reflect societal expectations, students who do not conform, or “act and look different” may be penalized; and thereby legitimize their low, subordinate and marginal position which is influenced by racism, classism, discrimination, language barriers, Eurocentrism, alienation (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, Zine, 1997:20).
How Does Structure Work?

Structural factors interact with the lived experiences of the students to produce disengagement and dropping out. Examination of this interaction helps in understanding disengagement and underachievement. Assigning and sorting students into courses structurally affect achievement. Students at the base of “educational opportunity structure” have lower expectations. Solomon, (1992:94) contends; “Track placement … becomes a very powerful determinant of the interrelated schooling process and outcomes” and contributes to high attrition rates for Black, male students.

Noguera found this pattern beginning in grade nine where placements are made without assessment to decide on student’s suitability for course. The critical issue is “that course assignments in the ninth grade would determine the trajectory students were on over the next four years.” Students and parents need information to make accurate course selection. Noguera states, the uninformed democratic nature of course selection is often a chance “to fail or to barely get by.” Thus, choices are closely tied to achievement outcome which is supported by “course-taking trajectories and grades.” (Noguera, 2008, p.152) In the TDSB many students are transitioned into high schools without adequately or successfully completing grade 8 requirements. At times, parents also insist on a placement despite its inappropriateness.

The streaming process is stratified, ‘colour-coded’ and structured along racial lines. Low level placements lead to disengagement, and contribute to negative racial stereotypes of the intelligence level and ability of Black students. Testing procedures, entry and qualifying requirements, standardized measurements of social and intellectual achievement are also structural factors affecting achievement. (Dei et al. 1997) Solomon
(1992) found students to be targets of biased and culturally inappropriate testing processes which were not “open opportunity structure”. These placement practices are evident in many schools in TDSB.

These variables “contribute to the schools’ pretence of impartiality and autonomy”; however, what appears to be normal procedures, may not be objective or equitable. Dei et al. (1997) state:

When students are ‘treated the same’ … in a way that negates the intersection of diverse social locations, the school abrogates its duty of encouraging all students to succeed by refusing to recognize that the difficulties some students face are the direct result of lacking valued cultural capital and social knowledge. (p.24)

Knowledge is also stratified by levels of program, along social class and racial groups. Knowledge as an active agent serves to reproduce and locate subjects “within the specified boundaries of class, gender and race” (Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 2003). Endemic in such situations are antagonism and contradictions with unpredictable outcomes.

The counseling system can also restrict opportunities for students, as students may be counseled to stay in certain classes or discouraged against moving to more progressive schools. Solomon (1992) argues that such practices as “holding back” students are “dysfunctional to the educational mobility of black students …” (p.80). The school system becomes unsupportive and non-responsive to the needs of students as administrators, guidance counselors and teachers fail to recognize and respond to early warning signs of ‘fading out’. Furthermore, the level of trust may not be present for
students to articulate issues that impact on their lives and which may impede their progress in school. (Dei et al. (1997) state; “Students felt their situations would be viewed within a climate of pre-judgment fuelled by negative racial stereotypes which made confiding in teachers or guidance counselors difficult” (p.76).

The role of the curriculum is central to understanding how “difference and power converge and intersect” in the formation of the schooling experience for minority students. The curriculum is firmly Eurocentric, centralized and standardized and intact as the legitimate knowledge base. Such dominance needs to be interrogated, dismantled, re-evaluated and expanded to become more inclusive since, inclusivity is fundamental to adequately address the needs of diverse school populations and their varied needs. (Dei, 2000)

Differences need to be recognized, encouraged, employed and strengthened to improve learning. Importantly, the presence of inequity and marginalization fosters the development of identities that are oppositional and resistant to educational goals. Schools’ disciplinary practice and the hidden curriculum work against Black male students, helping to structure inequality. The authority structure used explicit code of conduct and subtle student control techniques in reward systems. Conflict usually arises from staff interpretation and enforcement of rules. Other “impositions” and “unwritten” rules also cause conflict.

Informal structures such as club memberships and participation in extra-curricular activities can also divide on racial lines. Noguera, found white students to be more involved in academically oriented clubs, while Black students were involved in sports clubs. If patterns continued unchecked for long periods, they become normalized and
accepted as being democratic. According to Noguera (2008), “what some regard as a benign and voluntary form of racial separation actually masks the ways in which these patterns reinforce the racialized nature of academic failure and success at the school” (pp. 152-153). Extra-curricular activities should encourage racial socializing. Dei et al. (1997), view students’ socialization in racial groups of shared values and interests as having positive value. For example, a Black Heritage Club is a positive way to support cultural pride. Students will also segregate by gender, ethnicity and language to express interests and identities. However, interruption of negative racialized patterns, where present, is important, as this does not help to build racial harmony.

Students are also controlled through “space and time”, facing school-wide patrols. Presently, electrical surveillance and Police Resource Officers are a constant “threatening presence”, adding to oppositional conflict. It is this intensive monitoring of “black life” that breathing antagonism between whites and blacks, between authority and the disempowered, and between dominant and marginalized cultures. (Solomon, 1992, p.91)

Codes and regulatory forms intend to enforce conformity and maintain order; however, “students are treated as inconvenient interruptions in what would otherwise be a pleasant environment” (Danielson, 2006, p.46). The implication is that students’ presence pose a threat to the stability of the school system. Students oppose such restrictive structures as denial of rights and resistance may result in loss of educational opportunities which can develop into patterns of underachievement.

Structural and ideological mechanisms also support issues of gender, class and racism within the school and in the society. Black male students are mostly affected by disciplinary measures with punitive outcomes, negatively impacting achievement.
Suspension and expulsion detract from academic achievement and disciplinary measures send implicit and explicit messages about race and gender identity, and are tied to patterns of failure and success. Ideas about the ‘model minority’ groups versus the underachievement and disciplinary problems of Black, male students, over time become racially normalize patterns. Students become recipients of negative stereotypes; and if these are internalized may lead to under-performance or dropping out. Importantly, some students do not fall prey to these categories and are succeeding. As identities relating to race and gender intersect, they affect achievement outcome; and have certain perceptions and expectations from adults and students.

Thus, the literature informs that education has divisive power, privileging the dominant group and subordinating the marginalized groups. Importantly, although students may not be able to articulate such determination, their actions and response to the school system can be viewed as the basis for their resistance pattern. Although policies may not be racist in intent and appear neutral, they are “subtle and complex” and can “facilitate the perpetuation of the gap in academic opportunities” and “reproducing patterns of success and failure, and by extension, in reproducing inequality and privilege” (Noguera and Wing, 2006, p. 30). Some school structures continue to be “oldies but goodies”, but others need “focused examination and revision” to maximize student learning (Danielson, 2006).

**Cultural Factors and Underachievement**

Culture affects behavior, influencing rationale and motivation as students respond to the school system. Student culture is also influenced by social class, race, and ethnicity. Cultural behaviors adopted by students are viewed as oppositional, causing
conflict with school authority structure. Solomon states; “Certain attitudes, rituals, and styles of behavior, perceived as characteristic of black culture, solidify black identity and at the same time alienate the dominant-group culture” (p.5). These oppositional patterns of behavior can be regarded as a response to negative institutional structures of their lived experiences, and not solely as the individual’s problem. The tension between students and school structures resides in the school’s determination to conform to dominant, societal culture, and the students’ desire to create a space for themselves which is separate from the dominant culture and is impacted by race, class, immigrant status and male-gender based. These behavioral patterns developed by students are exclusionary and disadvantageous, denying them participation in special programs such as cooperative education; as teachers use their “gate-keeping enterprises” to deny students reasonable educational opportunity.

The forms of capital accessible to students also impact on their achievement. Noguera and Wing (2006) identify three forms of capital. Economic forms of capital that parents possess are closely tied to political powers and can be used to influence policy decisions which support certain groups and marginalize others. Social capital provides benefits due to connections to individuals with power. Cultural capital is demonstrated in tastes, styles, habits, language, behaviors and appearance (Bourdieu, 1986). If a student is able to access these supportive forms of capital their academic outcome are likely to be enhanced. Thus, forms of capital “interact with the structure of the school to perpetuate disparities in student outcomes and experiences” (Noguera and Wing, 2006, p.33).

Identity Formation and Achievement.
Structural and cultural factors also influence identity formation. Noguera, (2008, p.28) explains:

The fact that individual can resist, subvert, and react against cultural and structural forces that shape social identities compels us to recognize that individual choice, or … agency, also plays a major role in the way identities are constructed and formed.

Identity formation and agency are key issues central to understanding the academic performance of Black male students. These help educators to understand why students are “at risk, marginal, and endangered” (Noguera, 2008, p.28). Students’ choices impact on available opportunities and the norms of the culture. Although structural and cultural forces influence the actions of students, they also develop other cultural forms that can defeat the impact from those forces. Solomon in his study with males students in Toronto contends that students used their primary culture (Caribbean culture) content and secondary cultural patterns (Cultural patterns developed in Canada) style to develop a “unique strategy of resistance to their school structure” (p.13). He further explains that when the content from the primary culture is aligned to the style of the secondary culture, new “attitudes, symbols, and behaviors” developed producing oppositional practices. Ogbu (1993) views these secondary cultural differences as resulting from the meeting of two groups, one being subordinated to the other and resulting in a caste-like minority culture which is used to protect social identity and resist and oppose dominant structures. Thus, Solomon found the boys in his study utilize their cultural resources to resist the practices in schools that seek to dominate their lives. He examines the implication of cultural factors for the social relations in schools and the larger society.
Ogbu concludes that adherence to such counter-culture leads to distrust and cynicism about the value of education, thereby negatively impacting achievement. Importantly, some individuals may not choose, or be able to overcome the effects of structural and cultural forces, as level of choice available is restricted by external factors. The important factor is to comprehend the cognitive process that triggers individual choice and agency. It has been observed that the development of counter culture is also closely tied to the influence of peer pressure.

Educators opine that peer pressure is important in shaping identity because peer status is valued by students. Pressure from peers can undermine the value of academic achievement, so students may intentionally under-perform in order to be accepted by peers. Peer can also impose punitive measures for those who violate peer norms. As students become aware of their identity and gender role they also try to maintain and police their identities.

Black male students may also become “active agents of their own failure” by adapting negative behaviours. These ‘oppositional identities’ to education progress need to be challenged. But, as Noguera, (2008,) states:

> It would be naïve and a mistake to conclude that strength of character and the possibility of individual agency can enable one to avoid the perils present within the environment, or that it is easy for individuals to choose to act outside the cultural milieu in which they were raised. (p. 28)

Positive changes to improve the academic outcome for this group must link identity formation to cultural production; while balancing the effects of structural and cultural factors. Structural factors combined with students’ “lived culture” contribute to
school failure for some Black males, although they have an “expressed desire to succeed in school.”

**Student Resistance.**

Student resistance must also be considered as an issue in the cultural factors that affect achievement outcome. The literature suggests that struggle and resistance operate on multiple levels and relate to students’ disengagement in school. Resistance is defined as “the attitudes, behaviors, and actions which challenge dominant institutional norms and practices, as a means to effect social and institutional change” (Dei, et al, 1997, p.25). Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) also view resistance as a challenge to the status quo and as a move towards “progressive educational change”. These authors contend that the “cause-effect relation” that accounts for disengagement and dropping out; have many contributory factors in school structure and policies. Other variables such as; social, economic, emotion, home, society and school are also implicated. Dei, et al, used “fading out’ to describe the gradual process of disengagement beginning through students’ early experiences.

**Role of Race, Class and Gender in Resistance.**

Race, class and gender are complex identities students bring to school, contributing to oppressive measures for students. It privileges or marginalizes and subordinates students, and affects their educational outcome. Resistance is also embodied as “raced,” “gendered,” and “classed”. Race is central in the lives of Black students, and frame the struggle and resistance pattern. It helps to construct social identity and provides reason for resistance. Gender also intersects with race and brings further complication to the problems these students face.
The gender issue is also closely connected to authority and disciplinary regulations. Black, male students experience more surveillance in schools and society, negatively stereotyped and labeled as trouble-makers; allowing patterns which lead to dropping out. Gender renders cultural resistance as more “aggressive” and “oppositional,” further exacerbating conflict. In particular, males in groups are perceived as threatening.

Thus, gender plays a significant role in the development of the subculture that is resistant to school. Solomon, (1992) states; “… gender-based sub-cultures are important at their point of interaction with the black, working-class male sub-cultures…” (p.2). As students become ‘socially differentiated” from the dominant culture, they internalize the idea that “schooling will not improve their life chances”. School must therefore, be implicated in issue of gender, and gender biases need to be interrogated and challenged as they construct inequity for Black males.

Racism is associated with differential and unjust treatment, and impacted by social and economic factors, reflecting how conflicts are handled. Dei, et al, contend from studies in Toronto:

Consistently, the narratives of Black students and drop-outs have shown that racism exists unchecked within schools, and even when incidents are brought to the attention of the school authorities, just and decisive measures to address the problem are lacking. (p. 79)

Particularly, when differential treatment is meted out to some students on the basis of race, then race becomes a negative factor.
Education cannot operate under a ‘colour-blind’ umbrella assuming all students are treated equally, when students are different in terms of needs, experiences and position. Furthermore, viewing race from a position of white privilege disadvantages some students and privileges others.

Students’ position within the structure of school, relates to how they respond to schooling. Dei found that Black and white students respond differently in their reasons for disengaging and dropping out of school. Non-black students did not mention issues of race or differential treatment as reasons for dropping out.

Intersection of race and social class doubly alienate, and differentially empower students. Students need support, encouragement and cultural capital to access the system, for positive educational outcome. Many Black parents experience difficulty engaging the school system; they are perceived as ‘dysfunctional’, and blamed for their children’s educational problems.

Resistance is not so much with the content of authority structure, but how students perceive authority figures and respond to them. This is demonstrated with issues of respect. Respect is earned and reciprocated. Authority figures are viewed as controlling and wielding power, and students feel ‘silenced’ as their input is not considered when settling disputes. At times discipline and authority status take precedence over education. Students’ resistance also determines teachers’ educational judgment and response to culture. The authority structure of the school and the oppositional response of students help to polarize “dominant authoritarian on the one hand and subordinate, oppositional positions on the other” (Solomon, 1992, p.99).
Notably, not all Black students are resistant to the educational process. Some students may choose an assimilating approach, developing “culturally sanctioned behaviours,” distance themselves from peers in an effort to succeed. Students also seek transfer to better quality schools, and others resort to sport as a viable alternative for social advancement. Others, although facing differential treatment in school are supported by strong peers and families with positive achievement orientation. The intersection of race, class and gender implicitly determine the way social realities are experienced and negotiated and affects educational outcomes.

**Integration of Culture and Structure**

While acknowledging the importance of structural and cultural factors, neither one is significant enough to explain the problems faced by Black male students. An integrative perspective combining structural and cultural factors provides a viable working formula. Solomon states: “A new integrated perspective would acknowledge the potential for structure and culture to assume a less rigid and more accommodative posture” (p.109).

This approach allows changes that encourage “equitable and democratic” institutional structures, and encourages students’ culture that is less “oppositional and subcultural”. Such conciliation would prevent the spiraling nature of resistance, while promoting more positive relationships that encourages academic success.

In contextualizing the dilemma students faced, Solomon examines Reproduction theory, (Bourdieu and Passerton, 1977), (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) but rejects its deterministic focus as problematic. Cultural production theory (Willis, 1977) offers an
alternative explanation. However, neither theory offers a clear answer to the plight faced by these students.

Another theorist Ogbu, proposes an acting white hypothesis, whereby students reject education as a method of actively rejecting white structure and domination. This implies, students who are more likely to succeed are those who adhere to the dominant cultural values. Conversely, the students who do not integrate the cultural values of the dominant class may be regarded as ‘difficult’ and present ‘challenges’ (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Such a view is problematic as it does not credit the students with the resiliency and drive to succeed. Byfield, (2008) found that some successful Black male students did not trade their “Black identity for educational success” (p.18).

McWhorter’s view that three mentalities – cult of victimhood, separation as a coping strategy and anti-intellectualism are responsible for obstructing the achievement patterns of Blacks does not present a balanced analysis, as it ignores structural factors that affect achievement.

Structural forces have the ability to help determine the future outcome for students, if they conform to the structures. Students do resist and exercise forms of autonomy to create alternative pathways. The cultural perspectives also create limitation to powerful structural forces. Solomon contends, it would be problematic to view student alienation from either a structural or a cultural camp as both are inextricable mixed. This collision of structure and culture leads to conflicting relationships which negatively contributes to “Black students’ separation and alienation from mainstream culture” (p.93).
Individual agency is also important as some students are able to succeed in spite of cultural or structural factors. Students acknowledge the value of educational achievement and its “emancipatory possibilities”, but need strategies to replace the oppositional position. Students must balance the importance of accepting dominant cultural values, while respecting and maintaining their own positive and constructive cultural competence. Schools must also view students as valuable and contributing stakeholders in the learning process, nurturing them to develop new attitudinal changes (Mowlah-Baksh and Muir, 1995). A full comprehension of the importance of understanding the interplay of structural and cultural variables and the way they can affect educational outcome for students is a necessary pre-requisite for enhancing student achievement.

**Implications of Theories**

The theoretical perspectives are not exhaustive of the reasons for the academic problems facing students. While not providing any definitive solutions, the structural-cultural perspectives emphasize the complexity of the problem and highlight some of the type of variables contributing to school failure.

