

Reading While Black: Exploring the Voices of African American Struggling Readers

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to the many Black children who continue to persevere through all odds, to the many adults who covet and hold sacred the art of teaching Black children, and to the families who continue to support the intellectual development of their children.

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TSY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
Framing the Study	1
Explanation of Terms	4
Early Adolescent Readers.....	4
Being Black	5
Struggling Reader	10
Statement of the Problem	11
Blacks and Reading Achievement in Chicago	11
Literacy Policy and Blacks	13
Voices of Black Adolescents and Literacy Research	17
Summary	18
II. Literature Review	19
Introduction	19
Historical Perspective.....	20
Critical Race Theory	24
Black Adolescent Racial Identity and School Achievement.....	27
Voices of Early Adolescents	31
Early Adolescent Struggling Reader and Identity.....	36
Summary	37
III. Methodology	40
Introduction	40
Research Methods	40
Context of the Study.....	41
Participants	42
Data Collection.....	42
Data Analysis	43
Summary	49
IV. Meet the Readers: Findings from the Research.....	50
The Readers.....	50
Jahare	50
Harlem	50
Kenyon.....	51

Terry	51
Casey	51
Do Early Adolescent Black Students see Race as a Factor in Their Reading Ability?..	51
Do Struggling Readers’ Narratives Offer Insight into the Impact of their Racialized Experiences?.....	56
Access to African American Literature and History and Culturally Relevant Practices	57
How Can Making Race Central to Students’ Experiences Provide Understandings on Students’ Reading Achievement?	60
Struggling Reader Identity.....	61
How the School can and does Support Readers	61
Type of Instruction Readers Need	62
Purpose for Reading	63
Summary Profile of the Readers.....	64
IV. Discussion of Findings and Implications.....	66
“Struggling” Doesn’t Fit	66
Race Has Nothing to Do with It	67
The Context.....	67
The Counter-story: Part I-Black Families Support Reading Development.....	68
The Counter-story: Part II-Access.....	68
Counter-story to CRT: A Struggle from Within	72
Reader Identity, Racial and Cultural Identity, and Purpose for Reading.....	74
Implications for Policy, Curriculum, Schools, and CRT	75
Limitations of the Study	79
Recommendations for Future Studies	80
Learning to Read and Struggling Black Children	80
Race, Reading, and a Changing World.....	81
Summary	83
References.....	85
APPENDIX.....	109
VITA.....	111

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
1.	PERCENT OF BLACKS MEET/EXCEED IN READING ON ISAT FROM 2007-2012 IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS.....	12
2.	AVERAGE ACT READING SCORE FOR BLACKS 2007-2012 IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS.....	12
3.	LITERACY REPORTS AND POSITIONS REVIEWED.....	16
4.	EXCERPT OF DATA ANALYSIS.....	43
5.	RELIABILITY SCORE.....	47
6.	RESEARCH QUESTION ONE AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	52
7.	RACIAL IDEOLOGY AND READER'S RESPONSE.....	53
8.	RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	57
9.	RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS-CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY.....	58
10.	RESEARCH QUESTION THREE AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	60
11.	READER PROFILE.....	64

SUMMARY

Early adolescent Black struggling readers do not believe being Black affects their reading. While race is not a factor that affects reading achievement for these young adolescent struggling readers when it comes to reading, their voices do highlight that there are racialized contexts in which reading and learning how to read occur. Their early experiences show us that their nuclear and extended family members were instrumental in helping them learn how to read. In school, however, there are still some gaps in their experiences with culturally informed practices. The students had limited access to culturally relevant materials and practices. When their cultural stories are shared in school it can be characterized as the masterscript (Schwartz, 1992); a reshaped and acceptable rendering of the history of Blacks (slavery, Emancipation, Martin Luther King, Jr., equality) according to White people.

Their voices teach us that three distinct domains are at work and need to be honored when supporting them as readers. They are: Reader identity (who am I as a reader?), racial/cultural identity (who am I as a Black person?), and purpose for reading (why is reading important to my cultural and social identities? Why is reading important for me personally?). The purposes for reading are foundational to developing both the racial/cultural identity and the reading identity. They don't necessarily need books written by or about Black people, they need good books. They need (1) safe social spaces within classrooms to develop their reading identity, (2) opportunities to experience the power of reading, and (3) access to a variety of cultural stories.

Future research needs to increase the understanding of readers such as Jahare, Harlem, Kenyon, Terry, and Casey. What are the best ways to develop Black early adolescents reading

identities, their cultural/racial identities, and their purpose(s) for reading? Future research also needs to tackle how the tension between a historical context steeped in race and a current context steeped in post-racial rhetoric, will impact the literate lives of Black children. Continued work that brings Black voices to the forefront will help us all understand the nuances in learning to read that hopefully will positively impact Black children's reading achievement.

I. Introduction

Framing the Study

Vignette #1

I was so excited! My first classroom and I was ready to provide my African American third graders with an enriching education full of literature and knowledge about their history. My excitement quickly waned. Many of my students were struggling readers. This was new to me. I was reading by age four. All of the third-grade students I taught during my student teaching experience could read. Many questions swarmed in my head—why can't they read? Whose fault is it? Was it teacher practice? Help!

Vignette #2

It was a fall day and the school year had just begun. Eighth-grade students were learning about the Civil War in their social studies class. Their textbook left out Blacks' participation and impact on the Civil War. Therefore, I decided to teach the students information about Black people that was absent from the textbook during their library visits. While students were reading, a Black student approached me and asked in earnest, "Why are we studying Black people? It's not February."

These are true stories that represent my struggles as a Black educator in Chicago. Year after year I encountered many Black students who had to wrestle with the text to read and understand it and who knew little about their African and African American history. My bigger concern was their reading ability because they needed to be able to read to access information about themselves and the world around them. I returned to graduate school to learn how to teach reading, because the two reading methods courses during my undergraduate training were not enough. I learned and employed different strategies and classroom structures with some success.

But something deeper was going on. Regardless of where I taught, the assigned grade levels, or the Chicago neighborhood, the story was the same. Large numbers of Black children struggling with reading. The national conversation mirrored what I was experiencing in the schools. Blacks were not performing at high levels in reading on national, local, and state assessments. My experiences on Chicago's west and south sides made me begin to wonder what was going on with Black children in these particular contexts. What was happening when they were beginning to learn how to read? Did race have an impact on their reading development?

A deeper analysis was needed to explain what I assessed as a tragedy. Therefore, I decided to pursue a doctorate in search of the analytical tools to explain the reading performance of Black children. I began to read extensively about the history of education and schooling of Black children (Anderson, 1988; Boykin, 1986; Carruthers, 1995; Harris, 1992, 1994; Holt, 1990; Shujaa, 1994; Thompson, 2007, Watkins, 2001), Black learning styles/language differences (Bartz, 1969; Foster, 1992; Goodman, 1969; Hale, 2001a; Hale-Benson, 1982; Smitherman, 2000), African-centered education (Akoto, 1994; Asante, 1988; Hilliard, 1997; Lee, 1994), inclusion of African American history in curriculum (Hilliard, Payton-Stewart, & Williams, 1990; Nobles, 1990), the importance of reading books with Black characters and themes (Bell & Clark, 1998; Collier, 2000), culturally relevant pedagogy (Au, 1982; Hale, 2001b; Hefflin, 2002; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Lee, 1992, 1995, 2000) and multicultural education (Ascher, 1991; Banks, 1993, Banks, 2001; Bennett, 1995). These works pointed to several things important to literacy instruction for Black children:

- 1) Effective literacy instruction and curriculum must honor Black culture. That is, books should accurately reflect students' culture.

2) The teacher must provide multiple opportunities for Black children to talk about text. For example, utilizing a call and response style may facilitate improved interaction and comprehension.

3) It is important that Black children have ample opportunity to write in response to literature.

4) There must be a deep respect for the language Black students' use and teachers can benefit from a rich and nuanced understanding of Black English Vernacular.

Although the literature on Black education is rich, it did not provide a framework for analysis for examining the intersection of reading and race. Critical Race Theory (CRT) seemed to be an appropriate framework for analysis. CRT gave me permission to look at issues through the lens of race. As I will discuss more in-depth later, CRT acknowledges that race is a social construct that impacts our lives every day.

My research interest on Black children who were underachieving in reading and the possible impact of race on their reading development began to grow the more I reflected on my teaching experiences. Since CRT relies on the stories of the people who are experiencing the impact of race I decided to focus on the perspectives of Black, early adolescent struggling readers. I want to investigate the following questions: (1) Do early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability? (2) Can early adolescent Black struggling readers' narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school? and, (3) How can making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on students' reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum, and practice? With these basic questions my journey began.

Explanation of Terms

This study is concerned with a specific group of children that can be characterized as (1) early adolescent, (2) Black, and (3) struggling reader.

Early Adolescent Readers

Early adolescence is generally defined as the ages between ten and fourteen (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Stevenson, 2002). During this period children go through rapid physical and mental changes associated with puberty. They go through social transformations; sex roles, friendships and recreation become increasingly important as they progress through the middle grades (grades 6-8) (Allison & Schultz, 2001).

Much has been written on early adolescent readers' needs in the classroom and the impact of their struggles with reading on their identity and motivation and engagement (Allington, 2001; Beers, 1998; Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Compton-Lily, 2008; Franzak, 2004; Ganske, Monroe & Strickland, 2003; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Hall & Nellenbach, 2009; Ivey, 1999b; Sableski, 2007). There has also been much written on the broader impact of schooling on the literacy difficulties for Black children such as social promotion, inappropriate resources, curriculum that did not accurately reflect their culture, poor teaching, cultural differences between school and the community, and unidentified reading difficulties (Kozol, 1991; Hilliard, 1997; Jordan-Irvine, 1990; Lynn, 1999; Ogbu, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Watkins, 2001; Watkins, Lewis, & Chou, 2001).

Research tells us that early adolescent readers want to read for real or authentic purposes; they want to see a connection between school literacies and their home literacies, and they read text based on their interests (Alvermann, 2001a; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey, 1999a, Jenkins, 2009). They want choice and they still want and need support in the classroom (Alvermann,

2001a; Ivey, 1999a, 1999b; Jenkins, 2009). This study hopes to advance the conversation by sharing what Black early adolescent children, ages 9-14, who have been labeled struggling readers, have to say about their needs as a reader and about their reading experiences and how these needs and experiences are informed by race.

Being Black

Although there is a political distinction between the usage of *African American* and *Black* and a personal decision to use either, the terms are frequently employed to define the group in everyday contexts by researchers and in various sets of data such as the census or reporting of standardized assessments. I will use the term *Black* to describe the adolescents in this study. Black is defined in the study as a mix of the terms race and culture and includes understanding racism and racialized experiences. Each of the aforementioned terms needs to be teased out because each implies social, political, and economic positions within society. That is, what one looks like and what one is defined as, impacts one's life (Carter & Goodwin, 1994).

Race is a complex word that is used in various ways (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). As DeCuir-Gunby (2006) stated, "race is a convoluted and enigmatic conception" (p. 92), I want to be clear about its use in this research. The term has several layers. On one layer, race is a representation of humans or groups assigned to a hierarchy based on biological and physical markers such as skin color and nose and eye shape. This representation has been found to be a misrepresentation of human groups (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994) tied to the next layer, social construction.

Race is a social construction, as biologically there is no difference in the human race that would warrant a hierarchy (Smedley & Smedly, 2005). In fact, there was no concept of race as it is used today before the 1700s (Hilliard, 2001). This social construction is tied to another layer in

the term, power (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006). Power protects the dominant group from other groups. Race is used to define the intelligence of members of a group, their ability to learn, their worthiness, their economic standing, and even their culture. Race became an ideology (Omi & Winant, 1994; Smedley & Smedly, 2005) used to formulate discriminatory practices against Blacks (e.g., literacy laws, segregated schools, housing rights, hiring practices, etc.). All at once, race is “a socially and historically constructed ideological system that permeates all social, cultural, economic and political domains, and thus a major determinant of power” (De-Cuir-Gunby, 2006, p. 93). De-Cuir-Gunby’s definition is how the term is used in this research.

Viewing race as a social construction allows the behaviors of anyone in the group to be inappropriately linked to biology. This has led to the belief that differences between races cannot be changed and races are incorrectly seen as naturally unequal (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Smedly & Smedly, 2005). This is important to understand for this research because people of African descent, hence Blacks, are viewed as a lower group within the socially constructed hierarchy contributing to the types of experiences they have across institutions in the United States.

Part of being Black includes having racialized experiences. Racialized experiences refer to the events that happen as the result of the socially constructed phenomena of race. These experiences are often the result of stereotypes and are imposed on Black people by groups assigned to a higher position on the racial hierarchy, and those who are not members of the Black race.

Lynn (2006) notes that those who are a part of a racialized group are generally considered minority, underserved, or oppressed. These groups’ lives are impacted from the way the law treats them to everyday microaggressions because of their phenotypical characteristics, culture,

social status, and other factors that identify them as part of a racialized group (Lynn & Parker, 2006). For example, low-quality education and the achievement gap often affects Blacks regardless of their economic status (Diamond, 2006), but the gap more greatly affects those who are more vulnerable, such as the poor. Research (Diamond, 2006; Duncan, 2002, 2003; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson and Rahma, 2009) shows that inequity exists regardless of Black peoples' economic status or whether they attend integrated schools or high performing schools. Black children, on average, do not perform as well as whites on standardized assessments, and negative stereotypes of Black intelligence permeate the schools. These issues have persisted over time regardless of changes in laws or enactment of policies and initiatives, thereby almost becoming a by-product of being Black.

The experiences that befall Black people, and in reference to this research on Black readers, are not random (Duncan, 2002; Lynn, 2006). They are, as Duncan (2006) describes a “manifestation of the racial politics that are intrinsic, even vital, to the day-to-day functions of U.S. society and social institutions such as schools” (p. 131). For example Duncan's (2006) research, conducted in a high school, showed that teachers and students held negative assumptions about Black males being dependent on others to do well in school, and these negative assumptions about their intelligence hindered Black male adolescents' academic achievement. The school community communicated explicitly and implicitly that they thought Black males unfairly received additional support through a mentoring program or shared stereotypical perceptions about Black males doing well in sports. Black boys felt policed and mistreated. The beliefs of the school's teachers and staff allowed them to accept that Black boys just do not do as well as others in school, thereby taking no action and not accepting or realizing

how their fixed, stereotypical notions of Black males undermined the ability of the boys to excel in school (Duncan, 2002).