A balanced structural–cultural perspective is crucial. Structural content and intent appear normal and attempt to create smooth organizational operation; however, they can be restrictive and problematic in their implementation. Cultural factors also significantly impact learning, and cultural dissonance can cause students to be more oppositional. Any serious attempt to remediate the situation for this group must consider these factors. Factors to support achievement include: students’ level of acceptance of the achievement
ideology through schooling, teachers’ assumptions about achievement, parent and community support, and thorough understanding of ‘gendered realities’.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The process of identifying an approach that would adequately represent the perspectives of the participants in this doctoral dissertation presented a challenge as I struggled for a long time with the idea of qualitative research which I discovered to be a very broad field. I did not want to do a case study of the six male educator participants because I felt that approach would have distracted from the key issue of underachievement for Black, male students. I also wanted participants’ perceptions to be the foci for understanding this phenomenon of underachievement for Black, male students. It is also through these perspectives, by way of detailed, rich descriptions that this phenomenon will be explained. After many discussions with my thesis advisor and the thesis committee I finally settled on the possibility of using a phenomenological design.

Approach

Phenomenology is geared towards studying a specific problem by getting to the perceptions of participants. It removes the focus from the participants, to the phenomenon of underachievement and the meaning it holds for these participants. Kincheloe (1991) argued that phenomenology focuses on “the perceptions of individuals, seeking the insiders’ perspectives” (p.148). Phenomenology also describes experience as it is ‘lived’, ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’. Creswell, (1998) cites Bruyn (1966); “Phenomenology serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their field of perceptions in order to see life as the individuals see it” (p. 95). Significantly, the data
contained in the participants’ perspectives can be validly extracted by phenomenological approach, as the researcher engages with participants in the collection of data.

Thus, the participants who were past Black students, and who have experience working with current Black students, should be able to relate to the experiences of these students and bring a sense of understanding and sensitivity to the experiences of these students. They should also be able to explain the factors that they used to succeed and allow them to use their experiential knowledge to inform current practice. As they reflect on their experiences, it is hoped that they will be able to provide an opportunity to bring all their educational and experiential background, values and understanding to shape the issues in a certain pattern. There is also the possibility that the knowledge of these educators can be used to bring about more authentic school reform.

This study also provides an opportunity for these educators to examine pedagogical problems through practical inquiry into their work (Kincheloe, 1991). Dewey (1929) referred to teachers as the most important inquirers into the successes and failures of the school. As we try to acknowledge that educators do have the knowledge to make professional decisions about their work, we become better able to look at “what could be” rather than sanctioning “what is” (Kincheole, 1991). Lester, (1999) aptly states, that phenomenology also brings new insight, exposes “taken - for - granted assumptions” that requires action, while challenging complacency.

I was also drawn to the phenomenology research design because it allows for “purposive sampling” as a way to identify main perspectives. Welman and Kruger (1999) emphasize the importance of this type of sampling as a way to identify main participants. This type of sampling is also useful because it was necessary to find participants who had
experience working with students who are experiencing or had experienced the phenomenon of underachievement. The participants also had certain characteristics in common and this was helpful for quality assurance. I also needed participants who were willing to give their time to have the interviews taped recorded, transcribed and analyzed. They also must be willing to articulate their views about the questions. There was a need to use both teachers and administrators. Here I used my personal judgment to decide on participants who have had experience working in areas with students experiencing the phenomenon being studied. I also relied on snowball sampling as I asked the participants that I have contacted to recommend others for the interview. The literature describes those participants who assist in getting others to participate as gate-keepers, and those participants they recommend as key actors or key insiders.

**Participants**

In a phenomenological research design, between two and ten participants are recommended. I wanted to interview five educators since I believe that was a manageable number of participants and the literature suggested that a single figure sample size is valid. However, six of the seven participants I contacted responded and I interviewed all six and included their perspectives. Notably, the Toronto District School Board census for the year 2006 indicated that there were 15,900 teachers and 6.1% are Black, and fewer of these Black teachers are male. There is a 2011 census but the results are not published. So the small sample size is also reflective of the situation at the Toronto District School Board. Furthermore, the participants had accumulated many years of experiences, which provided vivid information. Their commitment to one and one-half to two hours of interview helped in producing rich data.
Since race and gender are two central issues affecting the research study, I decided to investigate Black, male educators because their perspectives are not only ‘raced’, but are also ‘gendered’. Race and gender are two salient variables that can impact on educational outcome. I believe these male educators would also be able to bring a very special type of sensitivity and understanding to the problem. Educators also hold fundamental assumptions about achievement, especially as it relates to gender, culture and socio-economic conditions, and these are also variables impacting the group being studied. According to Dei and Calliste (2000) educational institutions are; “powerful, discursive sites through which race knowledge is produced, organized and regulated” (p.11). Moody and Stricker (2009), cite a study by Sanodos and Rivers who found: So large was the impact of teachers on student learning that it exceeded any one thing about the students themselves … [The] teacher effectiveness is “the single biggest factor influencing gains in achievements,” an influence bigger than race, poverty, parent’s education, or any of the other factors that are often thought to doom children to failure. (p.18)

I also felt it is important that Black, male perspectives be examined since their perspectives have been given limited attention in the literature dealing with underachievement. Dei (1996) states, “there must be space in the story for other (African and non-African) experiences to be read and shared” (p.13). Importantly, Lynn (2006) confers; “Black men remained largely absent from the educational discourse on teachers and teaching” (p.2497). I believe that it was therefore necessary to examine their perspectives as part of the knowledge bases on cultural teaching in urban, Canadian
schools. Their scholarship will also help to expand the notion of what constitutes “sound and healthy pedagogical practice (Lynn, 2006).

Representation of the voices of Black male teachers helps to develop new knowledge about the problem of underachievement of Black male students which would not be possible without their perspectives. Their perspectives can also help to generate new concepts which can lead to the development of new programs to provide better academic support for Black male students. Lewis (2006) emphasizes the need to examine what Black, male teachers view as important in encouraging Black, male students to become achievers. Black, male teachers also have significant roles as mentors and role-models as they work to support achievement. Thus the representation of Black, male educators’ voices in the literature continues to be valued. Especially at the local level where they can seriously interrogate the problem of underachievement as they experience it in practice, these educators can provide first hand knowledge about the inter-play of structure and culture and their impact on educational achievement.

**Recruitment**

At the beginning of the research study I wanted three current teachers and two former teachers who are now administrators to participate in the study. The first challenge I faced was to find participants who would be willing to be interviewed. There is also a limited number of Black, male educators at the secondary level, in the Toronto District School Board so it was very challenging to find educators who would be willing to be interviewed. I began by contacting potential participants and informing them that an email would be sent to them about a study I would be doing. The e-mails and a letter informing them about the nature of study and requesting their participation in an audio
taped interview session was sent. The letter also asked them to share the content of the letter with other male educators who they know and asking them if they were interested in participating in the study to contact me. No new participant contacted me through this process. A sample consent form and the list of interview questions were also sent with the letter. The letter also informed participants that their written consent would be required at the time of the interview. Potential participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the interview process at any time. No participant withdrew from the study.

In selecting potential participants, teaching experience within the urban, low income schools in the Toronto District School Board was an important consideration, since it was in these settings that there seems to be the most evidence of underachievement for Black, male students. Participants were also from secondary schools, because although the problem of underachievement may have its roots in the elementary and middle schools, it is at the high school level that it becomes more critical for student success.

**Background of Participants**

All participants in this study were born outside of Canada and came from various Caribbean countries and one came from a country in Africa. They are from the age group of forty to fifty years, with one in the fifty plus age group. Two participants had early schooling experiences in Canada. One participant had his secondary schooling experience in Canada. The other three participants had their early schooling experiences outside of Canada. Two of the participants did graduate and post-graduate studies outside of Canada. The participants had from seven to over twenty years teaching experiences in the
Canadian public school system, including one with some private school teaching experience. All participants have experience working in schools with high population of Black students and in schools where some Black, male students are experiencing underachievement problems. Their long educational experiences should provide a more thorough understanding of the problem. Their varying degree of educational attainment is also significant as it is indicative of the value they place on education. Five of the participants mentioned the economical challenges they faced while attending school. One participant did not mention economic factor as a challenge in his early schooling experience. Importantly, one participant notes that, “education is the passport out of tough socio-economic situation …”

Notably, the varied background experiences of these educators, along with the varied cultural influences that have impacted their educational experiences point to the complexity of Blackness, a factor that is further compounded by gender and other issues.

Those participants who had their early schooling experiences outside of Canada did not experience racism as a factor. Subtle forms of racism were experienced in the Canadian educational system. One participant who had his early schooling experience in Canada did not see racism as a factor; however, he mentioned feeling very uncomfortable when the ‘N’ word was used in texts in class. He states, “If it [racism] ever was, I don’t think I ever noticed it. When I was in high school I remembered feeling uncomfortable when the ‘N’ word was used in texts such as Huckleberry Finn and To Kill a Mocking Bird.” Another participant mentioned his Canadian teachers’ surprise when he worked to improve his grades and his aspirations to achieve academically. He felt that generally, they did not have high expectations for his success. To him, in Canada, “Black is equated
with mediocrity.” He also mentioned his attempt to get help from a University of Toronto Biology professor and the professor’s attitude which left him feeling that he should not be in Life Science class. Furthermore, there was an under-representation of African Canadians students in that field. He was so discouraged that; “If it was at all possible, I would never go to see another professor.” Thus, being Black and male were factors that were always in front of him. This was compared to the positive influence of his teachers in his country of birth. One participant felt he faced many challenges both as a Black, male students and as a Black male teacher because of both his race and his gender. He mentioned his struggle to be accepted as a teacher of English, even after receiving a specialist certificate in English. He also felt that multicultural programs were not given high status recognition in the schools and students who were placed in English as a Second Language classes or English as Second Dialect classes were not given recognition. Even the location of these classes appeared to be hidden away from the main classrooms.

Another noticeable absence for those teachers who had their early experiences in Canada was the absence of Black, male teachers as role models. One participant remarked that he did not have any Black, male teachers during his early school years in Canada.

All participants mentioned the strong support they had from their family and community. One participant mentioned his mother as the chief motivating factor in his success. He stated that his mother was “full of aphorisms and words of encouragement.” His English teacher also inspired him in his love of learning and his desire to succeed. The church also played a significant role in the educational experiences of most of the
participants. One participant mentioned the church as a nurturing experience, where Sunday school incorporated a whole range of educational opportunities. He also felt that he was “fortunate to be in such a supportive environment.”

The onus placed on boys to succeed was a factor most of the participants experienced. One participant mentioned that his early schooling experience was in a culture where boys enjoyed academic success. He reflected:

This is a very different mindset from the one I grew up with, where we were very competitive with our peers, and we were very good friends and we studied together, but we always wanted to out-perform each other. I feel this doesn’t exist here. The kids who come up here have it [referring to immigrant students from the Caribbean], but they seem to lose it by grades 9 and 10.

Another participant stated that as a male he belonged to a privileged group in his former country and not because of wealth. He stated that; “young men are in a privileged position. We are expected to go to school, get an education and be prepared to take care of our wives and children. There were no issues with me going to school. There were no barriers…. So in terms of barriers to learning I could say that my education was always available to me.” This statement must be understood in terms of generational influence, as a younger person from that culture may have a different response to gender roles.

One participant mentioned the importance of celebrating academic success. He also mentioned that academic success was always celebrated in Jamaica. I mentioned earlier in this thesis that students who were successful in the local Common Entrance and scholarship examinations in Jamaica which provided free secondary education would
have their names published in the local new paper and their successes were generally a source for family and community celebration. One participant mentioned: “I have given back work to students and I see them celebrate because they have achieved well …” He further states, “I can’t understand that being successful is not cool ….”

**Data Collection Process**

After potential participants agreed to be interviewed, we would discuss the time and venue for the interview. It was very important to try and accommodate the wishes and preferences of the participants. Thus some interviews were scheduled for early mornings, while some took place as late as ten o’clock at night and one was done during the weekend. The locations also vary to suit participants.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to sign the consent forms. All participants signed the agreement form. The University of Toronto Ethics Protocol was reviewed. Participants were given the right to choose a pseudonym to protect their identity and most wanted to be identified as teacher participant and or administrator. The purpose of the research was reviewed, although the main research questions were not disclosed. Participants were thanked for voluntarily participating in the study and reminded of their rights to withdraw or refuse to answer any question. The confidential nature of the study was reviewed although these were stated in the letter requesting their participation.

**Purposive Sampling**

Structured set of interview questions were used as this approach would facilitate cross reference of perspectives. The predetermined questions also assumed that participants would give meaningful responses. Importantly, at the end of the interview
sessions participants were given the opportunity to freely add their comments. No one objected to the nature of the questions although they had access to the questions prior to the interviews and they were asked to contact me for any clarification.

The first response to the letter requesting participation was very prompt and within a week I arranged the first interview and set a date, time and place mutually acceptable to the participant and me, where we would do the interview. Surprisingly, this participant was not on my original list because I was out of contact with him for a long period, and we had just re-established professional contact through some leadership workshop that we attended. He arrived promptly for the interview and I felt very relaxed and ready. He also came with his letter and we had a very productive interview session.

Another participant came about because of a meeting in a parking lot. I had worked with this educator some years ago in summer school program and I haven’t been in contact with him since then. We had a lively discussion catching up on our lives. I mentioned my studies and I asked if he would be interested in participating. He gave me his e-mail and telephone number and told me to send him the details of the study. I e-mailed him the consent letter, the list of questions and the consent form. He called me to inform me that he would be willing to participate in the interview process. A date, time and place were set for the interview. This interview was to be done over the weekend. He explained his commitment to do the interview, but also mentioned his care-giving responsibilities for his children. I was very impressed as he describes his duties to pick up his child from school and to prepare the evening meals. He mentioned that his daughter called him, ‘the daddy-mommy’. This is an affectionate term his daughter used to describe his care-giving duties. An hour before the interview he called to cancel as he
was way behind with some household chores. A second time was set and he came almost an hour late. We started the interview, but he had another appointment, so we agreed to meet again to complete the interview. However, he was unable to make this third appointment. He called to apologize, explaining that he had to be at home with the children as his wife would be late. I was pleasantly surprised when he called a couple days later informing me that he would come to my home to finish the interview. This time he arrived on time and we were able to complete the interview.

He felt motivated by my studies as he too wanted to further his studies. I noted in my interview memo, that it appears that by encountering a working colleague trying to further her educational goals, this educator became motivated also to further his studies. We discussed possible options available to OISE and some of the challenges of raising a family, and working and studying.

While waiting for responses from the other potential participants that I have contacted, I began to search for other black educators who might be needed, if the original contacts did not want to be interviewed. Surprisingly, one administrator and one teacher who I thought would be most helpful proved the most difficult. The administrator did not respond to the e-mail although when we met at a workshop and he broached the subject of the interview and expressed his willingness to do it. We agreed to meet after another work-shop outside the TDSB premises, but unfortunately he was absent from that workshop. Further efforts to contact him have not been productive.

Another colleague made appointments which had to be cancelled on a few occasions. In trying to understand these cancellations I noted that there might be an unwillingness of these potential participants to become involved in any interrogation of
the TDSB’s system and policies. In a conversation with one of the potential participant, I confronted the issue, but was told that time-constraint was his biggest factor. Another participant told me that at first he was going to refuse to participate, but when he read the section of the letter that dealt with confidentiality and because of his interest in the topic he very willingly agreed to be interviewed. I reminded him that as the researcher, I have an obligation to respect his rights, needs, values and desires, and that I was working under the University of Toronto Ethics Protocol. He was also reminded that he had the right to withdraw at any time and he was not under ant obligation to participate. I was also reminded that when doing phenomenological research it might not always be comfortable for participants to make their voices heard when dealing with deep-rooted issues and exposition of “taken-for-granted assumptions or challenges a comfortable status quo” (Lester, 1999, p.4). After this conversation, we agreed to an interview time and location.

The third interview went as scheduled and proved to be very productive. He was articulate and forth-right with his comments and he provided some interesting comments which offered other lenses from which to view the dilemma faced by these Black, male students. These will be discussed in the presentation and analysis of data section. One factor that I noted after this interview and after listening to the taped interview was the volume of notes that I will have to contend with since most participants gave very lengthy answers.

The fourth participant willingly agreed to participate in the study. He requested the time and place for his interview and I accepted his conditions. Everything went as planned in terms of scheduling and meeting. Interestingly, this interview became centred
around this participant’s story. He was cognizant of the plight of Black, male students and he used his experience in the system as the vehicle to tell the story of these Black, male students. I noted that this participant would have been an ideal candidate for a case study.

Since I have not heard from the first administrator whom I have contacted and who had missed a couple of appointments, I decided to contact another administrator. I first met with him and explained what I was doing and requested an interview. He agreed and suggested that I sent him the details by e-mail. He promptly replied that he would be willing to do the interview. We set a date and time and the interview went as scheduled. This interview session was very formal and this participant was very accommodating and helpful as there were some slight problems with the tape recorder. Luckily, I had a back-up system which he helped me to set up. I found this participant very respectful and proud of the study and he encouraged me to work towards finishing this study as soon as possible.

The final interview took place a couple of weeks later. My original intent was to have the interviews finished before the Christmas holidays, but unfortunately I had to do the last two interviews in early January. This final participant was one of the original educators I had contacted. We made several attempts to do the interview, but scheduling became a problem. By this time I have done the five interviews as I have planned, but since he contacted me that he was ready to do the interview, I decided to go ahead and do this extra interview. I was happy for this experience, since he confirmed some of the earlier findings and shed some new data.
Generally, this experience had taught me some valuable lessons. One important lesson is that I should have field-tested the questions for their clarity. I assumed that because the questions were sent to participants prior to the interviews and they were instructed to ask me any question or express concerns, and since I did not receive any requests that everyone understood all the questions. However, when the questions were asked in the interviews one or two participants would preface some answers with phrases such as, this is a tough question. I tried to make clarifications where necessary. No one declined or refused to answer any of the questions.

After each interview, participants were asked to complete a Trustworthiness of the Researcher form. This form allows the participants to respond to my behaviour during the interview process. It was also a way for me to make sure the process was open and comfortable for the participants. This post interview review by participants can be viewed as a measure of accountability, as the participants had an opportunity to respond to the interview process. The completion of the Trustworthiness of the Researcher form by the participants, also make the process more authentic. Participants were also asked if they required a copy of the interview and those who requested a copy were sent a copy as a way to acknowledge participants’ contribution. It hopefully can also strengthen the collegial bond. Participants were also told that they could have access to read the final draft of the thesis.

I made notes during the interview process and post interview notes. Through these processes I was able to document the process of the development of the research study, along with the development of the phenomenon of the inquiry. I also noted my thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon being studied and questions that were puzzling.
Taking notes during the interview process and doing the Memos after each interview were also valuable sources of information as I was able to review these notes for doing this part of the methodology. These were very informative sources of the process of the interview. These field notes also help me to reflect on the interview process, acts as reminders of what happened and what needs to be done. Groenewald (2004) notes that field notes also involve analysis since some form of interpretation is involved in the notes. The notes also help me to make sense of what took place in the interviews.

I also listened to the taped interviews as soon as possible after each session. I also took the circuitous route of transcribing each taped interview manually. This was a very difficult task, but it came in very handy when I started the analysis, as I had themes and quotes that I thought useful to the study already highlighted. However, I would not recommend this process as it is very time consuming and laborious. In the end I had to seek some help for typing the interviews.

I noted that some colleagues may have reservation interrogating their practice and I also wondered if participating in an interview dealing with professional and work-related issues was a new experience for Black, male educators. I also noted that there could be generational responses and I wrote the question: “Would younger male teachers respond differently from some of these seasoned participants?” Importantly, the participants made many actionable comments and showed a shared concern for the development of a new framework to promote academic success for this group of students.

**Data Analysis Process**

This analysis process began with a systematic transcription of the interviews. The initial approach began by listening to the taped interviews and then manually transcribing
each interview from the taped recordings of the interviews. Although this was a laborious process, it helped me to become very familiar with the data. This process also provides a valid method for analysis and interpretation of the data, as I was also able to highlight evolving themes and select transcript data that would adequately describe the phenomenon that I was studying. Later, the interviews were transcribed.

By “burrowing inward” with the data, I was able to understand the depth and essence of participants’ lived experiences (Hays and Singh, 2012). As I immersed myself in the data I began to note expressions that were relevant to the experience. Hays and Singh describe this as horizontalization of the data and sees it as necessary as it allows each statement from participants to be considered for its “significance for description of the experience.” Horizontalization is a phenomenological data analysis technique whereby researchers identify non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements in participants’ transcripts. These significant statements were noted. In determining the themes evolving from the research, I relied on the chart adapted from Ryan and Bernard (2003) techniques to identify themes in qualitative data and a chart designed by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) to develop codes and themes and to match data to the research questions.

To allow further reduction and elimination in order to determine the main themes, Moustakas’ (1994) Modification of van Kaom’s (1959, 1966) Phenomenological Data Analysis Model as cited in Hay and Sing (2012, p.352) was also used in this analysis process. According to Hay and Sing, Moustakas (1994) has worked significantly to revisit phenomenology data analysis technique in order to summarize and to expand the steps for analysis of data. This chart provides a five steps approach, but steps four and five were omitted from this analysis because those steps deal with co-researchers and
there were no co-researchers for this study. A copy of the chart is presented in Appendix E.

This model provides two requirements to test the data: 1) “Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? 2) Is it possible to abstract and label it?” When these conditions were met, those sections of the data were regarded as a horizon of the experience. Data that did not meet these criteria were eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive and vague data were also eliminated. The remaining data then became the focus of the experience and core themes were formulated from the clustered and labelled constituents.

Application validation was used to determine the final identification of the Invariant constituents and themes. These were checked against the complete record for each participant. This check was made to make sure the themes were expressed explicitly in the complete transcript. They were also checked for compatibility, if they were not explicitly expressed. Those that were not compatible or explicitly expressed were regarded as not relevant to the research experience and were therefore deleted. The next stage was to use the relevant and validated themes to construct for participant a textural structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience. This included verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews. After the essence of the phenomenon was written for each participant, one composite essence was developed by combining all participants’ essences. It was only after the themes were identified and research data was extracted to support themes that any form of analysis was attempted. Relevant literature was also used to support and or refute data, or to add further clarity and elucidation to
data. Some limitations were also identified and some possible recommendations were made.

**Ethical Issues**

Throughout this research process I followed the guidelines of University of Toronto Ethical Protocol as the guide for completing the research process. To protect and respect participants’ right to privacy, needs and values the research objectives were clearly stated and written permission obtained, and information on data collection devices was also given. Copies of verbatim transcription of interviews were sent to participants who requested them. Participants were also invited to review final draft if they so desired.

I had to be careful in bracketing my assumptions and biases so that the data would speak for itself. Through the process of bracketing I examine and set aside any preconceived beliefs, values, and assumptions about the research topic. Hays and Singh describe this process as researcher’s reflexivity. They define this process “as the active self-reflection of an investigator on the research process” (Hays and Singh, 2012, p. 157). Throughout the process I was constantly reminding myself that these were the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon of underachievement for Black, male students and that my experience is not as valuable as theirs for this study. Careful thought was also given to bracketing of my experience so that it would not affect the way I represent the views of participants during the analysis process. I faithfully represented the phenomenon of the inquiry as was expressed in the ‘voices’ of the participants by relying on description of their perceptions.

During the interview process for example, I used Memo to note recurring themes, organized my thoughts and feelings so that these would not interfere with the process of
the study. I noted the location, time and length of the interview. Each participant’s perspective was also summarized and this helped me to be aware of the biases caused by editing process, and also helped me to be sensitive to the phenomenological approach. As a graduate of Applied Psychology and Counseling, and an educator with counseling experience, I was also mindful of Carl Roger’s approach to counseling where counselors are encouraged to be authentic in their relationship with clients, and to show unconditional positive regard and empathy. This approach helped me to further bracket my assumptions and feelings. Thus, the researcher’s voice was neither analytical nor statistical, but one sensitive to the phenomenological approach.

The phenomenological approach can be seen as a deliberate method that helps to prevent and restrict the researcher’s biases. Furthermore, the researcher does not take side either for or against participants’ views, as the “researcher’s personal views or preconceptions” or bracketed (Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald also cites Giorgi who states: “The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts.” (p. 5)

This does not imply that the researcher does not have any preconceived views about the topic, but the focus remains on the perspectives of participants, and keeping interpretations and meanings on data (Lester, 1999).

To fully represent the experiences of the participants, I used thick descriptions from the data, also known as “vividness” from the taped interviews to provide detailed accounts of the research data and process and to support the development of the themes. While relying on the descriptions, there is also the interpretation of aspects of the
research context. This approach helps to provide trustworthiness, since it allows
‘situational – specific reflections” to add to other aspects of data analysis or inferences
into the meaning of the data.
Chapter 4

Results

This chapter describes the key themes that evolve from the meaning of the participants’ statements as was gleaned from their perspectives. The main aim is to highlight participants’ perspectives on structural and cultural factors that may contribute to underachievement problems for Black, male students. The inter-play of Structural and Cultural factors is important in understanding school and learning outcomes. By using a phenomenological approach the researcher’s main task becomes one of providing detailed description of participants’ perceptions taken from the data, so that the participants’ voices come through clearly. No attempt will be made in this chapter to do analysis of results. This will be done later when the implications of the study are discussed. It should also be noted that some themes come with both structural and cultural characteristics and although no separate heading will be used in discussing these intertwining factors, the relevance of both factors will be discussed.

Structural Themes

Early Educational Experiences of Black Male Students and Female White Teachers.

One structural feature of the educational system that participants perceived as a possible contributory cause to under-achievement is the early schooling experiences for Black, male students. The early educational experiences of Black, male students are heavily impacted by the dominance of White, female teachers. Historically, there has been a preponderance of White female teachers in the educational system; so their impact on the learning outcome of students must be examined. Sleeter and Grant (1993) for example, provided statistics for the United States which can be applied to Canada. They
noted that ninety percent of teachers are white, and eighty percent are female, especially in the elementary schools, and this makes it difficult for boys to identify with school and its requirements. This systemic and structural condition is definitely an issue that could be impacting learning outcomes for Black, male students.

One teacher participant shared his perspective on the early experiences for Black, male students. He stated his perspective:

I know certainly at the elementary level there are certainly more teachers of Eurocentric persuasion and more female. In a sense your experience as a teacher vis-à-vis race, class, gender identity, experiences impact on how you see the students in the classroom. It is important to be aware of your own prejudices, your own fears and insecurities too, because students often time presents us with mirrors, a way or seeing a reflection of ourselves through them. And because they see us often, they are able to analyze us, because they have good analytical skills.

He further clarified:

In terms of my understanding, it would be very challenging for a White, female teacher to work with students if they don’t have a real understanding of these students. Some students may have negative school experiences and it would be very challenging for these teachers to work with these students if they don’t have a strong understanding of where these students are coming from.
He further stated that; “One of the things that is important for these students is that they may not have had the support system early, when they started out. How you started out on the educational road will determine how you end up.”

Significantly, many Black, male students’ lives have been largely impacted by the dominance of different female influences. One administrator noted the multiplicity of these female influences such as; mothers, aunts, grandmothers, female teachers. The values learned from the female familial and cultural structures may be different from those portrayed in the schools. So it will take a special kind of understanding to reach these students. Porfílio and Carr (2010) contend:

Unless educators better understand how the dominant (largely white) middle-class capital has become accepted as the norm, how it operates to advantage some and continues to disadvantage others, we will constantly grasp at reform initiatives that are individualistic and inherently disconnected from the main systemic problems. (p.36)

Another administrator participant also perceived that the early influence of White, female teachers in the lives of Black, male students may be a critical factor in the educational outcome. He reflected on his comments in the interview:

When I started telling you about teachers telling our Black kids, that they are bad in the elementary schools, I chose my words carefully. I could be stereotypical and say the majority of teachers at the elementary level are white, females. I’m probably too stereotypical about it, but I’m going to say it. Most of the teachers in elementary schools are white, females.
He saw these teachers by predisposition to be highly organized and have unrealistic expectations for Black, male students. “If we have a few more male teachers in the elementary schools that would help.”

When asked, in what ways can the educational system, intentionally/unintentionally default educational outcomes for Black, male students, an administrator became very critical of the early experiences of Black male students beginning in grade one. He believes that parents should have the flexibility to decide between the ages of 5 – 8 years when the student begins grade one.

Unfortunately, we have this factory mentality that states when they are six years they should be in grade one. Then you get some of these boys who are not mature, but are full of energy and they are not going to sit until the teacher finishes giving instructions, even if it is just for five minutes. These kids at this age, just because they are being themselves and are expressing their God-given energy as kids, we tell them they are bad kids…. As the teachers focused on these boys as bad kids, the label follows them into other grades. This negative attention brings enjoyment to the class and these boys take on that role. They are going to be the bad boys. By the time they get to secondary schools there is this tension that is created with teachers.

He does not perceived this as intentional branding; however he thinks its impact follows the boys. He opined that by high school

Some of them have been branded as bad kids and now they have taken on the role. Now as they get older, they are becoming the cheerleaders for
their classmates. So if anybody is going to challenge the teachers, it is going to be them. It is a role they have taken on, and I think it is unfair. So, some of our Black kids may fall prey to some of these types of pressure. I think this is wrong.

Expanding on the theme of the impact of White, female teachers, a teacher participant moved the discussion to the secondary level. He suggested:

I want to say that the presence of a White teacher, even if the teacher is racist, should not have a significant impact on their education, if the student understands that I am here to learn. One of the things my mother used to say to me, is to learn how to turn a negative situation into a learning opportunity. So even if the students meet somebody who is not particularly disposed to treat them equitably, they should still see this as impetus to thrive, to succeed, to overcome, to put out their best effort. I think though, and maybe the students who are failing may be affected by white, female teachers.

It is interesting to note that some of the behaviours mentioned by previous participants are still evident in the high schools. Another administrator echoed the same concerns from his experience in the high school system. He stated:

Not much has changed in terms of ideological understanding of White teachers in terms of Black, male students. White teachers are coming from a context which does not allow them to apply these values, psychological understanding to deal with males who may be restive. There is a very good chance that Black, male students will be double victimized by the baggage
he comes with in society …To work with students of color needs specific training to do the job successfully.

This participant also mentions that some teachers are afraid of the Black, male students and do not understand them. He stated that White teachers may say, “they don’t see colour, [but] yes, they do.” He also cites a writer who states; “You can’t teach what you don’t love.”

Special Education and Low Level Placement.

In continuing the discourse of structural factors, the participants shared their perceptions on the methods used to place students in classes and programs. They shared the perception that deeply imbedded in the structural arrangements of the educational system is placement of Black male students in low level and Special Education classes.

One teacher participant with several years experience teaching in the Toronto District School Board reflected on his early experience. He contended:

One of the things that was particularly concerning to me after coming to Canada was the number of Black, male students who were in remedial classes, who were not succeeding, who would be hanging out in the corridors. What that did for me, was to make me want to inspire, make a difference in their lives, providing them with high expectations. Let them know that they didn’t have to settle for this. Let them know that they could be both Black and successful.

He felt students were shunted off into essential classes then reflected:

I do not want to say workplace here, because some of our students can be extremely successful in college courses and there are some in non-
traditional occupations, especially for our students who may not be academically inclined. For example, I have heard of miners with limited skills who can make up to $200,000 per year. In the culture where I am from, people tend to look down on certain jobs, trades, electricians, plumbers, drivers, but these can be very rewarding careers for students.

Another teacher participant also noted the large number of students in Special Education classes from one school and his concerns for the way students are time-tabled into low level classes. He also noted that students do have the tendency to rise to the expectations that are laid out for them. This participant is concerned about the lack of representation of Black Male students in the ‘U’ courses. He stated:

I have always worked in areas where there is significant percentage of Caribbean students. I have always wondered why these guys do not engage more in the harder disciplines. I do not see too many Black boys engage in challenging courses. As a ______ teacher, I have always gone to them to encourage them to try some challenging courses. I tell them, you have the ability. When I see ability and recognize ability I go to the kids and encourage them to change their stream to more challenging streams. I am not sure if it is implicit or explicit why most of these boys are in the applied or college stream classes. I think there isn’t enough representation for our Black boys. Most are channeled into the college and applied streams – not that there is anything wrong with those streams.
This teacher participant continued this theme further when he spoke of Special Education placement and the over-representation of Black, male students in these classes. He stated:

I remember hearing some data from a school in this neighbourhood that there were some six hundred students in their Special Education department. Most of them were Blacks too, and I wondered how the tests were administered [referring to placement tests for Special Education]. Special Education deals with learning challenges, and with that you have high achievers and learning challenges; but it is the latter, not the former where you have the Black boys. I wonder whether these tests don’t inherently discriminate against these Black boys. In my school for example, about 30% of the school population and these are just rough estimates and about 60% of the Special Education population are Black boys. Some of these boys I teach and I am actually stunned that they have been identified as special learners. So it is really curious for me and I wondered how are these tests designed? Are there Ethno-cultural factors that are taken into consideration in the evaluation of these students? Are the indicators reasonable for the IPRC referral process? My gut feelings are that it cannot be so, because I lived in another setting where boys enjoyed the academic like I did … It is striking that one group is so heavily represented in Special Education. There got to something there. I do not have Special education qualification, but it is rather curious though.
It is the contention of another teacher participant that the placement of Black, male students in lower end streams, college level courses and Special Education classes also correlates with boys’ underachievement. He opined:

Their representations in a lot of those lower end streams will be like a revolving cycle. There is a low expectation of them which breeds a low expectation for themselves, and which does not give them a need to be successful.

He is further concerned about the low quality of some curriculum areas. Thus he suggested:

I think one of the biggest disadvantages to youth, Black males, is the whole idea of Credit Recovery and Credit Rescue. There are a lot of non-Black teachers who believe if you were to raise the academic level of the school you would have to dumb down the curriculum for black students to achieve.

He also made the point that at times it is these students who choose the lower level classes.

Interestingly, one administrator sees great value in Credit Recovery and Credit Rescue programs. He contended:

One other ministry initiative that I personally really like is the idea that when students attempt the course for the first time and they fail, they can get the chance to recover those credits [Credit Recovery]. Closely related to that is the fact that during the course if a student is in jeopardy of failing a course in the traditional setting, we can also re-timetable them into
Credit Recovery and Credit Rescue classes, to rescue those credits. The fact that in these classes they can now recover two or more credits that they were failing … is very good. This tends to boost the morale of students.