Understanding what it means to be Black includes defining the term culture. Culture is an important term in this research for two main reasons: (1) the values, norms, and traditions of a group create the true differences or uniqueness among people. (2) Relevant literature for this study focused on Black culture. Culture is the knowledge, beliefs, morals, language, customs, and habits learned by society or an ethnic group. It is learned and is transmitted to others. It is not biological (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Nobles (1990) states:

The system of culture teaches people to recognize phenomena and to respect certain logical relations amongst phenomena. Culture gives meaning to reality. As such, culture has the power to compel behavior and the capacity to reinforce ideas and beliefs about human functioning, including issues of educational achievement and motivation. (p. 6).

If culture is learned then a link between a socially constructed idea of race and culture bodes negatively for Black people; the achievement gap between races can be accepted as normal (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), which it is not. Books like those by Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) can convincingly posit that Blacks are not learning by using a historical, biological and cultural arguments that insist schools much teach impoverished Black children the right values and culture so they can succeed in school as some racial/ethnic groups are more “academically advantageous” (p. 271). These arguments have since been dismissed in the field of education (Boykin, 1986; Hilliard, 2001 Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Finally, it is important to be clear about what is meant by racism. Racism is a belief that one race is inherently superior to another. Racism as explained by Kovel (as cited in Hilliard, 2001) antecedes the notion of race; it is what has created race. Racism is about power,

“institutional power, a form of power that people of color—that is, non-Whites—in the United States have never possessed” (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2001, p. 61). Schools are affected by this belief. As Lynn (2006) explains:

Schools, in this sense, are part of a complex web of discursive cultural and social forces that further instantiate white culture, ideals, and beliefs. This, in turn, has the effect of further solidifying the political, social, and economic dominance of whites at all levels of society, the educational system becomes one of the chief means through which the system of white supremacy regenerates and renews itself. (pp. 116-117).

Defining racism is important to the study because it is the notion of power that affects the experiences of Black children in school. Research discusses the marginalization of Blacks in school through various means such as negative stereotyping, poor or irrelevant curriculum (Carter, 2005; Dance, 2002; Duncan, 2002, 2003; Lynn, 1999), unequal funding between Blacks and Whites (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012) and inequality in facilities (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate; 1995). These realities undergird why the voices of Black children are critical to the conversation. They are participants in schools and in a society that has throughout history treated Blacks unfairly.

Being Black incorporates the complexity of the terms defined: race, culture, racialized experiences, and racism. Being Black means dealing with racism and with race as social construction. In this research, I am calling race out and placing race at the center of analysis while recognizing that terms like race and racism may not be fully understood by early adolescents. Even still, I believe young people know that they are Black and that being Black makes them unique. I want to know what young struggling readers have to say about race and if

they think it impacts their reading development and achievement, as well as how their stories can tell us about their racialized experiences in relation to reading.

Struggling Reader

There is no fixed definition of a struggling reader. Franzak (2004) argues that students become struggling readers based on policy. Therefore, a struggling reader can vary between school districts and across states. This view politicizes the term and takes the focus away from the reader and onto the adults who make decisions about who should be labeled struggling. Bomer & Bomer (2001) puts the focus on the student and discusses struggling readers as persons who have not been able to figure out a reading system to make meaning.

An achievement focused definition of a struggling reading comes from the Department of Education (Kamil, et al., 2008):

[Struggling readers are] those students who probably score well below their peers on state reading tests and whose reading deficits hinder successful performance in their coursework. Under normal classroom instructional conditions, these students are unable to make needed improvements in their reading skills, so they typically cannot meet grade-level standards in literacy throughout middle and high schools. They need additional help that the classroom teacher cannot be expected to provide. Unless their reading growth is dramatically accelerated by strong and focused instruction, they will continue to struggle to make sense of the materials assigned to them in their coursework, and they are at serious risk of being unable to use literacy skills successfully in their postsecondary lives. (p. 7)

Reading research tells us that early adolescent students struggle for a variety of reasons such as decoding and comprehension (Allington, 2001; Bomer & Bomer, 2001). For this

research, struggling readers are persons who have to wrestle with text for any number of reasons and still continue to have difficulties that indicate they may need additional assistance with reading. This definition is a compilation of different researchers' explanations of the term (Alvermann, 2001a; Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Franzak, 2004; Kamil et al., 2008; Rubenstein-Avila, 2003; Underwood & Pearson, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The objectives of my dissertation research are threefold: (1) to better understand, through first-person accounts, if early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability; (2) to determine how their narratives might offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school; and, (3) to explore how making race central to the analysis of students' experiences can potentially help us understand its impact on their reading achievement, thereby potentially informing policy, curriculum, and practice. There are a few key issues that highlight the need for this research—the reading achievement of Black children on standardized assessments, policy that does not represent the types of research that represent Black people and does not heed the voices of adolescents, and the lack of research that uses race as central to its analysis.

Blacks and Reading Achievement in Chicago

Black students in Chicago, the locale of this research, scored below other racial groups in the area of reading on the 2012 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) with 65 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards. The ISAT is used to measure yearly growth for elementary school students in the State. These scores look promising, especially since Blacks' scores increased 13 points in the last six years (Chicago Public Schools, <http://www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/schoolData.aspx>). However, many are not prepared for

college. Recent publications show that students who meet the criteria on the ISAT are not college ready by the time they leave high school (Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, 2009). As evidence, the average reading ACT score for Blacks has hovered around 15 for the past six years (Chicago Public Schools, <http://www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/schoolData.aspx>). See Tables 1 and 2. In Illinois, the 2012 ACT data show that the average reading ACT score for African Americans is 17 (ACT, 2010). Both local and state scores are below the benchmark of 21 which “is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college course” (ACT, 2010, p. 1). Blacks have the lowest average reading score of all ethnic groups reported locally.

TABLE 1
PERCENT OF BLACKS MEET/EXCEED IN READING ON ISAT FROM 2007-2012 IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Year	2007a	2008b	2009c	2010	2011	2012
% Blacks Meet/Exceed	52	58.6	59	60.8	64.7	65

TABLE 2
AVERAGE ACT READING SCORE FOR BLACKS 2007-2012 IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010a	2011b	2012c
Blacks Average Reading Score (Benchmark is 21)	15.8	15.7	15.7	16.2	15.9	15.8

The alphabetized years represent the subset of students who were 8th graders in 2007 taking the ACT as 11th graders in 2010, 8th graders in 2008 who took the ACT as 11th graders in 2011 and 8th graders in 2009 taking the ACT in 2012. Data retrieved from Chicago Public Schools <http://www.cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx>

Lower reading achievement for many Blacks reveals itself in the early grades. The Council of Great City Schools conducted research showing that nationally only 12% of Black males are proficient in reading by 4th grade (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010).

This lack of achievement as defined by standardized assessments has been addressed in different ways. The past ten years there has been increased attention given to adolescent literacy broadly—even labeling the lack of achievement a crisis (Alvermann, 2009; Buehl, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). But more attention needs to be paid to the impact literacy research has on Black children’s reading achievement as their current performance on standardized assessments warrants some special consideration.