This administrator is also in support of some form of student choices in terms of time-tabling. He mentioned “as I got into leadership position, we do our best to time-table students into courses of their highest interest in the first semester so that the momentum will carry to the second semester into courses that they do not like.”

This concern with the issue of time-tabling and placement relates to the role of Guidance. Another teacher participant who had most of his education in the Canadian school system remarked that students are not appropriately guided when they are making course selections. He stated “a lot of students who are not demonstrating the skills, work well at the academic level, but are placed initially in the applied program.” He further stated that there is also a lack of essential courses for some students and “students’ interests and skills are not taken into consideration when doing time-tabling.” Additionally, he said that the Guidance system is also involved in this process as “students are placed into programs without the support they need.” He also mentioned that it would be helpful to “do initial assessment of students’ skills and knowledge prior to placement. If you are able to know their weaknesses and of course their strengths and interests before placing them in classes would be helpful.”

This teacher participant continued his perception on placement and early identification of needs. He suggested that there is also the need to have early identification to determine gap analysis. Specifically, he advises that the system should
“have structures in place to help those students with interventions, to help the students work up to a level to sufficiently function well academically.” He reflected that “early identification is necessary to identify and remediate the problem” and that it is also important that structures be put in place in terms of “support structures for identification of gaps, provide specific interventions, direct help … and strategies to help the students.” He is also wary of the labels attached to students since “a label tends to define, to confine and to limit students.”

It is the perception of another teacher participant that parental involvement is important in the educational placement decisions for their children. He contended:

I don’t necessarily think having Black, male students in Special Education and lower level classes is really a school issue. I think that comes down to, especially parents, because a lot of those students who are in those low level classes are children of parents who went through the school system. If many other households can advocate for their child to be in an academic stream, even when we see that their skill levels do not suggest an academic understanding. If they can advocate for them, there is no reason why any other parents, especially black parents who have grown up in this system and know the importance of streaming … deemed they should be there.

Closely aligned to special education and low level placement of Black, male students are the expectations held by teachers for these students.
Low Expectations of Students.

The participants also have the perceptions that structurally there are low expectations for Black male students. Low expectations determine educational outcome, since students have the tendency to rise to the expectations that are laid out for them. The low expectations that teachers hold for Black, male students is also closely tied to way students are placed in courses.

One teacher participant noted that there is the “belief by some teachers that some of the students do not have the ability to do well genetically in certain subjects and may not be able to do well because of lack of academic foundation”. They also believe that the social economic structure of the environment in which the students is raised does not help to develop good literacy, numeracy skills, or a good solid foundation. Additionally, he suggested that “some teachers genuinely believe students are not cut out for academic success” and generally, there is a “sense that if the child is from a poor neighbourhood, there is lower expectation.”

After arriving in Canada, as a student, this participant noted:

A lot of teachers were satisfied just by me doing satisfactory work. But for me, I was not satisfied. I would go to the teachers because I was keen and motivated. ... A lot of teachers were taken a back by the fact that I was keen and motivated. This low expectation also presents challenges for Black, male teachers as students respond accordingly.

Another teacher participant mentioned: “One of the challenge is the sense that somehow there is low teacher expectation and Black is equated with mediocrity.” He also noted that:
Teachers’ perceptions of certain communities are reflected in the response teachers give to the students. They may have lower expectations for the students based on their stereotypes of certain communities. In this way, the system may contribute to lower expectations for some of these students.

The placement of students into particular courses is also indicative of the expectations that educators have of them. An interesting frankness from this administrator participant is his acknowledgement that when dealing with Black students, he stated:

I will sometimes play into the stereotypes and will use lines such as – the system is predicting that 10 years from now, you’re going to be a bum. I do not believe this, but I find myself using lines like that to get the young people to see that at the end of the day, they need to make the right choices and not to live up to the expectations of society.

Another teacher participant also had the perception that there is low expectation of Black people in general. He suggested:

I think the expectations of Black people, Black youths, if you want to say specifically, Black, male students is very low. Maybe low is not a good term. The expectations are very simplistic and probably in a lot of situations they don’t expect very much. People in general have a low opinion of us. I would say that it is also true for the Black community itself, their expectations of themselves is also very low.
It is also interesting to note that students are judged not only for their academic achievement, but by their appearance. The above participant explained, “Black male students, just by their appearance alone, in certain people’s eyes is already an indication for their low achievement and potential failure and underachievement.”

**Resource Gap and Educational Outcome.**

An important structural feature that the participants perceive is the role of inadequate resource to the educational outcome of the students. This issue met with mixed reactions from teacher participants and administrators. One teacher participant saw the resource gap as one of the structural variables that affects learning outcome. His perspective was:

> I definitely think school resources are issues in certain communities and that is quite obvious. For example, Riverdale Collegiate which is just down the street from another high school in the same community. The population is quite different. One is obviously more updated and more physically appealing, while the other is dilapidated and quite run-down. If you are in a run-down environment, you are not going to respect any aspects of environment, whether it leads to disrespecting adult leaders in that building. The state of the environment, definitely shape the state of your mind.

This administrator in responding to questions on Educational structures felt that adequate funding for resources were being funneled into this community. There is a budget of $200,000.00 – $300,000.00 for his school, plus an additional funding that most schools do not get. Money is used to provide extra support programs such as Child and Youth
workers, Attendance Counsellors, and Leadership opportunities. These supports are important in catering to the whole student. He stated:

I happen to believe eventually, some of these things do make it possible for any kids who really want to make good choices, who want to get a good education to do so. So the point I am making is that the system do some good things to level the playing field for our kids.

He also mentioned extra allocation of staff to needy schools. “Let’s say two schools, one in this area with one thousand students and one in ______ with one thousand students we are more likely to get more teacher allocation here, just because we are in a needy neighbourhood.”

Inadequate funding must be considered as an underlying factor for the conditions of underachievement. Often new policies are implemented without adequate assessment of the full cost needed to effectively support and sustain the success of the program. Lomotey (2010) supports the notion that: “High poverty schools are more likely to have inadequate funding, unsuitable learning conditions, and fewer resources” (p. 352).

The adage that education is costly, but ignorance is more expensive is applicable to this resource problem, as the cost to society will be greater if some students are left undereducated and are underachieving, since they will only be able to make minimal contribution to the society, or the society may have to incur the added expenses of supporting them financially, and socially.

Clearly, the need for adequate resource also impacts on the type of programs that are provided for the students and on the type of services that students receive. Resource is the fuel that drives the system.
Providing Alternative Educational Experiences.

It is also the perspectives of the participants that the people in the educational structure responsible for providing programs have been deficient in the need to consider alternative programs and experiential learning opportunities for these students. There seems to be an apparent lack of experiential learning opportunities. The big question is: Are students receiving the type of education that will help them forge ahead in the society? When students can frankly say, “I don’t think they service us well.” Then the answer to the question is ‘NO’. One teacher participant mentions his students’ concern on this issue. As this educator reflects on his setting there is a certain degree of uncertainty as to whether the educational needs of the students are being considered when they are placed in certain classes and the types of programs that do meet the needs of students. This participant reflected:

In my setting, one observation that is common among Black kids, not to say Black boys have an affinity for what I’m going to mention. They always say; sir, I don’t think they serve us well. When I asked for explanation, [students would respond] they put me in drama class, I would rather take auto-mechanic or a shop. These opportunities are not available in my school.

He further stated:

Maybe superintendents and stakeholders do not do a good job of determining the best way to service our clienteles in our area. This is not the larger portion of the population. Maybe I am sensitive to this lack, other students have said it, Caucasi ans, too. I think our model doesn’t
really – school model and structure and program and course offerings, we could make an effort to serve them a little better.

The suggestion was also made that superintendents and trustees should survey the community to see what the needs are and what our young people need. Speaking of this disservice, the educator suggested that:

They \{placement\} affect achievement, when they are not receiving the services they need. They become truants; others leave for the world of work with inadequate preparation. Those who return find it very hard to readjust. They have many challenges.

This educator isn’t sure if this disservice is done by default, but he stated “there isn’t sufficient thought put into the process of how we service our Black, boys. Whether Black boys have different needs from White boys, I do not know or from South Asian boys. I think they do ….”

Another teacher participant perceived that it is valuable to develop skills that are essential in the workplace and which can lead to economic success. In responding to students’ course selection process he stated:

I do not want to say workplace here, because some of our students can be extremely successful in college courses and there are some in non-traditional occupations, especially for our students who may not be academically inclined. For example, I have heard of miners with limited skills who can make up to $200,000 per year. In the culture where I am from, people tend to look down on certain jobs, trades, electricians, plumbers, drivers, but these can be very rewarding careers for students.
Another teacher participant mentioned that there was also a lack of essential courses for some students and “students’ interests and skills are not taken into consideration when doing time-tabling.” Importantly, alternative programs are also affected by inadequate resources.

In thinking of structural factors, students’ placement and programs provided are also critical to achievement outcome. This teacher participant believes that achievement is affected when students are not receiving the services they need. He further states that, stakeholders need to recognize that there are problems amongst Black, male students and should find steps to address them. He is “not sure if there is recognition, but the numbers don’t lie.”

**Cultural Themes**

**Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Curriculum.**

Participants perceived that there is a need for Culturally Relevant and Responsive Curriculum. This is a cultural issue with structural implications, since the curriculum is deeply embedded in the structural foundation of the educational process. It is the Ministry of Education and the school system that determine the framework for curriculum development. However, cultural relevance and inclusion is a cultural factor that requires separate consideration.

This administrator perceived that culturally relevant curriculum inclusion will depend on the onus of the teachers to implement the changes necessary in the curriculum. He articulated that:

At the end of the day, curriculum has to be inclusive and I think despite the best intentions of government, there is no way they can capture
everything. I think it is up to us as professionals. I give you an example, any teacher that is teaching in a school board where a large per cent of Black kids are underachieving and is teaching trigonometry for example, and does not start by making the point that it was Africans who invented trigonometry, such a curriculum is not inclusive. You will not find information like that in curriculum documents. Professionals will have to do the research….

He related the story that trigonometry was invented to stop people from killing each other every year after the flooding of the Nile. The floods affected land boundaries and people were protective of their land rights. Trigonometry was invented to chart out land boundaries to solve this problem and stop the fighting. He concluded “if you do not include such information as a math teacher you are failing our Black kids. Teachers need to know that one size curriculum doesn’t fit all students.”

It is the perception of another administrator that:

African students don’t know the value placed on education in Ancient Egypt 4,000 years ago. They don’t understand that their ancestors were great mathematicians, astrologers, builders, architects, chemists, and doctors. They don’t understand that. There’s no connection for them. Ok. This is relevant historical and cultural knowledge that would help to broaden curriculum structure.

He also mentions the need for professional development experiences in curriculum inclusion to help teachers to better meet the needs of the students.
This teacher participant perceived that cultural factors play an important role in the learning process. He stated that, “in terms of content area and subject area, curriculum has a cultural link, even if it is just the name of a person, or some situation.” He mentioned Toronto District School Board’s recognition of Black History Month, Asian History month and the encouragement of everyone to participate. However, he noted that there is also the negative side, such as in cosmopolitan boards where:

Not everyone gets recognized, and some groups feel left out. If we could find a cultural celebration that is more encompassing that would be the ideal. We could do a better job, although it is very difficult to do. But every tough problem has a tough solution.

Another participant remembers the importance of some cultural events in his life. Talking of his love of music, he remembered a steel band being brought to his school, and to date that has been one of his fondest experiences. He also remembered on his way from a field trip, they stopped to hear Harry Belafonte performed. He remembered how “exciting and inspiring” the experience was. He reflected:

I paid attention to the pianist in the back. I went home and say to my grandma, I want to play the piano and they sent me to piano lessons. So I always want to expose my charges to these types of cultural experiences, as they are inspiring. Doing music as a youngster, I developed goals and disciplinary habits.

Another teacher participant concurred on the value of an inclusive curriculum. He stated:
I also think that if students are to be successful they need to see a connection between what is being taught in the school and to see a connection between the curriculum and their own lives. So how does this thing that I’m learning in the classroom translate into success for me whether it be in terms of having a career, making money, progressing in life, achieving higher social status. School systems need to understand the students’ background and to cater to these, to be flexible in assessment and evaluation, to provide students with different learning tasks that reflect their different learning styles. And generally have high expectations that each student can succeed. This teacher participant’s perspective, while acknowledging the value of culturally relevant and responsive curriculum, seemed skeptical on curriculum changes and he echoed the view of a previous participant that changes must begin with the teachers.

He opined:

There have been a lot of things said and put into the curriculum and I don’t think that in and of itself it is going to change the achievement level of these particular students. You can’t legislate understanding, kindness, common sense or social responsibility. You have a curriculum whereby teachers can input almost anything they want. If I wanted to teach my class a whole lot of black content, the common curriculum says that I can do it. I don’t have to follow … historical practices. Right? So if I wanted for example, to teach a lot of black content in my history class, I could do
it. Why don’t more teachers do it, if they have a class that’s filled with students of a different racial background? I don’t know. You can’t legislate people’s motivation, you know. So I don’t know if there is anything you can do in changing the curriculum because the curriculum has changed many times. If you would take a look at it historically the changes that the curriculum has gone through, nothing has changed, [it] hasn’t gotten any better for black students, if you want to take a look at their achievement levels, if you want to take a look specifically at black male achievement levels. In fact it’s gone down, if you were to believe the research and the numbers …. So I don’t know if there is anything in itself in terms of curriculum orientation or pedagogy that can be done…. There are a lot of things in the curriculum that our students cannot identify themselves in…. I think that schools, teachers have the ability and the means to, you know, give a positive experience to every person that is in the classroom. It’s just not done for whatever reasons.

Another teacher participant’s perspective is to see curriculum integration that acknowledges all students’ experiences and one that enriches their cultural capital. He explained:

Definitely, curriculum needs to reflect the students’ culture. Students need to see a connection between the curriculum and their own culture. Of course that does not mean we do not provide diverse reading materials, diverse Canadian materials. Although our clientele may be Black boys we are not going to prevent them from gaining access to giving them cultural
capital or cultural currency. So when I say it is okay for you to use street language in your writing, but I will also insist that they also use Standard Canadian English because this is what they will need to use to succeed in the larger society. So one may start with the student’s culture, but one needs to offer exposure to other cultures and the way mainstream culture works and the skills to function in mainstream culture. Black students should be exposed to Shakespeare. Yes, a dead, white guy. This will give them the cultural capital that they will need to succeed in the Canadian society. One of the most important skills is the ability to read, write and speak using Standard Canadian English. If students are to be successful, they need to see a connection between what is being taught in the school, between the curriculum and their own lives.

The Role of Parental Involvement.

A strong perception of the participants is the value and effect of Strong Parental Involvement on Students’ Achievement. This teacher participant stated “I strongly believe that success or failure for many students is a result of the family or the home input or lack there of.” Referring to student achievement, this participant also wants to see more parental contribution. He stipulated:

For me, the bottom line comes down to what the homes sets up for them. There are many things the home can do to combat, maybe too strong a word, but to combat the lack of things they can identify with” in the curriculum.
Parental advocacy is perceived as important. Speaking of the large percentage of students in Special education, this participant stated:

I don’t necessarily think having Black, male students in Special Education and lower level classes is really a school issue. I think that comes down to, especially parents, because a lot of those students who are in those low level classes are children of parents who went through the school system. If many other households can advocate for their child to be in an academic stream, even when we see that their skill levels do not suggest an academic understanding. If they can advocate for them, there is no reason why any other parents, especially black parents who have grown up in this system and know the importance of streaming … deemed they should be there.

He is also mindful of the social economic status of these parents. He explained:

If you’re in a low SES – monetary circumstances is the main thing you are dealing with. Many times parents have to work 2/3 jobs. This leaves them very little time to deal with issues their children are facing in schools. I’m not making any excuse for anyone, but socio-economic status is a great indicator of future outcome for these young people.” In another context he states, ‘parents are caught up in the day to day struggles of providing for the family. This does not leave a lot of time to devout to their child’s educational needs.

Another teacher participant stated:
A lot of parents even if they are not educated realize that education is important and they genuinely want their children to acquire a good education. They may not be sure of how to help their child – may not read to their child, take them to the libraries or museums. The expectation is that the school will provide what the students need. Parents will participate and support field trips. Parental input is an important input and they are willing to support their child’s educational program.

The dynamics of school, parents and community relationship, as an integral part of the success for students is central in the perception of this administrator. He referred to his early experience on arriving in Canada as a graduate student:

I felt that not finishing was not an option. I now felt the weight of my community to finish to prove that that a Black person can do it,” and “to provide some role models for my own kids and also for other Black kids in the community.

He further elaborated:

There is this culture that we are beginning to build of getting parental and community involvement in the schools. That is a very good thing. In fact, some schools are beginning to organize Parents Academy to inform parents on how the school system works. Parents are given strategies on how to help their kids I think that is fantastic. I would like to see educators deal with students keeping in mind some of the barriers that the students may be facing. One of the ways to get teachers sensitized to that is to push towards parental and community involvement n schools. If we understand
our communities, I think we will see our students in a different light as opposed to labelling them as bad. My definition of community actually means the parents of these kids, their immediate family members and their immediate friends. This community has to expect more from the kids. We should not have to make excuses for the kids.

The role of parents and community support for educational success is clearly supported by these educators. It is apparent that they affirm the African proverb that states that it takes a village to raise a child.