Literacy Policy and Blacks

Acceptance of different kinds of research methods and the discussion of race in government policy in regards to reading, specifically, is scant. Policy can and has both shaped educational practices and informed the development of instructional programs. One example is the impact of the National Reading Panel’s report on reading instruction (2000). The panel was charged by Congress in 1997 to find out the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching reading, as well as gather information on research about reading. The panel relied heavily on experimental or quasi-experimental designs to develop what works best for children when they learn how to read. “In order to meet evidence standards (either with or without reservations), a study has to be a randomized controlled trial or a quasi-experiment with one of the following three designs: quasi experiment with equating, regression discontinuity designs, or single-case designs” (The Institute of Education Sciences: What Works Clearinghouse, 2008, p. 5).

Consequently, qualitative research, such as ethnographies and other qualitative methodologies, was left out of the conversation of what works in one of the most influential

policy documents on reading in this country. This is a problematic omission because several key studies on learning and literacy that focused on Black people are ethnographies (e.g., Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The findings from these studies should have at least been considered to help the committee understand what works best when teaching reading. The panel did not include in its report any studies on the effects of home culture on literacy development (Yatvin, 2000). In her minority view report Yatvin (2000) writes:

In spite of the Panel's diligent efforts and its valuable findings on a select number of instructional practices, we still cannot answer the first and most central question of the charge: "What is known about the basic processes by which children learn to read." We still do not know what types of instruction are suitable for different ages and populations of children. (p. 3).

Diversity in learning based on race, culture, or even age was not part of the study. The findings of the Panel were used to fund large federal programs such as Reading First, which have had far-reaching effects on reading instruction in schools.

Neglecting other bodies of research potentially useful for advancing the literacy development of Black children limits policy's impact on change and leads to instruction and practices that may not be meeting this group's specific needs. Policy "state [s] locutionary truth claims about cultural and educational, social and psychological phenomena" (Luke & Woods, p. 198, 2009). Policy has the power to set the direction of what all actors and agents involved should come to believe. As such, policy legitimizes political decisions and these truth claims are used to define what it means to learn how to read and by what means we define research as legitimate.

An indication that the literacy community in part has ignored race and culture as part of the discussion of best practices for adolescents is evidenced in reports, policy, and position statements on the topic. For example, the recommendations of the Institute of Educational Science (Kamil et al., 2008) and Alliance for Excellent Education (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) do not give specific attention to literacy development based on race or culture. Neither does larger more influential literacy advocates such as the International Reading Association. Some documents have recommended ways that schools and the nation need to address the adolescent literacy crisis and have mentioned that Blacks and the economically disadvantage suffer more from the literacy crisis among adolescents. But the discussion stops there.

After a review of ten adolescent literacy reports and policy and position statements, the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) makes the most mention of the importance of culture for literacy. They devote a whole section to the topic of multicultural perspectives and note that children need to see themselves in the literature that they read. In addition, they include sociocultural perspectives as they discuss the multiple and social literacies of adolescents. Of the policy and literacy statements reviewed, this is the only document that incorporates these ideas. Literacy position statements and reports at large were not informed by literacy researchers who have used culture or race as a springboard to develop literacy practices (Lee, 2007; Lynn, 2006; Morrell, 2002; Morrell, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Tatum, 2005).

Even more troubling is that policy recommendations were primarily funded by one philanthropic organization, the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The majority of the recommendations were authored by the same people, potentially foreclosing broader perspectives that could have been offered from a more ideologically and methodically diverse group of scholars. As a result, a narrow set of research and ideas impacts the discussion of what

works best for adolescents and this effectively excludes research that centers race and culture as part of its analyses. This is a problem if we are to try to understand what is going on with a group that on average, is not achieving at high levels in reading. Table 3 summarizes the literacy reports and positions discussed above.

TABLE 3
LITERACY REPORTS AND POSITIONS REVIEWED

Title	Year	Policy Stake Holder	Sponsor	Authors
<i>Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success</i>	2010	Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy	Carnegie Corporation	Snow, C., Bragg, M.L., Deshler, D.D, Kamil, M.L., Lee, C.D., Levin, H.M., Moje, E.B., Riddile, M., Roderick, M., Schwartz, R., Biancarosa, G., Kieffer, M.
<i>Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices</i>	2008	Institute of Education Sciences	US Department of Education	Kamil, M.L, Borman, G.D., Dole, J., Kral, C.C., Salinger, T., Torgesen, J.
<i>Adolescent Literacy: Policy Brief</i>	2007	National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)	NCTE	NCTE
<i>Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy</i>	2006	Alliance for Excellent Education	Carnegie Corporation	Berman, I. & Biancarosa, G.
<i>Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals</i>	2005	National Association of Secondary School Principals	Carnegie Corporation	Phillips, M.
<i>Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy</i>	2005		Carnegie Corporation	Berman, I. & Biancarosa, G.
<i>Adolescents and Literacy-Reading for the 21st Century</i>	2003	Alliance for Excellent Education	Carnegie Corporation	Kamil, M.
<i>Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implication for Reading Instruction.</i>	2000	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development	Distinguished Panel
<i>Effective Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: Executive Summary and Paper Commissioned by the National Reading</i>	2001	National Reading Conference	National Reading Conference	Alvermann, D.E.

<i>Conference</i>				
<i>Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement for the Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association</i>	1999	International Reading Association (IRA)	IRA	Moore, D.W., Bean, T.W., Birdyshaw, D., Rycik, J.A.

Voices of Black Adolescents and Literacy Research

The voices of adolescents in general and Black children in particular have not impacted policy designed for them (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps & Waff, 2006; Cohen, 2007). Policy that is shaped without the voices of adolescents stands in conflict with adolescent literacy research that notes the importance of utilizing adolescents' voices and literacy identities as part of adolescent literacy reform efforts (Alvermann et al., 2006; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Reeves, 2004). As Alvermann et al. (2006) states, "Unless such issues are acknowledged in terms of their impact on youth's identity-making practices, much of what will pass in the name of adolescent literacy reform may miss its mark, or worse yet, harm the very individuals for whom it holds the greatest potential" (p. ix).

Conversely, when researchers have used adolescents as informants and studied their literacy practices, connections are rarely made between race (as well as other identities like gender) and how it impacts adolescents' views (Hinchman & Chandler-Olcott, 2006). Tatum (2006) who studied Black males in particular stated, "the students themselves should provide input about the value of these texts. Their voices are noticeably absent in conversations about their literacy-related successes and failures in middle and high school classrooms" (p. 49).

Finally, research on reading that uses race as central to the analysis is scarce, particularly with early adolescents. Literacy and education researchers have used race and culture as a springboard to develop culturally relevant literacy practices (Au, 1980; Hale-Benson, 1982, 2001; Hilliard, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1992b; Tatum, 2005) and have looked at how young

children learn and talk about discrimination through using text (Encisco, 2003). Tatum (2005) specifically looked at curricular practices for Black males and concluded that the types of texts we use with Black adolescent boys are key to engaging them in reading, positively changing their life trajectory and empowering them. In addition, race and its impact on literacy research have been conducted on topics such as negotiating race in classroom research (Larson, 2003) and identifying race and ethnicity in children's writing (Daiute & Jones, 2003). However, exploring if race has an impact on reading, or if students think being Black affects their reading, is not as evident in reading research.

Summary

There is a need for research that examines what Black children think about race in relation to reading. Policy has yet to address their needs specifically and the voices of Black children are scarce within literacy research. While researchers have done a plethora of studies around culture and literacy, culture and instruction, Black learning styles and language, work centered on what early adolescents think about being Black and how it might have potential impact on their reading ability are still necessary areas to explore.

II. Literature Review

Introduction

This study is focused on the perspectives of Black, early adolescent struggling readers. Do these children see race as a factor in their reading ability, do they see themselves as struggling readers, do their narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school, and what can they tell us that can inform policy, curriculum, and practice?

This study is informed by researchers who have examined critical race theory (CRT), (Lynn, 2006; Morrell, 2004), Black adolescent identity (Cohen, 2007; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Dance, 2002; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009), early adolescents' views on their literacy practices and reading ability (Alvermann et al., 2006; Ivey, 1999b), adolescents' views on education and social capital (Carter, 2005; Cohen, 2007; Lee, 1992, 2007), and struggling reader identity (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Compton-Lily, 2008; Hall, 2009, Hall & Nellenbach, 2009; Ivey, 1999b). In this chapter, I will discuss the major interrelated areas of research that inform my work.

I begin the chapter with a brief historical perspective of Black literacy and educating Black children, highlighting the unique history of Blacks and their fight to be literate. Additionally I discuss how literacy was conceptualized in the Black community. I then cover the following topics: critical race theory, Black youth racial identity and school achievement, early adolescent's beliefs about their literacy practices, and struggling early adolescent readers and identity.

Historical Perspective

Historically, literacy has been a struggle for Blacks to access. African Americans' determination to overcome an estimated 90% illiteracy rate in the 1800s is stunning (Anderson, 2004-2005). Even with the looming threat that learning how to read and write could bring death or beatings (Belt-Beyan, 2004), African Americans were persistent in their pursuit to read, write, and maintain their cultural identity. Some were self-taught. Other efforts to learn to read were accomplished through freedom schools, secret schools, and independently-run schools such as the secret school ran by a Black woman named Deveauz in Savannah, Georgia, and Miss L in Charleston, South Carolina, who used a sewing class as a cover for her secret school (Anderson, 1988; Holt, 1990). Cultural identity was maintained through the curriculum, while the importance of being educated and being literate was expressed as part of regular cultural practices. This included maintaining the specific cultural characteristics in Black language, rhetoric, oratory, and writing styles, starting schools, participating in community literacy events, and upholding the belief that literacy/knowledge is power.

Black educators wrote curriculum to dispel the negative myths of Blacks that many children saw in textbooks of the early 20th century (Harris, 1994). By reviewing documentation of educated African Americans from 1700-1939, Harris (1992) found four major themes that defined African Americans' literacy experience: (1) literacy was a valuable commodity that African Americans had limited opportunities to acquire; (2) literacy could serve both emancipatory (i.e., participation in society) and oppressive functions (i.e., curricula can misrepresent groups); (3) European Americans did not fully support education for African Americans; and, (4) curricula should provide authentic and accurate pictures of African American culture and history that would strengthen their pride in their culture.

Since education became legal for Blacks, Black educators created curricula material that dispelled the myths of Black people that many children saw in *McGuffey Readers* and *Elson Readers* (Harris, 1994). Alice Howard's *ABC for Negro Boys and Girls* was created to show positive images of African Americans. It was included as a supplement in a 1925 reader for African American children (Harris, 1992). Curriculum was written by Garland Penn, W. E. B. DuBois, and others. Some of the text for African Americans held the tenets of hard work, Christianity, and had no particular emphasis on culture. W. E. B. Dubois's ideas for curriculum outlined a push for understanding of self, learning to read by the age of four, and learning foreign languages (Harris, 1994).

In 1936, the need for culturally relevant curriculum for reading was discussed by Johnson who noted that, "reading, a most useful tool, can be interesting if it can begin close enough to experience to have meaning... The irony of the situation is increased when the reading matter of these Negro schools is restricted to the used and discarded volumes of the libraries of the white community" (p. 268). Johnson was also critical of how textbooks made Black children feel bad about their own race and left them without a sense of their history.

Gadsen (1993) studied twenty-five families in a small southern community about their beliefs about literacy. She showed that African Americans held literacy in high regard. For them, literacy was always tied to a life event. The findings from her study revealed that "literacy is achieved through schools, but access to education may be accomplished only through mutual understanding, respect for the community, and a sense of cultural identity" (p. 365).

A rich history of literacy and its link to cultural uplift was also discovered through a close reading of narratives of Black people (Perry, 2003). Perry's study illuminated the ideas that (1) literacy was a communal act; (2) literacy was freedom; (3) literacy was a necessity for

cultural/communal advancement; and, (4) literacy allowed Blacks to write their own stories and move to action. Other works show a deep connection between literacy as tool of empowerment. In Fisher's (2009) historical ethnography, a tale is woven of the powerful uses of literacy by Black writers, poets, novelists, journalists, educators, and activists who used language to disseminate information and uplift the Black community. A recurring theme of literacy as power reveals itself in the scholarly works on Black literacy (Belt-Beyan, 2004; Fisher, 2009; Gadsen, 1993; Harris, 1992, 1994; Holt, 1990, Perry, 2003; Richardson, 2003).

The works of these scholars show a rich history of reading and the importance of being literate in the Black community. They also highlight particular features specific to Black literacy. For instance, Richardson (2003) has done an in-depth analysis of Black language, composition, and rhetoric to create African-centered instruction used in an African-centered composition course. Her study details the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Blacks' writing and their use of proverbs, rhythmic patterns, direct-address conversational tones, and call and response as part of the Black writing style. Other characteristics of Black writing include an infusion of cultural values, social consciousness, and references to race. She used this knowledge, along with culturally relevant pedagogy, to successfully teach Standard English.

Miller and Vander Lei (1990) share three features of the Black oral culture that can be valuable for the instruction of writing and collaborative work in classrooms with Black children. These three features—communal collaboration, call-and-response collaboration, and historical collaboration—emphasize the idea of literacy as community. Communal collaboration entails that the author and the audience meld into one voice; where the content of the discourse becomes more important than the person creating it. Call and responses require active participation of the audience and can shift and change the direction of a speech based on the respondents. Historical

collaboration explains the refinement and repeated use of one's own work and others', thereby enabling a contemporary author and audience to respond to previous speakers and audiences.

While the focus of the present research is not on specific writing or language use in the classroom to support reading, it is important to underscore the depth of the Black literacy tradition. That is, it is important to understand that the manifestation of what has been termed as low achievement in reading of many Black children runs counter to the importance of reading in the lives of Black people in the United States.

It is also critical because to look at issues of race as defined in this research, the historical aspect must be brought to bear. The rich literacy history of Blacks was cultivated even while external forces such as slave laws, inequity in school funding, racial segregation, poorly implemented desegregation policy (*Brown v Board of Education*, 1954), and lack of access to public schooling worked to make literacy an elusive goal for many Black people. A story about today's Black readers cannot be told without this context because being Black created a racialized experience when it came to learning how to read. That is at one point in history, being Black prohibited one from learning how to read; confined to particular curricular experiences in schools and marginalized in relation to access.