**The Need for Positive Role Models.**

The issue of providing role models for learners is also another cultural theme that has strong structural implications. The participants gave their perspectives and strongly see the need for positive role models for Black, male students. This teacher participant remarked, “I never had the opportunity to see a black, male teacher during the elementary years.” This remark was made with a sense of regret and loss. Positive role model is a crucial aspect of any learning environment. This is especially an important issue for many Black, male students who may live in fatherless households.

Another teacher participant in relating his dealings with Black, male students, stated:

I felt some of my Black boys perhaps had some problem with a male authority figure and showed defiance in some situations. As an adult and a professional I adjusted my approach. Okay, I am in charge of you, but I’m not against you. I tried to make it very clear that I’m the teacher, and I will be fair. I’m here to help you to learn and prepare you for the next stage of
your life. I do this in an informal way – small talk, humour that is appropriate, street language. As a coach I tried to bridge the gap and help them from another angle. I hang out in the halls with them. I think I have in my arsenal things I can use to reach them. It pays off and I feel a measure of success.

Positive role models contribute an important cultural component to the learning experiences for these students, and can contribute to positive educational outcome for these students. This participant also leads out in a, Boys to Men Program … “a mentoring initiative where teachers mentor males in every aspect of their lives.” Boys are encouraged to understand the importance of education through academic counseling. They are taught values such as: honesty, thoughtfulness, fairness, punctuality. The program also provides field trips, workshops with mentors from the community, resume writing and volunteer opportunities. There are monthly sport activities and yearly gala, where students must dress formally, demonstrate appropriate table manners. He reflected “someone rallied for me and fought for me.” Thus, this participant is playing a vital role as a mentor and as a role model for the students.

The importance of having positive, role models to counter the impact of negative media images are brought out in this scenario from one participant. He notes that the impact of negative media messages adds to further marginalization. He noted:

I already say when they flip on that television the images they see of certain races are not very flattering. These people are the ones who are going to go to school and become teachers. They are going to come into the classes with these biases and until they learn to leave these biases out,
they are going to only expect Black kids to either shoot a basketball or shoot a gun. There has to be cultural shifts. I am not saying that it is everybody that does this, but enough of them think like that. It may not be intentional, but that is their world view and that kind of world view needs changing, because that is actually what makes it very dangerous because they do not even know they are doing anything wrong, when all they can expect of these kids, if they can shoot a ball or if they can shoot a gun.

Another teacher participant echoed this perception held by some teachers as he related an incident between a Black, male student and a White teacher. This participant believed that the historical impact of slavery is still evident. In the past Blacks were perceived as “lesser people in the sense of who we are, our character, our ability. As a result we are patronized a lot.” This is his gut feelings, which he thinks could be inaccurate. Some teachers as a result of this perception are unable to separate feelings from produced work. He gave the experience of one student who believed he was marked harder than the other students. Another student became rowdy during a soccer practice and the teacher “barked” at the student. The student retaliated. The teacher wrote a lengthy report stating: “I have a bad feeling about this boy. I guarantee that by grade 11 he will be locked up. ..” This teacher without understanding the student’s situation judged him based on his gender, family and home background and his SES status.

As a result of these incidents this teacher participant took his responsibility as a role model and mentor very seriously. He encouraged the student to apologize to the teacher but that teacher wanted the youth to be cut from the soccer team and was actually angry with the coach for not dropping the student from the team. This participant
supported and mentored that student. He was happy to report that the student is now in his third year at university. As he talked about this student with pride, he stated that he wouldn’t be surprised if the young man became a lawyer.

Another participant mentioned his role as a teacher and mentor. He said:

> In my classroom I treat my students equitably. I try to use culturally sensitive material, but beyond that an important principle in my class is equity. I try to treat all my students fairly. I try to give all of them the same opportunity. I try to help my students to understand that they can succeed in spite of gender or social class …

This teacher participant inferred that the Toronto District School Board must be implicated in this matter of providing more role models. He opined:

> Well, I think the first thing you have to look at is the fact that in terms of sheer numbers you just do not have enough Black teachers in specific environments. I don’t necessarily think that schools should be examined at the local level. If this is what your population is you should cater to that population. If it’s a high number of black students the staff should reflect that, their teachers should reflect that. If its brown students it should be reflected. The Board has the ability to do that. The Board knows the importance of that; they’ve done studies that show that it is necessary and also possible. Now, so we know that on a Board level that’s not going to be done, so I just think in terms of sheer numbers you just don’t have for whatever reasons, enough black teachers in place, in places where they’re needed.
This administrator was very proactive as a teacher and began a mentoring project with very positive outcomes. He reflected:

So during my time in the classroom and working with students young black males didn’t do well in school. We had a situation at ______ for 4 years no young black male graduated and went to university. And I thought this was preposterous. I was shocked to see year after year students walked across the stage to graduate and get awards and there were no black males making it to university and we realized that later and decided to take steps to support and encourage more young, black males to succeed at school and to make it to university. This started out by giving them the incentive with scholarships…. I’m telling you as a black educator, my success parallels theirs and is intertwines with theirs. So I started a book club for young black males and every lunch-time they came to read with me and we read a book and discussed and shared the contents of this book. I wanted to say that out of my work with the ESL Department as a new teacher I produced a Ph.D. [graduate] who came to see me to tell me that what motivated him was when I brought in the autobiography of Dr. Martin Luther King to the class and it was the first book he was ever interested in and it was the first time he got hooked into the school.

Clearly, these educators see their role not only as educators, but as mentors and role models for their students.

Students’ Attitude and Achievement Outcome.
A very critical perception of the participants is the role of Black, male students’ attitudes and its impact on their learning outcomes. One teacher participant’s view is that immigrant students appear to be more motivated about education than Black students born in Canada. He articulated:

The challenge comes particularly from the North American Black students who seem to lack motivation, who seems to accept the line of least resistance and who seems to be the architect of their own failure. Students have become disenchanted with the educational system. They do not want to put out the effort and for whatever reason they do not want to grasp the opportunities that are being presented... These students who are underachieving are probably their own worst enemies. They are underachieving because they have settled into a pattern where they have chosen popularity over utilizing their own intellectual potential. A lot of the underachievement has to do with the Black males themselves, not making use of the opportunities being offered by the educational system...

I have heard the story often of the Black students who do not want to be academically successful because he would not accepted by his peers or fit in readily by his society.

Another teacher participant’s perspective concurred with the opinion of the previous participant. He stated:

I don’t think it’s an accident that many newcomers achieve higher academically … and at a higher rate and do better than a lot of students who were born and raised in Canada. One thing is, in many of the social
structures of newcomers they are taught to respect authority figures, namely teachers and community elders. There is a strong family structure which plays a big role in identity and in the long run how much self-esteem and confidence one has in themselves which played a big role in how you perform in school and in society …

The attitudes the students bring to the educational setting is one of the cultural factors that will help them to benefit from the educational process. This teacher participant saw a dual approach to achievement – celebratory and on the other hand coolness. He stated “I have given back work to students and I see them celebrate because they have achieved well in class and the rest of the class would scoff at it.” Another perception is that some people do not seem to value educational success. As this participant reflected:

I can’t understand that being successful is not cool and it is more cool to pick up some bad habits – be it truancy, don’t go to class, don’t follow the dress code. There could be some issue here that could be a source for some doctoral dissertation…This is a very different mindset from the one I grew up with, where we were very competitive with our peers. We were very good friends and we studied together, but we always wanted to outperform each other. I find this doesn’t exist here. The kids who come up here [referring to the students from the Caribbean] have it, but they seem to lose it by Grades nine and ten.”
He continued by comparing the present education setting with his own educational experiences. He remembered his love for learning and the support he got from peers. He stated:

Some rallied for me and supported me and encouraged me to investigate other settings where I could progress academically. Some of these guys became doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, plumbers too. I am not discounting any vocation, they are all important.

Personal responsibility for one’s action is a valuable character trait. One teacher participant described this as a disciplinary process called habits of mind. He explained:

Well, habits of mind have to do with for example, like having a goal and then working a little bit each day within some type of routine to the fulfillment of that goal. And, again I think that probably starts at home. Many students of all different make ups they have a goal. They have a goal. They have a plan. … they know what they want … they act accordingly, they work towards that goal, the fulfillment of that plan. I think that in many situations, many students do not have a plan and I think that’s a part of their disciplinary issues, because if you don’t have a plan then you’re just wandering. And if you’re wandering, well you know what happens, you will walk in many different paths and obviously once in a while, you’re not going to take the right path.

One administrator pointed to the number of conflicting factors that can impact students’ attitude. He stated:
I just want to go to Ron Edmonds, that brilliant educator from the 60s who said that we already know all that it takes for students from every background to learn and that we should be concerned that we have not used all these methods so far. And I’m not saying it word for word but this is what you are saying. We should be concerned that we have not taken advantage of all of the opportunities we have at our disposal to help all students to be successful, instead we continue to doing research and all of that. But we already know what it takes. Now so far as black males are concerned, they need more support. They need support in a setting where they’re motivated by teachers to succeed. And we have been saying this for the last 30 or 40 years especially in the _____ area, and in Ontario on the whole. There’s research after research which clearly outlines some of the challenges that young black males face in the educational system and in society. And we need to implement or use some of these suggestions to see what would happen, to see how we can support them so that they can do better academically.

It is the perception of another administrator that educational choices should come with consequences. His early educational opportunities were backed with parental support. There were consequences from parents if school work was not done. He argued “If you did not do your work at school, you had some serious consequences to deal with. You either did your work at school or had other menial duties forced on you at home ….” This is contrasted with the Canadian system, which he described as ‘top notch’, where students have the right to choose. In his opinion students make wrong choices:
Quite a number of our kids, and unfortunately a number of our Black boys make the choice to leave their education and the only thing anybody can do is to talk to them. Get the kids to take more responsibility for their learning, in spite of the challenges they may face. Racism does exist, but only to a minimal level that our kids should be able to achieve, in spite of these situations.

The attitudes that students have to their educational achievement continue to be debated in the educational forum. Some puzzling questions include:

- What is the reason new immigrant students are more likely to be academically motivated, than Canadian born Black students?
- Why hasn’t the educational system learned from research and from experiences over the last thirty years?

**Minority Voices.**

There were also some Minority perspectives that were not included as these were not fully elaborated or supported or contradicted by other participants. These included the following perceptions: One teacher participant mentioned a study that suggested starting school later may help improve students’ cognitive processes. Another teacher participant responding to the question of school quality articulated the view that it is the teachers who contribute to the quality of the schools. He further explained that in the more affluent areas, where there are less Black students in those schools, the quality of the schools are better than in areas where there are large congregation of Black students. He then asked a pertinent question: “Does this translate to the same level of service for students in all areas?”
One administrator participant also mentioned the idea that students are given too much decision in the choices they make for their educational future. The value placed on Black, male students in the school, especially the students’ role as athletes was also a minority report. Again, this participant questioned: “Is this their racially appropriate space?” The perception was also held by one teacher participant that some minority administrators who were in position to make changes to help the students were reluctant to do so, and were more interested in maintaining the status quo of the school rather than implementing changes. These views were not part of the major themes, but they are worthy of mention and may be subjects for further research as they could have implications for the issues that inform this dissertation.

**Conclusion.**

Importantly, there were differences of opinion on certain themes such as the availability of resources and the ways in which parents should be involved. These differences should be viewed as critical; but in this study the differences did not show marked disagreement. Such differences also require further study and conversations around the ways policies are developed, financed, implemented and evaluated. Differences of opinion can also become divisive as they can lead to lack of support and full implementation of programs.

Structural and cultural factors should be viewed as determinants in the successful educational outcomes for students. Some structural factors also have cultural implications and vice versa. These are indications that structure and culture are closely intertwined and both must be considered when working for successful educational outcome. Therefore,
one cannot assume that the sameness of educational opportunity equals equitable opportunities. As Gay (2005) reminds us:

… the sameness of educational resources for diverse individuals and groups does not constitute comparability of quality or opportunity. To believe that they do is to assume that students of African, Latino, native, Asian and European origin are identical in personal, social, cultural, historical and family traits.’ (p. 228)

Educators must therefore be willing to consider structural and cultural factors as key issues in any educational setting.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications of the Research

This thesis sets out to examine the structural and cultural factors in the educational system that significantly impact on the achievement outcome for Black, male students. It sought to situate the problem of underachievement for Black, male students within the context of the educational system and its response to the needs of marginalized students. The primary aim of the research was to gain the perspectives of Black, male teachers on these issues and to use their perceptions to understand an empirical matter. By utilizing a Phenomenological approach, it was able to understand the framework and context within which educators and students make sense of the learning experience. As teachers examine pedagogical problems through practical inquiry into their work, they are able to provide perceptions that can help to bring about more authentic school reform. Dewey (as cited in Kincheloe, 1991) saw teachers as “the most important inquirers into the successes and failures of the school” (pp. 46 – 48). By asking these Black, male teachers their perceptions of the problem of underachievement, it acknowledges that they have the knowledge to make professional decisions about their work.

The problem of high underachievement rates for Black, male students is a phenomenon that continues to puzzle and challenge educators. Specifically, the central questions that frame the development of this study are:

- What are some Black male educators’ perspectives of the role of systemic, structural and cultural factors that contribute to the problem of underachievement and school failure for Black, male students? Were these the same barriers they faced and how did they overcome these barriers as students?
• How might the narratives of these Black male educators both challenge and support multicultural approach to curriculum that purports to particularly address the problems facing Black, male students?

This research implies that teachers and administrators in the educational system have much to offer in understanding Black, male students and the problem of underachievement. The participants in the research showed remarkable concern for the success of their students and they have a keen sense of what needs to be done. Their voices are informed by their professional experiences, practice, ethnicity, culture and their gender.

Some broad themes were gleaned from the perspectives of the participants and are perceived by them as important when examining the problem of underachievement for Black, male students. These themes have some implications for helping Black, male students to successfully navigate the educational structures and systemic barriers.

**Structural Implications**

**Early Educational Experiences.**

Among the structural factors, it was perceived that the early influence of White, female teachers may have some impact on the educational experience of Black male students. It may therefore be necessary for the educational system to intentionally focus on the early educational experiences of Black, male students and their relationships with their teachers. This may require re-training of teachers or more professional development workshops highlighting new appreciation for diversity, and particularly new ways to enhance gender education. The perceptions that the early impact of white, female
teachers impact on learning outcomes for Black, male students is supported by Henry Morgan (as cited in Kunjufu, 1985) argues that:

Upon entering school in primary grades, black children possess enthusiasm and eager interest, however, by the fifth grade the liveliness and interest are gone, replaced by passivity and apathy…. (pp. 6 to 7)

There is the need to examine what are the factors that change these students approach or to develop new ways to maintain and utilize the enthusiasm and eagerness that these students possess when they begin school. Maintaining and boosting students' readiness skills for learning may help to reduce early signs of underachievement.

The examination of the impact of white, female teachers on educational outcome for Black, male students should not be regarded as an assignment of blame. The reality is that white, female teachers have been the largest sector of the teaching force of the educational system for a long time and especially during the early years. This significantly affects learning outcomes since these teachers may be expecting female-like behaviours from these students –sitting still, being docile and cooperative. These teachers’ gender, race and culture may influence the outcome for these Black students. Dei (2000) posits that “critical educational practitioners have noted that white teacher often resist acknowledging their privilege and a priori assumptions regarding minority cultures” (p.19).

A question that might merit further study is: To what extent are the expectations of these White, female teachers geared towards girls? Importantly, if expectations for male students are overly influenced by feminine perspectives it may be viewed as an equity issue. The early educational experiences of these students appear to be critical to
their educational outcome. Since our Black, male students are apparently at risk from an early age, a strong support system must begin at this early stage. It will also be incumbent on the leaders in the teacher educational programs to help prepare new teachers how to be sensitive to gender roles, and especially male students from other racial and minority groups that may affect learning outcomes and be more careful in analyzing students’ responses so as to not “assume deficits in students rather than to locate and teach to strengths” (Delpit, 2006, p. 172).

These teachers accept the norms and behaviours of their group as normal and acceptable. As these norms are systematized, even non-dominant groups accept them as true. The main benefactor then becomes the dominant group. Since such acceptance gives them a privileged and powerful position and can be viewed as a form of racism (Rios & Stanton, 2011). At the same time the minority groups, and particularly in this study, Black male students are left at a disadvantage. Nieto (2005) also argues that the attitudes and actions of staff must also be examined as these factors may be “complicit in causing academic failure” (p. 405).

Intini, (2010) in Maclean’s Magazine, mentions the differences in the brain of the male and female kindergartners. The article points to a study that shows the brain development of a five years old male is about equivalent to that of a three and one-half year old girl. “This means most girls start school with a very significant academic advantage: they can sit still longer and self-regulate better and earlier” (Intini, 2010, p. 68). Thus, it is important that consideration be given to the developmental stage of students. The early stages of the educational process are critical. Dei (2000) reminds us
“disengagement from schooling is a process that often begins in and through a child’s early educational experiences” (p. 21).

**Special Education and Placement**

Another structural theme that the participants perceived to be a contributory factor was the high level of placement of Black, male students’ in low level classes and Special Education classes. The perspective was also held that placement in special classes is further compounded significantly by the generally accepted belief in low academic expectations for Black, male students. These participants believe that placement and expectations help to determine educational outcome, since students have the tendency to rise to the expectations that are laid out for them. Expectations for all students should be based on the premise that every student is capable of high achievement when they are given time and necessary support to build their skills.