Today, being Black still determines to some extent the experiences afforded when learning how to read and write. Black children are still fighting for the right to be literate in the sense that their schooling experiences are often not good ones. Today, many schools are still segregated. Blacks are still not achieving at advanced levels on average on standardized reading assessments, and are more likely to receive their education in places that have fewer resources (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Lewis et al., 2010; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). This disparity exists even within

racially, integrated schools (Diamond, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Ogbu, 1993). Through this study, early adolescents who are the descendants of those who fought for the right to be literate are asked to share their thoughts about race, reading, and their struggles. Their voices will be couched in both the history of Black peoples fight for literacy and a rich literate Black tradition. Their narratives will be analyzed using Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its foundations in law. It grew from a growing concern of the legal system's treatment of racially and ethnically diverse persons, for whom the law did not work. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) characterizes CRT in the following way: "Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 3). As pointed out in the introduction, the stories of the oppressed become critical when racism is understood as an everyday occurrence. Without hearing how race and racism affects "othered" people, it is difficult to understand its complexity and how to address it. CRT draws on work from various disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, ethnic studies, and so forth) to interpret and analyze race in society (Lynn, 2006). According to Delgado and Stefanic (2001), the basic tenets of CRT are:

- 1) Racism is common.
- 2) Racism is difficult to cure or address because it is common and is used as a means to uphold the interest of white elites and working class people.
- 3) Race and races are products of social thought and relations.

- 4) Differential racialization is an occurrence where societies racialize minority groups at different times for different purposes. Groups are used and portrayed to fit the needs of the dominant society. In addition the reality of the human intersectionality is often dismissed. Humans do not have one identity.
- 5) Counter-narrative /“legal storytelling” is important to the discussion of people of color. People of color have a unique voice and their perspective on race and experiences with racism come with a certain status. They have lived experiences and these stories are important to the understanding of race and racism.

What does CRT have to do with education and reading achievement? It offers a framework for analyzing the stories of struggling early adolescent readers through the lens of race. By examining the “race effects” of school practices, policies, and structure (Lynn, 2006), we can potentially uncover the deleterious effects of education on adolescent African Americans’ reading achievement. Moreover, we can look to see the extent to which their racialized experiences with reading might have impacted their reading development.

Groundbreaking work by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Tate (1997) have helped to situate CRT in education by highlighting its potential to look at how property rights affect educational inequalities (i.e., funding, physical buildings, curriculum, access to museums and other institutions), as well as its usefulness in researching education policy and practice. This work has been expanded for use in many areas of education including literacy: viewing literacy as white property (Pendergrast, 2003); making race visible in literacy research and instruction (Rogers & Mosley, 2006); and promoting equity in children’s literacy instruction (Hughes-Harsell, Barkley, & Koehler, 2010). There are also a number of research studies that use race as a point of analysis, although not specifically using CRT as a foundational theory. In the edited

work *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding* (Green & Abt-Perkins, 2003), researchers used race to look at a variety of topics, including teacher practice, and exploring how children talk and learn about power and discrimination in texts. The editors maintain that it is possible and critical to uncover and make visible race and racism in literacy in classrooms and schools. In addition, researchers must be critical about their own practices and beliefs when they use race as a means of analysis.

The review of literature on the history of Black education before and after segregation (Anderson, 1988; Barrows, 1969; Bell, 1995; Takaki, 1979; Watkins, 2001) enabled me to contextualize my earlier reading on Black children and education, culturally relevant practices, learning styles, and cultural difference. It helped me understand that the issue of literacy achievement is nestled within the context in which learning occurs and that low literacy achievement could be the outcome of systemic issues faced by Black children who attend public schools. The major themes that emerged from using Critical Race Theory to look at the low levels of literacy achievement of Black children are the following:

- 1) The education of Black people has not occurred outside of racist thought—from it being illegal for Blacks to learn how to read and write to the selection of the type of curriculum Blacks should receive. Accepting that racism is a normal part of our everyday lives calls us to question its impact on curriculum that has not changed much over the years. Therefore this issue can still be a major factor in Blacks' lower literacy achievement.
- 2) The public education for African Americans situated in large urban school district is often inferior regarding its quality of instruction.

- 3) As curriculum, ideology, structure, and process dictate literacy instructional practices, an emancipatory pedagogy and curriculum practices for Blacks must be considered.
- 4) Culture influences ways of knowing so that a mismatch between school culture and home culture may be problematic in the education of Blacks.
- 5) Culturally relevant pedagogy can be used to address issues that negatively affect Blacks in instructional practices and teacher cultural knowledge.

Even though work has been done with race, literacy and education, there was still a need for research that analyzed the potential ties between race and the plethora of Black struggling readers by examining the voices of early adolescent Black struggling readers. Would the same above themes emerge through their voices? I used CRT to reveal possible factors that may be affecting the reading achievement of struggling early adolescent Black readers.

Black Adolescent Racial Identity and School Achievement

During normal stages of adolescent development, humans go through a process of identifying who they are as members of a group, society, and so forth. Adolescents are faced with tough decisions that help them develop moral character (Marcia, 1978; Spencer, 1999). But in a community where a culture is not valued, adolescents may develop characteristics of resistance to the mainstream cultural (Youniss, 1998, as cited in Spencer, 1999). As Spencer (1999) summarizes, “The response may represent, in fact, an unconscious consideration of societal expectations for appropriate behaviors, while knowing that an equitable access to social opportunities is lacking” (p. 42). This population of youth are defining themselves socially, culturally, morally, and academically. It is in this light that I use the word identity; it is to cover the multiple ways that we see ourselves and the social contexts in which identities are shaped

(Alvermann, 2001b) or as Gee (2000) put it, “Being recognized as a certain “kind of person,” in a given context” (p. 99).

As they go through these stages they are developing their racial/ethnic identity as well. By age 10, children appear to crystalize their ethnic identity (similar to racial identity but includes a worldview or set of beliefs that explain why one is part of a race) and racial attitudes (Rotheram & Phinney, 1998, as cited in Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). For Black early adolescents, this defining period is crucial to their academic success.

Scottham, Sellers, and Nguyen (2008) developed a multidimensional inventory of Black identity for adolescents. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) allows one to explore their self-concept by recognizing that individuals have more than one identity which is ordered by importance. In addition, the MMRI emphasizes no one definition of what being Black is. It helps define at what level race is important to an individual’s self-concept.

Using the MMRI, Smalls, White, Chavous, and Sellers (2007) explored the roles of racial ideological beliefs and racial discrimination in the academic engagement of African American adolescents ages 11-17 (grades 7-10). They found that students who see race as a central identity have more positive attitudes towards being Black, and that positive attitudes toward being Black are associated with more positive psychological outcomes. Their findings suggest that embracing an ethnic minority group identity may enhance school engagement. This orientation is different than Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) work which stated that identifying more with White culture promotes academic achievement.

Academic engagement may be an important mediating process between Black students’ racial ideological beliefs and academic outcomes. In addition, experiencing racial discrimination is an important risk factor for lower academic engagement. That is, “adolescents beliefs about

the meaning of their racial group membership along with their racial discrimination experiences, relate to their academic engagement attitudes and behaviors” (Smalls et al., 2007, p.324).

Connell, Spencer, and Aber (1994) conducted research on a model of interpersonal contexts and their relationship to action and outcomes of school success among poor, urban Black youth. As a primary goal, they tested a model of human motivation regarding school success and failure. The model looks at the relationship between how individuals see themselves in relation to how these beliefs play themselves out in different cultural contexts such as school and affect such things as engagement. The model then specifies how individuals’ responses or actions directly contribute to outcomes (e.g., success in school), and the individuals’ experience of the context (e.g., school).

They found that being poor and the participants’ community’s economic situation was not the major indicator for school success. Instead, what was relevant was “youth’s experiences of their family’s support for them, of their own sense of control over their success and failure in school, and of their feelings of self-worth and emotional security with others are regulating their actions in school” (p. 503). These findings are important because it highlights the impact of family on adolescents’ perceptions of themselves and consequent success in school. Additional research completed by Zand and Thomson (2005) supports the idea that Black adolescents’ global self-worth (how good they feel about themselves) has a direct effect on their academic achievement.

According to Carter (2005), Black and Latino youth fall into three broad categories of identity: mainstreamers, cultural straddlers, and noncompliant believers. Mainstreamers may identify with their own cultural and ethnic identity but they accept dominant culture’s “know-how” (p. 13). They go along with the school or institutional rules and see no uniqueness in their

culture accepting dominant culture as the norm. Cultural straddlers are critical of institutional rules, however they obey them while maintaining their cultural beliefs and successfully navigate institution's resources. Socially, they get along with their Black and Latino peers in and out of school and still perform well academically. Noncompliant believers are just that. They do not follow the rules of mainstream society and therefore find themselves "locked out" of the activities that are considered to be part of successful participation in institutions.

While Carter's work focused on low-income Black and Latino adolescents and not struggling readers, her explanation of the identities young Black and Latino subscribe to adds to this conversation. These identities begin to define how well these students do in school and what types of social and cultural capital they have. In doing so, they help us understand the unique needs of Black students when it comes to schooling. Black students are navigating more than just their cultural identities, they have to juggle institutional identities, dominant culture identities, and they do not see schools as aligned to their realities (Carter, 2005).

Dance (2004) studied academically struggling middle school and junior high Blacks and Latinos in Yonkers. By following them for nearly four years, talking with their families, and spending time in and out of school with them, she discovered that the "fronts" they put on are necessary because they protect the students from the harsh realities of the sometime dysfunctional and violent world they live in within their community. Moreover, particularly with males, the bravado of being able to protect yourself and your family is a mitigating factor. She discovered that role models are crucial in helping Black and Latino boys navigate the academic world and their communities. In addition, she brings to bear the need for more integrated, culturally and social-economically sensitive school models.

Finally, positive correlations between ethnic identity and self-esteem, academic achievement and student behaviors have been found in middle school children (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Research on racial identity has been summed up by McGee (2007) as follows:

Scholars who study racial identity contend that strong identification with one's racial group can serve as a protective buffer to personal self-esteem and foster positive psychosocial adaptation. In educational contexts, an awareness of the existence of racial discrimination in society has been related to better social and academic outcomes for African-American students, consequently African-American students can understand and defend themselves against the continued legacy of educational oppression. (p. 25)

The combination of the research discussed here, along with McGee's (2007) summary highlights the fact that: (1) Blacks are varied in how they identify themselves culturally; (2) positive orientation toward your ethnic group and positive view of your race can support positive academic achievement and; 3) the need to disassociate from race if one views it as an inhibitor and linked to poor school success is also related to a positive effect on school achievement. Finally, these studies highlight the importance of taking into account individual early adolescents' beliefs about what it means to be Black when using Critical Race Theory as an analytical tool to look at data. Being Black does not automatically mean one is conscious about racism or sees him or her as part of the larger Black community.

Voices of Early Adolescents

Early adolescents are at a stage in their lives when they are trying to define themselves. As noted earlier, they are trying to build autonomy while still being very dependent. This stage is not without influence from engaging in different literacy events. Engaging in text, connecting with characters, increasing content knowledge, and hearing new points of view all help shape

adolescents (Neilsen, 2006; Tatum, 2000). This would be a wonderful connection for a good reader, but a struggling reader is probably having more difficulty making connections especially in grade or age-appropriate text. Neilson (2006) points out that text, particularly fiction, are symbolic resources that are imaginative possibilities and tools to house dreams. If an adolescent cannot access these symbolic resources, what tools are they relying on?

Early adolescents have told us in various ways how they view their literacy abilities. But more often than not, adults are interpreting what they believe adolescents need most. Early adolescents like to engage in a variety of literacy events that are usually not available to them during the formal schooling hours (Alvermann, 2001; Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2002; Ivey, 1999a, 1999b). But struggling Black middle-school readers have stated that their low engagement in reading during school was the result of negative feedback from teachers in years past, embarrassment, and low decoding and vocabulary skills (Tatum, 2005).

Research on younger adolescent readers show they are very sensitive to context; that is, the purpose for reading, the outcome (i.e. a grade), the type of texts read, and their personal identities. All of these things affect their motivation to read and engagement in reading (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Tatum (2000) argues, “Literacy instruction must have value in these young people’s current time and space if it is to attract and sustain their attention. It must address their issues and concerns in a way that will lead them to examine their own lives” (p.15).

Broughton and Fairbanks (2003) conducted an ethnographic, longitudinal study of early adolescent girls’ identities and literacy development. They discovered that as the girls struggled with their changing views of themselves and others, the literacy curriculum did not support their developing identities. The four girls she studied at the beginning in sixth grade and on through seventh grade began to position school and engagement in their language arts classes in different

ways. One girl became more involved and another less; another girl's social relationships became more important (while still earning good grades), and another, whose placement in special education classes gave her the support she needed in language arts, gained confidence as a student.

Their study suggests that the rapid change taking place during early adolescence can and should be supported in the language arts curriculum. While these girls were changing, the literacy curriculum stayed the same—with a heavy focus on grammar and answering comprehension questions, “We continued to find a disturbing lack of connection across the girls’ interests and desires, the school context, and the language arts curriculum” (p. 432). Based on the girls interviews and classroom observations, Broughton and Fairbanks recommend that schools listen when girls talk, plan for social learning activities within the curriculum, along with ample opportunities to support identity formation through self-expression and self-exploration. Finally they argue for including a balanced representation of male, female, and multiethnic protagonist in the texts that are read. That is, it is important for children to see themselves in the literature.

Some adolescents were turned off from reading as they got older because texts became increasingly boring and long. A survey of struggling readers in middle school showed that 65% of eighth graders, 42.4% of 5th graders, and only 27% of 3rd graders think reading is boring (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). However, the preponderance of evidence tells us that adolescents still read (Alvermann, 2001a; Hagood, Stevens, & Rinking, 2002; Moje, 2000).

We have learned from Jenkins (2009) that a teacher's decisions around supporting the reading development of a young Black struggling reader are important. His work with such a reader for a number of years, has led to five recommendations for supporting Black male struggling readers. Recommendations include connecting reading to their lives, providing choice

in the type of texts read, and understanding that school, family, and other external supports need to work together to support literacy development.

Ivey's (1999b) multi-case study of three sixth-grade readers highlighted that young adolescents' disposition towards reading and ability to read vary depending on the content and context. Ivey (1999a) also reflected on middle school readers after ten years of observing them and listening to their voices. Her work generated the following generalizations about the needs of struggling middle grade readers: (1) they need real purposes for reading, (2) they like to read when they have a variety of text available, (3) they want to become better readers, and (4) they want to share their reading experiences with others.

Knoester (2009) interviewed ten early adolescent students ages 11 to 13 years old, along with their parents and homeroom teachers to understand the role of literacy and identity formation in the lives of these early adolescents. The participants were African American, White, and Latino. He asked questions about reading habits and interest, availability of reading materials, what motivated them to read, their perceptions about friendships and so on. He learned from them that reading was tied to social interactions such as talking about what they were reading. Seven of the ten students said they still like to have their parents read to them. In sharing a more in-depth picture of one of the students, John it was found that not liking to read, finding the right text, and seeing reading as not important for future goals seemed related to his social status in school. Using the metaphor of a circle a teacher describes John as close to the center of the social world—well liked but resistant to reading. Other boys in the center of the social circle resisted reading as well.