There is support in the literature for the perspectives of the participants in this study on the placement of Black students, especially those placed in special education classes. According to Foster (as cited in Solomon and Levine-Risky, 2003) structural factors lead to inequity and these inequities affect racial minorities in the way their academic potentials are evaluated, the type of curriculum they receive, the social relationships and career choices that are made. Wynn (2007) also supports the fact that there is over-representation of Black male students in Special Education. He states:

> The over-representation of Black males in special education, on athletic teams, and in suspensions, together with their under-representation in gifted programs, on the school honor role, and in college matriculation shapes attitudes and beliefs within every school community.” (p. 36)
Ahram, Fergus, and Noguera (2011) concur:

A vast body of research has shown that the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education is based largely on the practices and beliefs of educators, who in their formal and informal evaluation of minority students construct notions of ability and disability. Specifically, the over representation of Black and Latino students in special education suggests a convergence of two distinct processes: 1) assumptions of cultural deficit that result in unclear or misguided conceptualizations of disability and 2) the subsequent labelling of students in the special education through a pseudo scientific placement process. (p.2233)

There is much support for the idea that tracking and systematically placing Black, students in general and especially Black, male students in special education classes allows these students to lag behind. Burris and Garrity (2008) contend that most times schools sort and track students by ethnicity, social class and gender. These authors found that “the more the curriculum was “slowed down,” the wider the learning gap between high-track students and low-track students become” (p. 6). Such placement policies come with many negative results. Ahram, Fergus and Noguera (2011) highlight some of these:

- Disproportionality in the educational system raises concerns about the relationship between race and student ability and school equity issues.
- Overrepresentation of minority group in special education can be viewed as a modern form of segregation – separates students from general educational opportunities offered to other students.
• Disproportionate representation provides less access to rigorous and full curriculum and as a result less likelihood to enter post-secondary institutions.

• Overrepresentation in special education leads to low level employment.

• Socially and emotionally students have limited interaction academically mainstream peers. They are usually placed in restrictive settings with poor quality services.

• Special education labels can lead to stigmatization, and the designation does not normally change throughout the child’s schooling experience.

To narrow the learning gap will require a more rigorous and high quality curriculum for all students. Burris and Garrity concur, “success springs from providing all students access to a rich and challenging ‘accelerated’ curriculum” (p. V111).

Importantly, pride in the accomplishments of high achieving students should not negate responsibility for students who are struggling with lower levels of achievement.

The placement and time-tabling of students is a structural and systemic issue that needs examination for the ways the schools sort, tracks and select certain students for particular classes. This becomes an equity issue as such placements create labels of differences and it is not unusual for some students to internalize these differences. This can also lead to “academic haves and have nots.” Furthermore, where there is inequity, the message is based on the society’s view of what students are capable of achieving and how they should be treated. So when there is such a high concentration of Black, male students placed in special educational classes, this could indicate a perception that the students are not capable of high achievement.
Additionally, the length of time that the students spend in special education classes also needs to be reviewed. It may also be useful to review the quality of education given in special education classes and the deficiency in the special education curriculum. Furthermore, since special education is such a costly program, the expectation is that the results would be more promising.

**Low Expectations of Students**

The expectations meted out to students come with serious implications for their success. Cultural understanding or misunderstanding is a factor to be considered when expectations are made since it affects learning outcomes. It is important to note that low expectations can also lead to low student achievement and behavior (Ahram, Fergus and Noguera, 2011). Porfilio and Carr (2010) argue that “all students should be held to high academic standards ...” (p.31). Pre-assumed expectations can lead teachers to teach down to students and inadvertently contribute to students believing that they are unable to learn or even give up on the learning process. Delpit (2006) notes “because teachers do not want to tax what they believe to be these students’ lower abilities, they end up teaching less when, in actuality, these students need more of what school has to offer. (p.173)

Brathwaite and James (1996) also argue that “social construction of Black students as academically incompetent operated as a barrier to the realization of their educational goals” (p.19). As Wynn (2007) further explains:

Black male students are most often the least-likely students to be enrolled in academically rigorous classes. They rarely understand the relevance of academically rigorous course work or have the necessary relationship with
teachers, counsellors, and coaches to be encouraged toward … the complete range of academic enrichment programs ... (p.86).

This conception of black, male students’ ability also takes into consideration the students’ behaviour, actions and looks (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

Importantly, when an administrator has to resort to stereotype, reminding Black students that society does not expect much from them, to get his message across; it points to the fact that the expectations for these Black students are not very high in the society. When students internalize such beliefs it can negatively impact their educational outcome.

Another structural theme as perceived by the participants in the research is the impact of lack of adequate resource on student achievement. It is reasonable to assume that the schools with the students who have the most needs would be the schools that get the most resources. However, this does not appear to be the case. When lack of resource can be perceived as a contributing factor to students’ underachievement, it must be viewed as an equity issue that must be addressed. Resource improvement would include not only material resources, but provisions for staff professional development, technological improvements, special program considerations, more resource personnel where needed to support teaching and learning outcomes.

**Alternative Programs**

The need to consider alternative programs and experiential learning opportunities to meet the challenges that face some of these students, were also perceived as important structural issues. Since some students may not be university or college bound, they need to have valuable exposure to work study programs and apprenticeship experiences.
Kahne (1994) recommends broadening the scope of achievement to include alternatives to university and college education. He explains that although all students should be given the opportunities and encouragement to pursue college education and other academic goals, this should not be the primary goal for all students as there are other forms of achievements. Thus, the educational system has the responsibility to help these students find success in their chosen fields. Noddings (as cited in Kahne, 1994) states:

- Children who are successful in [school] are prepared by that very achievement for further academic excellence and positions of leadership.
- But children who may someday be excellent trades or artisans are “prepared” for those endeavors by failure in schools… Must our mechanically and artistically talented children suffer twelve or more years of failure or near failure before they are to find [an alternative compatible with their interests and talents]? (p. 241)

When such experiences are added to the curriculum, students will have more options and may be more willing to accept the notion that schools can help them to prepare for their future as workers and contributors to the economy of the society. Experiential and job readiness programs should be viewed as valuable and important additions to the curriculum as these may help some students to see the relevance of schooling to their future. Glaze, Mattingley, and Levin (2012) explain “alternative programs can play a role in an overall approach to greater equity” (p. 28). At the same time, these authors warned that since the majority of these students will continue to attend the regular schools, alternative schools or programs do not absolve the regular
system from making the effort by finding new ways, or modifying programs to provide successful educational outcome for all students.

It is also important that educators and other stakeholders begin to listen to the voices of the students. Students’ voices are very important since usually they are the “silent recipients” of schooling. Cooper (1996) sees students’ perspectives as providing valuable insight into the teaching and learning process. By listening to students’ voices a way is provided for them to impact valuable decisions that affect their lives. Attempt to develop full school service. For students should be done properly and after studying the needs of the school. Dryfous (as cited in Taylor & Whittaker, 2009) sees such schools as “schools in which quality education and comprehensive social services are offered under one roof [and] have the potential to become neighbourhood hubs, where children and families want to be” (p.49).

The real issue at present is that the educational system is not working for all students (Braithwaite & James, 1996); (Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac & Campbell, 1995). Thus, as the society evolves, the educational system needs to make the necessary changes to accommodate the evolving needs of the society.

If the students are not receiving the right type of education they need, this means that they will not be prepared to meet the needs of the job market. An under-educated and untrained youth work force will also place an added burden on the society not only in the economic sense of being under-employed or un-employed, but also adds to the sense of disenfranchisement that Black students are already experiencing. Lomotey (2010) contends that on the continuum of poverty to wealth, students’ location affect issues of education, parenting, leisure and consumptions.
Importantly, the structural processes of delivering education affect different student group differentially, and by definition impacts Black, male students significantly. Groups such as African Canadians have been defined as different, as the “other”, and as being distinct from a “we”. As a result of this distinction, there are apparent different educational aims and practices expected for this group. Significantly, Freire (as cited in Nieto, 2005) states every educational decision is accompanied by an ideological framework. These decisions come with assumptions about “the nature of learning, about what particular students are capable of achieving, about who should be at the center of the educational process” (p. 403). Importantly, these assumptions are also communicated to students directly and indirectly. Nieto also notes that “… student learning can be positively influenced by changes in school policies and practices that affirm students’ identities and that are part of systemic school reform measures” (p.401).

Generally, one overarching implication as inferred by the participants for structural consideration is the need for personnel involved in policy developments and other educators to acknowledge that rigid, structural policies, although traditionally have offered stability for a homogeneous group of students, some aspects may need restructuring to accommodate and facilitate the new diversity of student population and their multiplicity of needs. This is viewed as an equity requirement that acknowledges and respects the diverse nature of the emerging school population.

As the implications of the structural factors are examined, another concern is the educational system’s apparent slow, inflexible and non-responsive nature in making the necessary changes to meet the needs for this particular group of students. As one teacher participant stated:
Any system doesn’t change because certain members, especially the least powerful members of that system want change. They change because they see change as beneficial to them. So what benefit is it for them, for the current educational system to make changes that are going to see a higher rate of Black, male rate of success? Let me give an example, they saw a benefit in going after females... Do they see a benefit in doing the same for Black male students? I’m not sure that society as a whole has enough respect for them to do that.”

There is no doubt that marginalization of certain group continues to be a problem in the educational system. Importantly, while the educational system may want to improve educational outcomes for its students, it may not be willing to dismantle its structural base.

As I reflect on the implications for structural changes, I refer to Lloyd Mckell, Senior Advisor, Director’s Office (2011) draft report for Closing the Opportunity Gap. He cites the TDSB Equity Foundation Statement (1998):

We believe that equity of opportunity and equity of access to our programs, services and resources are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes for all whom we serve. The board is therefore committed to ensuring that fairness; equity and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs and services.

Mckell further points to the need to identify and remove institutional barriers and to the idea that the learners get the support and rewards they need to help them achieve success. It will also be necessary to provide the necessary financial and human resources and
collaboration with students, parents and community groups in promoting equity and inclusion.

**Toronto District School Board’s Efforts to Improve Underachievement**

The participants also acknowledge the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) effort to make changes such as; decrease suspension and some progressive disciplinary practices, incorporate ant-bullying practices, implement safe schools policies, the effort to analyze data by demographic characteristics, the provision of additional staff as Literacy and Numeracy coaches, model schools and Student Success and Learning to 18 strategies, as move in the right direction. The move to incorporate more parental participation through the parents’ academy was also seen as a positive move. However, there is still much to be done such as attention to the concern about the level of racism that still exists in the educational system and the need to consistently focus on marginalized groups of students who are not achieving at their fullest potential.

**Cultural Implications**

Closely aligned to the structural factors are some cultural issues such as; the relevance of culturally responsive curriculum, the perception that strong parental involvement plays a critical role in students’ achievement was one of the important cultural themes evolving from the research, the absence of positive male role models for Black male students was also seen as strongly impacting on educational achievement and school success. Black, male students’ attitudes are also perceived as important contributing factors to the achievement and learning outcome for Black male students.
**Culturally Relevant and Responsive Curriculum.**

The need for Culturally Relevant and Responsive Curriculum is a cultural factor that comes with structural implications. As the society moves towards globalization, the curriculum must also reflect this world view. The perspective is held by the participants that the narrow Eurocentric views have dominated the curriculum for too long. A wider world perspective must be developed to incorporate and reflect the identities, experiences and culture of the diversity of learners who inhabit the schools.

Porfilio and Carr (2010) suggest certain considerations for curriculum inclusion.

- There is a need to determine the level on inclusiveness within the curriculum structure, its representation, the mindfulness of those in charge of decision-making process in formulating and developing content of cultural responsiveness.
- There is also a need to consider the adequacy of funding required to train staff, to ensure core cultural curriculum content, and the need to collect, manage and analyze data and accountability guidelines to ensure the best quality teaching and learning experiences.
- This entire process must also be monitored and reviewed. These factors have implications for successful curriculum integration.

In examining the value of culturally relevant and inclusive curriculum, there is also a duty to honour the historic foundations of curriculum structure and also an obligation for the curriculum practices to become more inclusive. By broadening the scope of curriculum development, it will enrich the learning process. The value of such wider educational experience is captured in the following quote from Dubois (as cited in Hansen, 2007):
I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line
I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men
and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves
of evening that swing the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of
star, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and
they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So
we wed with truth, I dwell above the Veil. (p. 56)

Significantly, some members of the group of students whose education forms the
basis of this study experience gaps in their historical knowledge, and a more inclusive
and culturally relevant curriculum can help to fill those gaps. Until more in depth
multicultural changes take place in curriculum, monthly festivals although filling a gap,
will continue to point to the failure of attempt towards curriculum integration. Therefore
one implication from this study is to support and nurture broader curriculum integration
or restructuring and to consider a re-theorized version of Multiculturalism.

Re-theorized Version of Multiculturalism.

The comments of the participants point to the failure of current multicultural
policies, to meet the needs of students. As Rios and Stanton (2011) suggest “even well-
meaning teachers have used multicultural education to pursue a superficial attention to
diversity in curriculum and instruction, via tokenism, in the curriculum or via an
assimilationist ideology” (p. 10).

Changes in curriculum structure and process require an evolving educational
framework to examine, operate and situate the issues minority students face. One
perspective that holds strong possibility for making a difference for Black, male students
is the re-theorized version of multicultural education proposed by Nieto, Bode, Kang and Raible (2008). This perspective comes with new understanding that acknowledges the fact that education and learning are situated in the midst of a seemingly complex and changing world of “multiple realities” and “multiple goals.” It expresses the view that the complex curriculum requires constant change and redefinition to meet the needs of diverse learners with varied experiences and needs. The work of these authors is instructive as schools move from their former homogeneous status to a more highly diverse group of learners.

**Failure of Current Multicultural Education.**

Before any discussion of the new re-theorized version of multicultural education it is worth reviewing some of the shortcomings of the current Multicultural policy. In 1971 a national policy of Multiculturalism was introduced in Canada. The intent was to move Canada from its assimilationist ideology towards embracing Canada’s multicultural diversity. Significantly, the educational system was expected to play a central role in disseminating multicultural ideas and incorporating multicultural values in the students. Ng, Staton and Scane (1995) state:

Accordingly, the educational system was targeted as the site from where multicultural ideas, and principles could be diffused among young Canadians. Students were perceived as the individuals most likely to be receptive to the new programs of educational pluralism and exposure to other, non-Western, cultures. (p. 2)

However, four decades later, the current educational system remains highly Eurocentric, especially in basic curricula structure. There is therefore a need to systematically
deconstruct this Eurocentric base. This is a task that must be approached with a sense of obligation and duty. It is fundamentally important to honor the basic tenures of the curriculum that has historically served the educational system; but there is also the duty to become more inclusive and responsive to non-dominant values and experiences.

Rios and Stanton (2011) argue that the current Eurocentric curriculum continues to colonize the minds of students. It devalues the students’ cultures and languages and views differences as deficiencies, rather than as strengths to be utilized to enhance the learning process. The use of the Eurocentric curriculum is “an on-going colonization of the mind. Importantly, often those who are teaching and those who are learning are not even aware that this curriculum is colonizing the mind”. (p. 25)

Thus, tentative approaches to include multicultural content through the additive approach, for example, have not done much to significantly change curriculum. Ng, et al. (1995) argues that this “strategy of adding diversity to the dominant school curriculum serves, paradoxically, to legitimate the dominant Western culture focus of educational arrangements …” (p. 37). Furthermore, the additive approach when seen as “foods and festivals” and is separated from the main curriculum as in African History Month, Asian History Month or any other “one-shot experience” devalues the real meaning of multiculturalism. This is not to say that these practices have no value and that they should be discontinued. However, they are only touching on the periphery of the curriculum and have no lasting impact on real learning.

Notably, the current multicultural policy does not address many of the issues affecting many marginalized students (Porfilio & Carr, 2010). It is also the argument of Rios and Stanton (2011) that “teachers may modify their teaching slightly to better meet
the needs of students, but much of the curriculum, assessment, and management approaches may not change significantly” (p.21).

Arguably, current multicultural policies have not significantly changed institutional practices; nor do they fully address racism, equity and social justice issues. Neither has the call for content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy been seriously implemented (Banks, 2004b). Furthermore, Nieto (2005) argues that:

Many people assume that multicultural education consists of little more that isolated lessons in sensitivity training or prejudice reduction, or separate units about cultural artifacts or ethnic holidays … If conceptualized in this limited way, multicultural education will have little influence on student learning (p. 403).

**Redefining Multiculturalism.**

It is the contention of Nieto, et al. (2008) that multicultural education be re-theorized. They recommend re-theorizing multicultural education by:

- pushing it beyond its traditional parameters of curriculum integration and cultural awareness to include such issues as multiple identities, curriculum in non-school contents, and different approaches to understanding race, culture, and community, among other issues. (p. 179)

Accordingly, Nieto and Bode (as cited in Rios & Stanton, 2011) expanded the following definition of multicultural education:

… a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the
pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the school’s curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that school conceptualizes the nature of teaching and learning. (p. 36)

This perspective examines who and what counts, accounts for race and identity, accommodates change in teaching and learning to include views in and outside the classrooms, incorporates wider social justice projects; and encompasses issues of gender, language, sexuality and other differences into the curriculum. Importantly, the connection between identity, community and diversity is central to move education from its ‘neutral’ position to a “multicultural and social reconstructionist” approach. A critical and social justice lens is important to facilitate the examination of the knowledge base of the curriculum and to understand the tension and contradictions surrounding curriculum.

**Racism.**

Racism becomes part of the central discourse and is not masked with ‘colorblind racism’ and does not regard racism as past. Historical, systematic and institutional racial inequality is addressed and colour-muteness – “an unwillingness or inability to engage in any conversations about diversity and difference” (Nieto, et al. p.189) is acknowledged. Critical discourse moves racism from its “thriving discursive underground in the classroom” to part of the primary discourse, where issues of differences, diversity and representation are openly discussed. It incorporates marginalized perspectives,
discourages potentially silencing attitudes, allows deconstruction of the dominant knowledge base, and is attentive to identity formation and expression.

**Identity Formation.**

Students’ multi-faceted identities – racial background, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, social class and group identities are respected. Accordingly, Meyer, Bevan-Brown, Harry and Sapon-Shevin (2005) contend that “we should create classroom environments in which children are comfortable revealing all aspects of their background and experiences that matter to them” (p. 363).

According to Nieto, et al. (2008) identity formation is complex, unstable and positioned differently, implicating gender and moving it from male-female dualism to include ‘trans’ and ‘transgender’ identity. Identity formation is further impacted by technology, creating multiple identities in cyberspace. Media images construct knowledge and compete with print-based experiences creating changes to be incorporated in curriculum reform.

Addressing these disparities is essential to improve achievement outcomes or prevent achievement gaps. Nieto, et al (2008) describes these disparities as “resource gap” or “lack of attention gap”, since availability of resource varies according to students’ demographics. Thus, the system helps to create the gaps when there are inadequate resources to help students to develop the skills they need. Students cannot be blamed for their underachievement when their needs are not properly cared for.

**Social Justice and Equity.**

A social justice, equity and critical approach helps students acknowledge and understand their multiple identities. Nieto, et al. (2008) contends that “education needs to
listen as students talk about their lives, their identities, and their communities” (p.185). Critical pedagogical practices provide a forum for examining inequities and developing social justice perspectives to deal directly and explicitly with racism, injustice, oppression, and privileging and perpetuating main-stream knowledge in texts and curriculum. Students will need critical thinking skills to help them talk about issues important to them. It is also a “diligent and skilful use of reason on matters of moral and social importance – on personal decision making, conduct, and belief.” (Noddings, 2006, p.32).

This builds on Dewey’s ideas of using “significant situations” and “conditions which stimulate thinking”; and Giroux’s idea of “combining the language of critique with the language of possibility” to make learning relevant, critical and transformative. New discourses is also valuable in “naming, performing, and questioning identities in order to address the multiple realms that teaching and learning bridges” in postmodern classrooms.

Nieto, et al. (2008) suggests that re-theorizing multicultural curriculum depends on actions of cultural workers – students, teachers and community members. Their experiences are to be incorporated into the existing paradigm relating curriculum to its broad, socio-political context, while helping students examine the multi-faceted nature of knowledge and identities. This approach is research- based. It focuses on youth’s views and narratives of themselves and others. It is trans-cultural with a global perspective.

This framework for curriculum allows new voices, while honoring previous multi-cultural histories and influences. It opens and sustains the discourse on identity, power, and inequality, making them ‘fluid’, ‘porous’ and “inviting and challenging
[students] to find ways to evolve to a higher, deeper, universal level within their everyday lives” (Forbes, 2004, p.34). This re-theorized version of multicultural education therefore, holds much prospect for being inclusive and centering all the histories, experiences, identities and cultures, of the diverse learners (Dei, 2000). This would examine the knowledge base of the curriculum, the content construction and the examinations of the tensions and contradictions that permeate current curriculum practices. Dialogue and discourse on racism, differences and diversity and representations would be openly discussed. This new approach would also respect the varied aspects of the students’ identities and experiences. It would view teachers, students and community members as cultural leaders working together to foster a new framework for curriculum.

The re-theorized multicultural approach is supportive of the themes evolving from this research. It acknowledges curriculum changes, community involvement, student identity issues, and incorporates both structural and cultural issues. This approach gives strong support for inclusion of students’ voices and opportunities to interrogate issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and racism. These are factors that can affect learning outcomes for Black male students. A re-theorized version of multiculturalism not only affects Black male students, but its impact will improve learning outcomes for all students.

Parent and Community Involvement.

Another cultural theme as perceived by the participants in this research includes utilizing parents as valuable resource in the educational outcome for their children. Although there has been some criticism of the role parents have played in their students’
educational outcome by some participants, there is no denying the fact that there has been a strong heritage of the value of education by Black parents. In the Caribbean for example, parents would sacrifice to help their children maintain educational opportunities and to view it as a pathway to upward social and economic mobility. This pipeline of the appreciation for the value of education as a vehicle to upward mobility seems to have been severed by coming to North America. There is therefore a need to recapture this respect and value of education. Further research would be necessary to understand what other options have replaced education as the path to upward mobility.

In terms of parental involvement and engagement in the educational system, parents may require support and help to navigate the system. There may also be the need to develop more strategic partnership where parents become more than advocates for their children. As the educational system and its staff work towards more parental and community participation, the words of Dr. George S. Dei (as quoted in a seminar on multiculturalism I attended, 2012) seem important: “Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists, it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.”

Admittedly, parents are able to counter many of the limitations placed on students when they become involved in their children’s educational endeavours and support and encourage them. But Brathwaite and James (1996) explain that in spite of other factors that may contribute to underachieving, “it is important to look at the school itself and persons charged with educating students, since it is here that we find the evidence of the barriers to their achievement” (p. 18). This does not discount parental input, but Wynn (2007) is mindful of certain restraints: “Black parents want to see their children succeed
academically, however, they are less likely than White parents to have a positive relationship with classroom teachers to ensure that this happens” (p. 92).

Families and communities are strong partners in the educational system. Epstein (as cited in Taylor & Whittaker, 2009) explains: “Partners recognize their shared interests and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better opportunities for students” (p. 46). Noguera (2004) also supports the idea that schools must become more responsive and supportive to students, parents and communities where they are located through the development of responsible and accountable partnerships. Effective parental involvement is one of the pillars of quality education for all students.

Importantly, low income and diverse families may have problems with being involved in schools. Many of these families have not developed a positive relationship with the schools due to unfriendly school climate and personnel. It is also observed that the type of involvement changes as students become older. However, this does not discount the high value parents place on the education of their children. The former Governor-General of Ontario, Lincoln Alexander, notes that the impact of his mother’s belief in education was her gift to him. He entitled his book *Go To School You are a Little Black Boy.* He wrote:

> Those words, her words, have been at the core of what I have accomplished in this life. She was a mere maid, but her knowledge and foresight transcended her station in life; she knew that accepting defeat was easy, but success was possible, and education was the vehicle to take you there. She was right, and it has. (p. 14).
School, parents and community partnership is valuable for successful educational achievement. This connection is important as “teachers often lack substantial and positive interactions with people different from themselves (Rios & Stanton, 2011, p.19). This connection must be forged as teachers work to break-down what Ford (2005) describes as Drive-by teaching. These are teachers “[d]riving into racial and ethnic minority communities, teaching students who are strangers, and driving out of the community immediately after school. (p. 390). Glaze, et al. (2012) contend:

There must be strong advocacy and encouragement for educators to serve as leaders beyond the walls of their schools. Schools exist within communities and are in strategic position to identify the needs of students, build alliances, and harness the will of community members to support learning (pp. 184-185).

At a recent conference, a presenter encouraged parents and community leaders to continue the advocacy they had started in the sixties since “those who shout the loudest are the ones who get the best results”. She used the African proverb: “If you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

**Role Models.**

“I never had a Black, male teacher while I was in elementary school”. These words from one of the participants in the study who was educated in Toronto was spoken with regret. Now, more than ever effort must be made to provide students with teachers who can act as strong and positive mentors and role models for them. This is especially true for the group of students that is the focus of the problem for this study, since there are many Black students from fatherless homes. While not replacing fathers,
positive, male role models can provide valuable support and mentors for many Black, male students. The Director of Education for the Toronto District School Board, Dr. Chris Spence’s promise to remedy this situation is an important promise that needs to be fulfilled. “I do recognize that there is a lack of positive Black role models as principals, teachers, support staff, administrators and counselors and I pledge to you that’s one of the things that will be on my radar as the director of education” (Spence, as cited in Fanfair, 2009). The Toronto District School Board must now move from recognizing the problem to proactively work to provide this valuable service to not only the Black male students, but to provide positive mentors for all students.

Students need positive role models. This is a deficit in the structural framework of educational system that has cultural implications. Students need these role models as examples to emulate and to provide some form of cultural understanding and support. There is support in the literature for providing role models for students. Porfilio and Carr (2010) support this need for cultural role models. They state: “The importance of racial minority teachers in diverse, as well as non-diverse, contexts is immeasurable, yet there are a number of obstacles to recruiting, integrating, retaining and promoting racial minority teachers” (p. 242). It may be necessary to use community pressure to encourage and support more young Black men to view teaching as a viable profession.

Teachers in general must also be sensitive to the ways their perceptions of certain groups affect the ways they deal with students. Delpit (2006) states that educators need to pay attention to perspectives that are different and “differences grounded in the values learned as an aspect of an individual’s ethnic identity” (p.144). Proefriedt (2008) also
notes that “… there are deeply rooted historical attitudes within our culture that have had extraordinary negative impacts on ‘outsider populations’ ” (p.45)

Importantly, male teachers must continue to view their roles first as educators, but this education must influence other transactions with students. The relationships forged with students are critical to their learning, and this relationship is especially needed for Black male students whose lives are surrounded with so many female influences. The educational system must also endeavour to provide incentives to attract and keep Black, male educators as it works to support this particular group of students.

**Student Attitudes.**

The perceptions have been given that the attitudes the students bring to the educational system affects their educational outcome and achievement. As a result, students cannot be cast as innocent victims in their education. There is a need to help students develop a sense of agency and determination to succeed academically even when faced with structural and systemic barriers. There is also a need to determine the value placed on the importance of Black, male students in schools. Are Black male students regarded in schools for their ability in sports or for their academic prowess? Lomotey (2010) contends, Black male “athletes are appreciated for their service to the school community – making the institution attractive to others – and for giving up a myopic preoccupation with academic achievement.”

A troubling question that has implications for this study is: Do Black, male students experience schooling as a “culturally subtractive” experience rather than an “additive” experience? This is important for consideration as structural forces have the ability to help determine the future outcome for students, if they conform to the
structures. However, students do resist and exercise forms of autonomy to create alternative pathways, especially when their cultural desires are not met. Gosine and James in Porfilio and Carr (2010) describe such student resistance as resistant capital. These authors state:

…such behaviours represent a dimension of community cultural wealth, that is, resistant capital, which for some youth represents a means of preserving a healthy racialized identity in the face of an educational system that devalues and fails to effectively accommodate them. (p. 50)

As this group of students struggle to preserve their self identity and cultural norms, it is imperative that the educational system make the effort to help them by making their history and experiences a part of the teaching and learning experience, and by helping them to see a connection between what transpires in the school and their personal and collective growth.

Thus, these students may be skeptical about their chances of forging ahead in the society, even though they may endorse education as a means of getting ahead. Ogbu (2000) succinctly states that these students may also attribute their economic and other difficulties to “institutionalized discrimination” and these are factors they believe will not disappear by doing hard work or acquiring an education. Since most may not be able to perceive the future pay-off from their educational efforts, they may never challenge themselves. Moreover, at times they are rarely given academic work that challenges their intellectual curiosity. Since “the fundamental causal factors of both success and failure lie in what is communicated to children in their interactions with educators” (Cummins, p. 252). It is worth bearing these factors in mind when thinking about students’ attitude.
Their anti-school attitudes may thus be used “as markers to be maintained.” These are some factors that lead Cummins (2000) to conclude that “underachievement is the result of particular kinds of interactions in schools that lead minority students to mentality withdraw from academic effort.” (p. 251)

McWhorter (2000) although not specifically relating to students’ attitude, may be instructive in understandings students’ attitude. Interestingly, the end of slavery did not see much change in the situation for the freed Blacks. According to McWhorter (2000) slavery severely “severed Africans from the models in their indigenous cultures of black people living lives of the mind” (pp. 137, 138). He further explains that no cohesive cultural traditions survived. He also states that “typical circumstance of slavery … so hindered the transmission of specific African cultures that the African heritage survived only as a subtle, generalized, background element in a new American-based mix processed as ‘black’ …” (pp. 137 – 138).

Arguably, many Black scholars have done significantly well in society, but there are not many Black students who have access to these scholarly achievements. Students’ notion of success may be more related to the Media, music and sport personalities. Many of these people have gained their successes without any real dedication to educational gains. Thus, the way masculinity is constructed in school and amongst youth is also related to class structure. Woods (1998) contends:

The long-term value of using one’s mind well and developing the skills to be a lifelong learner is difficult to convey to teenagers who see athletes make millions, watch television heroes ridicule their parents, or live in a home where no one holds a job. (p.61)
Forms of peer bonding are very important for these male students, especially for those who come from single family, female parent households. Such support also enhances the social capital of these students. However, students should be encouraged and taught how to deconstruct peer influences for their negative influence on their lives. Teachers also need to assess the ways they make accommodations to Black, male students. Are they accommodating failure or supporting effort and hard work?

Students should also be encouraged to celebrate the successes in their lives because many of them have far too little going on in their lives to celebrate. Their cultural mannerism needs to be accepted. It is interesting to note this participant’s comment about celebration. Because of the limited high school opportunities in Jamaica for example, students have to compete for these positions by doing local entry examinations. Successful candidates would have their names printed in the local newspapers and it would be regarded as honourable status, and one to be celebrated. In communities such as these education is also seen as a status symbol and the way to gain social and economic mobility.

In investigating the education system, it may seem apparent that students can become overwhelmed with the high school program where they are expected to make academic choices independently and without adequate counseling. Furthermore, students may be doubtful of the pay-off from their educational experiences. Thus, in determining the role of students’ attitudes towards academic achievement one must also assess the level of skills that students have developed and their self determination. Christenbury (2007) finds that “… students largely preferred not to commit to any sort of sustained intellectual engagement “(p. XV). Students may also need counseling about their
attitudes and ways to combat their thoughts and attitudes that may be hindering their educational process.

Boys also have social power which they may use to challenge and influence peers in negative behaviour. Fordman and Ogbu (1986) propose that “… African American students fear being ostracized by their peers for demonstrating interest in and succeeding in academic and other school related tasks.” As a result, they used ‘styling’ and ‘postering’ due to the fact that school is being viewed as an “alien and hostile place” (p.209).

According to Kebler (1993), cited in Frank and Davidson (2007), male students in high schools “routinely expressed and subscribed to different sets of beliefs about education” (p. 97). They make choices that reflect views about masculinity and which are understood “both individually and collectively” among themselves. Thus, the students by their negative behaviours, challenge the status quo of the current social order; while establishing peer credibility and acting manly.

Cultural perspectives can also create limitation to powerful structural forces. To help combat these limitations it is important to work to move education from its site for “intellectual colonialism”, to one that values the cultural uniqueness of the students (Kinncheloe, 1991). Importantly, students will resist any attempt to remove or restrict their culture whether it is done intentionally or unintentionally. Notably, students must be willing to take more responsibility for their learning. They should be encouraged and helped to develop more positive attitudes towards the schooling experience. Since individual agency is important, the students must also be willing to put forth the effort and hard work required to succeed and reach their highest potential. There are many
students who are successful in spite of the obstacles they face in the schools. Further study would be necessary to determine why these students are able to succeed, while others continue to underachieve.

**Structural and Cultural Factors and Educational Outcomes for Black Male Students**

The results of this study demonstrate that there is a need to understand the significance of structure and culture in the educational outcome for Black, male students. Structural and cultural dynamics interplay and can impact on students’ achievement. Although the participants in the study did not articulate how the interplay works; this understanding is central as it affects learning outcome. Structural forces can dominate the schooling experience of students, especially minority students and when this combines with cultural factors, there can be negative educational outcomes.

Particularly, Black male students may be the biggest recipient of the negative effects of structural policies in terms of discipline, placement, school safety policies and their impact. It is also important to note that schools can become a contested arena as students struggle to maintain their identity and sense-of- self in what they may perceive to be a unwelcoming school environment. When faced with restrictive policies, Black male students may resort to some forms of cultural norms as defense mechanism. It is because of these reasons that an integrated structural/cultural understanding is recommended as the best approach to facilitate reconciliation in the interplay of both factors.

Marginalized students enter the educational system at a disadvantage because of societal socio-economic factors which place them at the lowest level of the socio-
economic structure. Although these students may believe in the power of education to help prepare them for upward social and economic mobility, because of the rigidity of the structural system and its impact on their lives, Black male students may become skeptical of the advantages they may gain from the educational system, and may not exert the necessary effort to diligently try to make a success of the schooling system.

These Black, male students’ position may also be further compounded by the lack of protective factors such as; positive role models to offer support and mentorship, parental and community supporters working in unison with the schools to support student learning, positive student-teacher relationships and a curriculum that does not honour their histories or validate their experiences. Therefore, although students may be willing to accommodate to the values of the structures within the educational system, they may not have the support necessary to help them navigate the system and to assist them to acquiesce to the demands of the system.

When these protective factors are absent, then what happens in the classrooms becomes less important to the students and they may withdraw. Importantly, the students show up to school, but for what purpose? Since they show up it should be regarded as a desire to learn. To put the question another way – how can educators utilize such showing up to motivate and hold students’ interests? Classrooms and situations that do not encourage positive learning may discourage students and leave them to best utilize their time to socialize in the hallways and cafeterias and demonstrate cultural characteristics that may be anti-school. These are concerns that add to the inter-play between culture and structure and can cause underachievement for Black male students.
Additionally, within the context of students’ cultural experiences must also be added their race, gender and sexuality and other stressful issues that may surround their lives. When these factors are not catered to, the students’ lives become very problematic. The complexity engendered by these factors may also further exacerbate the structural/cultural problems and leads to further disengagement from school resulting in underachievement.

The educational system in their search for solutions to the underachievement problems faced by students must therefore take into consideration the interplay of the factors mentioned above. It may be useful to provide a forum where students can confront the issues they face and given help to reach solutions that are equitable and justifiable. Educators may also have to be willing to learn and experience aspects of the communities that inhabit their schools. This will help them to learn more about their students and in the long run develop better relationships with parents and community supporters. Parents and community supporters must also work to support the schools they children attend. Such collaboration will help to improve learning outcomes for students as they realize that what is being done is for their benefit.

Students while craving understanding from the educational system must themselves become less oppositional in their dealings with educational personnel. They must also understand the value of developing the cultural capital to help they live successfully in the wider society. These are values that the educational system must continue to help them to develop. This conciliatory position may be achieved when both structure and culture work together. In this sense structure will work to become less rigid
in its policy implementations and students must also work to become more compliant and accepting of school routines. Hopefully, the results will be more success for all students.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

There are no definitive answers provided by this study, but it adds to the continuous dialogue and raises questions and purports change. The thesis raises some important implications for understanding how structural and cultural factors may affect the educational process. The complexity caused by the intersection of structure and culture requires a shift in understanding, especially when dealing with Black male students. In order to acknowledge these issues, an integrated structural-cultural lens is recommended to understand the dual impact of structure and culture on educational achievement for Black, male students. The importance of these factors should be taken into consideration when educational reforms in the Toronto District School Board are being considered.

The study has also identified some protective factors that can help to improve learning outcomes for all students. The result of the study confirms that Black, male students face many structural and cultural challenges in the educational system. The findings of this research also confirm views in the literature that both structure and culture are important variables that must be examined as significant contributory factors to achievement outcomes for Black, male students. However, it is not enough to acknowledge the importance of structural and cultural factors, since neither one is significant enough to explain the problems faced by Black male students. An integrative perspective combining structural and cultural factors provides a more dynamic and supportive working formula. Solomon states: “A new integrated perspective would
acknowledge the potential for structure and culture to assume a less rigid and more
accommodative posture” (p.109). This approach allows changes that encourage
“equitable and democratic” institutional structures, and encourages students’ culture that
is less “oppositional and subcultural”. It is by making the effort to integrate structural and
cultural strategies by way of conciliation that will help to promote more positive
relationships that encourage academic success.

The educational system in Toronto will need to work more consistently to respond
more effectively to the needs of Black, male students and other marginalized students. As
the findings of this research show, most problems for these Black, male students began in
their early schooling experiences. The deficiencies of experiential educational
opportunities and resource gaps are issues that the educational system must consider. A
more comprehensive educational program will be necessary to provide for the varied
needs of a diverse student body. It must include technologically advanced skills to meet
the needs of a changing society. Parental and community support are necessary to help
combat this problem.

These are problems that have been plaguing the educational system in Toronto for
decades, but there have not been any significant, consistent structural or systemic changes
made to ameliorate the situation. Thus, there is a need to move forward differently. This
may be a discomforting reality, as change can be difficult and may require intensive
work. However, inequities require an obligation for change and any support for equity
must be substantive. As one participant concludes; “A lot of onus has been placed on the
students by blaming them or pressuring them if they don’t succeed. Look at it another
way. What are we not doing to help these students to see themselves as competent,
capable, active learners who are able to take responsibility for their learning … It is important to move from a model where we examine what the students are lacking all these years to where the students have strengths, work from their strengths, their gifts, their abilities, their talents, their uniqueness, their creativity. Why not use their source of strengths as a pillar to help them achieve?”

This type of reframing is important as it helps in clarifying policies, producing new ideas and options and developing new strategies for academic success (Ettieridge and Green, 1998). Furthermore, reframing allows for new perspectives as it provide a need to look at ‘what could be’ rather than sanctioning ‘what is’. Changes to organizational structures must also embrace and reflect keys aspects of students’ cultural experiences. Thus, as the cultural implications are considered, it is important to understand the connection between educational structures and students’ culture.

There is also need to acknowledge that rigid, structural policies, although traditionally have offered stability to a once homogeneous school population, aspects may need reframing to accommodate and facilitate the new diverse school population and acknowledge a new world view.

As part of the reframing it would be interesting and necessary to seriously consider what the opposite of underachievement would be for Black, male students. Determine what it would look like if all students were successfully achieving. According to (Dei, 1996) “How we name issues reflects our degree of comprehension of the problem.” (p. 134) A more positive and promising outlook would be to put the onus on excellence for all students. To achieve this excellence would require more effort and determination of all the partners in the educational system. Dei (1996) further elaborates
“educators and administrators will have to redouble their effort to make educational excellence accessible to all students.” (p. 135) Excellence in academic achievement will involve helping students to develop the cultural capital that will help them to live, and work successfully in the Canadian mainstream society. It is also important to determine the clear, explicit intentional and potential measures that are necessary to bring all students to this successful level of excellent achievement.

Reframing should be regarded as an alternative way of thinking about the problem of underachievement for Black, male students. This should be regarded as an exploratory method to be used to deconstruct the problem. It also challenges the business as usual approach to the problem that may seems normal and acceptable, but which to date has not been effective in re-mediating the problem. This concept also has some explanatory power which should also be evaluated. This assessment should help to determine its success in helping to understand the experiences of these students. Reframing is a dynamic and changing approach since is allows for new and different understanding of the problem. It also situates the phenomenon of underachievement in the educational system, as the most likely place to make some positive and lasting change.

It is also apparent from the perspectives gleaned from the participants in the research that there is a need for a broad spectrum of stake-holders – Ministry of Education personnel, school board representatives, educators, students, parents and community experts continue to dialogue about the future of teaching and learning. Such dialogic discourse and expectations would offer these groups acknowledgement for their experience, expertise which may help them to be more responsive to change and come to the understanding that we do not have to do things the same way because we have always
done it that way. By getting to this understanding, it may be easier to map out new directions for systemic and policy changes, or frame of reference for approaching the problem of underachievement.

Finally, as the participants in the research inferred and the literature suggests there is a need for a new type of interaction and less rigid structural demands. Mowlah-Baksh and Muir (1995) summarize “that interaction becomes conditioned by curriculum, student ability, teacher’s attitude, the socio-economic status of student and teacher, board administration, board philosophies, and the internal culture and politics of the school as specific educational settings” (p. 51).

As educators work to make excellence for all students a reality in the educational settings, they will prevent underachievement from becoming a permanent reality for a large percentage of students, namely, Black male students. This is important because an under-class of students who are under-educated, and are under-achieving will also become under-employed and will continue to pose serious problems and challenges to the society.

**Factors that Contributed to the Participants’ Educational Success**

So what can be learned from these dedicated educators? Their own schooling experiences have taught them some valuable lessons about respect for learning. They state that success in the educational system requires effort and motivation. To them education was a necessary task to be done, but its accomplishments came with rewards. They also had strong support, high expectations and accountability from their parents and dedicated teachers. Other community agency such as the church also helped to nurture and support them by adding educational activities during the summer holidays and on
weekends. They were also accountable to their parents if their school performance fell below expectations, and there were consequences for their actions. Along the way they have developed a love for learning and have internalized this value. This is a tradition that they try to past on to their current students.

They also believe that success is possible for all Black, male students, and for all students if they are given the proper support and encouragement. As a result they have become mentors and supporters for their students, even after some of these students have entered post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, they do not see underachievement as being synonymous with Black, male students. Neither should it be allowed to become a normalized pattern or be seen as ‘structured indifference’. Their stories are filled with examples of struggling Black, male students who have successfully navigated the educational landscape and are now successful fathers, workers and contributors to the society.

**Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study was limited to six Black, male educators – four teachers and two administrators - giving their perspectives on the problem of underachievement faced by some Black, male students. All participants are from Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and as such, the results may only be reflective of the context of TDSB. This study should be viewed as an initial step in examining the perspectives of Black, male educators. Thus, there should be caution in generalizing the findings of the study. This study does not represent the perspectives for all Black, male educators. There are also generational responses to the findings of this study, since all the respondents were in the forty and fifty plus age group.
Most of these educators have also experienced educational systems outside of Canada. It would be useful for further research to be done with younger, Black male educators who have had all their educational experiences in Canada. However, the participants are all marginalized voices and they may be in a position to inform the educational experts and managers within the Toronto District School Board of what needs to be done to help Black male students improve academically. The perspective of the participants, are also closely tied to the literature and thus adds to the transferability of knowledge. Data is also transferable and it can be used to help keep the focus on the problem of underachievement in other areas.

The study is exploratory in its aims and it may be difficult to draw any definitive conclusions. Coulter and Smith (2009) aptly summarize the purpose of this type of research. “The purpose of narrative research is not to provide a single definitive answer but to open up possibilities for new questions and ways of thinking in the reader.” (p.585) Because of the small sample size, further research would be necessary on some of the findings from this study. It might be useful for example, to investigate the role of special education placements on achievement outcomes for Black, male students. Students are knowledgeable consumers of education, so it would be interesting to investigate their views about their achievements. To what extent does impact by white, female teachers in the early educational experience of Black, male students influence their educational outcome?

The role and expectations of parent and community partnerships on students’ achievement also merits further study. In what ways would having more Black, male
educators as role models change educational experiences and outcomes for Black, male students?

It is understandable that personal biases may influence the research project. However, careful attempt was made to bracket my personal interpretations. Awareness of my personal biases, judgment and interpretations were also carefully monitored. Careful thought was also given to the presentation of accurate representation of data and open research practice was rigorously maintained.

Participants in the research may also have been unwilling to give complete answers, because of the fixed nature of the questions. However, the researcher’s acquaintance with some participants in the research may have been an advantageous factor as they would be more willing and open with answers. Participants in this inquiry are also invited to review the final project if they so desire, in order to check accuracy of information.

Although the study will not present a fully representative story for all Black male students or for all Black, male educators, it has added to the other stories, especially stories about male students and gender education. It is hoped that certain patterns have evolved and some new directions have been gleaned which may be indicative of the problems faced by these students. Some suggestions are also made for improvement, by moving beyond acknowledging underachievement problems to intentional and focused effort to create new successful pathways for these students. The problem may not be solved, but hopefully it will be better understood and a better understanding of the learning environment will occur that can lead the development of new curriculum of possibilities. As Burnsford, et al state, “… we have to look to see what we can do to
change the tide to achieve better results” (p.255). Since this research study was restricted to one ethnic group and one gender, a more extensive study with a less homogeneous group would possible generate more extensive findings.
**Final Word**

This study is framed within a vision of hope. It is the hope that the promised return from education will not be stamped “insufficient funds” for our Black, male students. Wynn (2007) reminds us “it is the power of our belief in the ability of every student to achieve success that makes us strong” (p.131).
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College Press.

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urban schools: Research-based recommendations for school personnel.


Appendix A. Participant Consent Letter

Dear

This letter is a formal request soliciting your participation in a research project that I am conducting in fulfillment of the thesis requirement for my doctorate. The title of the research is: Black male Teachers’ Perspectives of the Systemic, Structural and Cultural factors in the Educational System that Contribute to Underachievement for Black, Male Students. I am a TDSB teacher and part-time student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. This study will ask you to participate in an interview session and give your perspectives as a Black, male educator on issues affecting Black, male students and their achievement. Your response will provide a picture of what it is like for Black, male students studying in our schools. I am hoping that the outcome from this study will eventually provide vital information that can be used by TDSB and other educational institutions to improve the achievement outcome for this group of students. In total, I hope to interview five Black, male educators from the TDSB.

The interview will be approximately one and one-half hour to two hours in length. You will be asked some questions about your educational experiences as former students, and present educators. The focus of the interview will be on the systemic, structural and cultural factors in the educational system that impact on achievement. These questions will be e-mailed to you prior to the interview so that you can review them. There are no risks or direct benefits associated with participating in this research project. You will not be under any obligation to participate in this study and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. You may also refuse to answers any of the questions with which you do not feel comfortable. The time and the place of the interview will be discussed with you and determined to meet your convenience.

You may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at 416 946 3273 about your rights in participating in this research project and for answers to any questions you may have.

I would also like you to share this information with other Black, male educators who you think would be willing to participate in this research project. If any of these educators are willing to participate in this research project, please have them call or e-mail for further instructions.

I will need your permission to tape and transcribe the interview. Transcriptions of the interview will be available upon request and arrangements for this will be discussed at the interview meeting. Transcript of the interview will only be available to my thesis supervisor and me. No one else will have access to these tapes or transcripts. Tapes will be safely locked away at my home and transcript pass-word secured on my computer. Information from the interview will be strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to identify participants and no mention will be made to your actual work location. At the end of the interview you will be asked to complete a brief Researcher’s Trustworthiness form. This form is to help me assess the effectiveness of the interview process.
I can be contacted at home and my telephone number is 905 738-3514 and e-mail address is lorna.muir@utoronto.ca

Thank you for your support, your time, and your consideration. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lorna Muir
Appendix B. Consent Form B

I have read the attached letter describing the research study by Lorna Muir and I have talked with her regarding the research. I am fully aware of the nature of the project as outlined, and the reason for my participation, and how the information I provide will be kept confidential and will be used. I agree to participate.

Date ______________________________

Name ______________________________

Signature ____________________________

I agree to have my interview taped.

Yes ____
No _____

I would like a summary of the result

Yes ______
No ______

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Yes _____
No______

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Appendix C: Trustworthiness of the Researcher

1. Was I open and honest?
2. Did I provide the opportunity for you to say what you really wanted?
3. Did you at any time want to say more, but felt that you could not?
4. Was I an attentive listener?
5. Were the questions very clear?
6. If you needed clarification, did you feel you could have asked for it?
7. Was there any time when you felt that you could not share something with me?
8. Name that occasion. What? When?
9. Was there anything about my behaviour – verbal or nonverbal, that made you feel that you could not easily disclose to me? State them.
Appendix D: The Interview questions

Personal Information

1. How many years have you worked as an educator in Canada?
2. What is your age group: 20 – 30 [ ], 30 - 40 [ ], 40 -50 [ ] , 50 and above [ ].
3. What is your present position in the school or the board?
4. Where have you received your educational experiences and what were some challenges you faced as a Black, male student and how did you overcome them?
5. Explain the chief motivating factors that led to your success.
6. How has your educational experience been influenced by your race and gender?
7. Please describe some challenges a Black, male teacher or administrator face in the educational system as they relate to working with Black, male students?

School Structure

1. What are some structural practices within the educational system that promote academic achievement for all students?
2. In what ways do structural factors, such as school resources, disciplinary practices, suspension policies, time-tabling and school quality affect achievement outcome for Black, male students? Explain to what extent, do these practices impact on the achievement outcome for these students?
3. In what ways can the school system intentionally or unintentionally default educational outcomes for Black male students?
4. How can the educational opportunities be restructured to produce more options for better educational outcome for Black, male students?
School Culture and Achievement

1. Can you describe the culture of the educational system as it relates to the needs of the students? How are cultural practices developed and maintained in the educational system?

2. Relative to other factors which may influence achievement, how important are systemic, cultural factors in fostering achievement outcome for Black, male students?

3. What are some cultural factors that must be taken into account when dealing with Black, male students?

Black male students and Achievement

1. What is the basis for describing a student as being ‘at risk’ or underachieving?

2. How is underachievement defined as a problem?

3. How are Black, male students represented in categories related to boys underachievement and in categories relating to academic success?

4. How can the educational system structure a culture of achievement to facilitate academic outcome for Black, male students?

5. Race and gender are two salient features of these students’ identity. How do these features relate to their achievement outcome?

6. Can you relate a ‘success story’ from your experience, of a particular student from the group being studied, that relate to underachievement and or over-coming underachievement problems?
Teachers’ response to underachievement of Black male students

1. What do teachers believe to be the basis for the underachievement patterns for Black, male students?
2. What can be done to help teachers and administrators become better equipped to meet the challenges faced by Black, male students in the educational system?
3. To what extent do the social class, ethnic identity and gender of the students influence concepts of what transact in the classroom?
4. How can the curriculum orientation and forms of pedagogy work to challenge and support an achievement orientation for all students?
5. What are your views of the impact of the preponderance of white, female teachers on the educational outcome for Black, male students?

Concluding questions

1. What changes would you recommend for the current educational system to use to meet the challenging needs of these Black, male students?
2. What final comment would you like to share about achievement and concerns about Black, male students?
Appendix E: Phenomenological Data Analysis Chart

(Hays and Singh (2012, p. 354)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moustaka’s (1994) Modification of van Kaam’s (1959, 1966)</th>
<th>Phenomenological Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using the complete transcription of each research participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping. List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizontalization)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reduction and Elimination: To determine the invariant constituents:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test each expression for two requirements:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above the requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents: Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant. (a) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (c) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researchers experience and should be deleted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Construct for each co-researcher an individual structural description of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the individual textural-structural descriptions, develop a complete description of the meanings and essence of the experience, representing the group as a whole.

Source: Moustaka’s (1994, pp.120 – 121)