Knoester's findings suggest that identity development impacted the independent reading habits and interests of the adolescents in the study. Knoester used Gee's (1996) theory of

Discourses to situate his work. Discourses explain the multiple identities that people have. The primary discourse is formed early in life. It is the first social identity we develop through our interactions with our families and our social cultural settings. They form the foundation of values like who we include and what we “believe when we are not ‘in public’” (Gee, as cited in Knoester, 2009). Secondary discourses are those that are learned through socialization in other spaces like church and school. Gee’s (1996) theory implies that there can be tension between primary and secondary discourses. Knoester saw this tension in his study. To find a bridge between primary and secondary discourses, he contends that building the academic discourse of early adolescents may be done by making connections between their personal, home, and school identities, and by taking into account their interest. What is critical, especially for Black students, is recognizing the possible tension between friendships, school success, and secondary academic discourses. Schools have to make a conscious effort to attend to these tensions.

An analysis of fifth-grade readers’ surveys about their out-of-school practices showed that the strongest predictor of reading success in young readers in terms of higher reading achievement was time spent reading books outside of school (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Reading outside of school also impacted growth in reading proficiency from 2nd to 5th grades. Unfortunately, on most of the days during this research, children reported little to no book reading outside of school. From the daily surveys that the students completed, it was also discovered that 5th-grade students spent more time watching television and listening to music than reading.

Based on how early adolescent readers describe their reading practices, we learn that they are multidimensional, still need support to develop their reading abilities, and even if they are proficient, readers begin to change their dispositions towards reading in in-school contexts.

Struggling readers, average and proficient, young adolescent readers—are still developing their sense of who they are along with their reading habits both in and outside of school.

Early Adolescent Struggling Reader and Identity

Students are labeled as struggling readers for a number of reasons—low test scores, poor fluency, reading below grade level, policy, poor grades, cognitive disabilities, poor comprehension, low vocabulary, and low motivation (Alvermann, 2001; Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Franzak, 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ivey, 1999b; Kamil et al; 2008; Rubenstein-Avila, 2003; Underwood & Pearson, 2004). Some believe that young children’s identity is impacted by their reading difficulties.

As stated earlier, I use identity in the social constructive sense—to cover the multiple ways that we see ourselves and the social contexts in which identities are shaped (Alvermann, 2001b). Students’ beliefs about their reading ability are constructed based on the responses they receive about their reading ability through interactions with peers, teachers, and parents (Alvermann, 2001a, 2001b; Hall, 2009). How they define themselves as readers can impact how they choose reading strategies, how they engage in class, and how much they read in both in-school and out-of-school contexts (Alvermann, 2001b; Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Hall, 2007, Ivey, 1999b; Sableski, 2007).

How students perceive the label of “struggling reader” and respond to the task of reading can impact each other. Struggling readers may exhibit behaviors that impact how much reading they do in class. Using descriptive case-study methods, Hall (2007) collected data on one sixth, one seventh, and one eighth-grade struggling reader to analyze their behaviors in different content area courses. She discovered that these readers used silence as a strategic way to respond to reading or talking about text. They would use silence to protect their identities—being seen as

poor readers or showing they were good readers—to learn the content covered in class. Hall warns us to be careful when looking at struggling readers as unmotivated or unwilling. Struggling readers may be interested in the content but need more support; they may not engage because they do not want to compromise their identity or they find alternative ways to learn the content that may not fit what a teacher would consider engaging (e.g., listening or using the work of peers around them).

Research on a group of eighth-grade students revealed that global self-concept and reading ability might not be linked. That is, students who had low reading achievement did not also have a low self-concept (Hettinger, 1982). Hettinger theorized that students may accept their perceived low ability to learn: academic success may be unimportant to them or the low-ability students may have a stable self-image that it is resistant to change. In other words, if students felt good about themselves and accepted their low reading achievement, their self-concept was not affected by their low reading achievement. This idea should be heeded to mean that not all students who struggle with reading feel bad about themselves just as Hall (2007) has noted that not all silent struggling readers are trying to disengage in the learning process.

Finally, Sableski (2007) found that the identities struggling readers developed were both resistant and compliant to one-on-one tutoring interactions with the teacher. The students seem to negotiate the literate identities presented to them by their teachers and the ones they had for themselves. Through these interactions with the teacher, students built their own literacy identities.

Summary

Early adolescents are developing their social, academic, racial/ethnic, and reading identities. There may be a tension in their social and reading/academic worlds that schools need

to pay attention to. For some, especially boys, they may be masking their academic abilities or positive disposition towards learning because of the requirements for them to be tough on the streets in their communities. In addition, for Black children, their attitude towards their race can be impacting their academic success. Having a positive orientation toward your ethnic group and positive view of your race can support positive academic achievement; and, in some cases, disassociating yourself from your race if you view it as an inhibitor and linked to poor school success is also linked to a positive effect on school achievement. Early adolescents begin to think reading is boring, and by middle school, one study showed well over half of eighth graders believed this.

Early adolescent struggling readers are multidimensional. They cope with the academic environment in a variety of ways. They may remain silent or they may try to work with peers. While they continue to read different types of text outside of school (e.g., video, magazines), overall they are reading less outside of school as they get older. The label struggling reader affects how early adolescents participate in literacy events in the classroom. Lastly, struggling early adolescent readers still need support with reading from their families, teachers, and peers.

III. Methodology

Introduction

This study is focused on early adolescent African American children and their beliefs about race and their reading ability. The three research questions are: (1) Do early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability? (2) Can early adolescent Black struggling readers' narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school? and (3) How can making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on students reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum, and practice?

This chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section I discuss the research methods employed. The second section is focused on the context of the study, which includes the selection of the site and participants. The third and fourth sections are dedicated to the collection of data, including collection procedures and methods of analysis.

Research Methods

To answer the research questions, I had to use a method that would allow me to listen to what the readers had to say. I chose to use one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I anticipated that Black early adolescents would be able to engage in meaningful reflections about their reading experiences, especially as it pertains to their literacy development. Seidman (2000) tells us that interviews, as a method of inquiry, are the "most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language" (p. 14). Interview talk is a co-constructed event where the context is very important. In addition, it is essential for the interviewer to recognize his or her identity and participation in the interview (Rapley, 2001). As a Black educator, it was important for me to recognize my own biases. That is, although my voice is found in the interview discourse, it was

important that I did not allow my personal experiences with race, racism, and literacy instruction, dominate the children's voices. Seidman (2000) suggested the following in interviews, which I applied:

1. Listen to what the participant is saying—concentrate on substance, internalize what is said.
2. Listen for the inner voice of the participant. Certain vocabulary words can signal that the response is more guarded, which can then be followed up by asking for more details.
3. Be aware of process as well as substance—energy level of participants, nonverbal cues—to assess the progress of the interview and to know if you should dig deeper.

The interview questions were designed to bring race to the forefront, while looking at the history of literacy in the Black community, education of Black children, and how these young children talked about their experiences. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe when necessary while providing consistency across the interviews.

Context of the Study

The study took place at a university Reading Clinic dedicated to preparing its graduate students for the reading profession, as well as providing low cost reading and writing tutorial services to students who are struggling with literacy in school. The Clinic has a long history of serving students as young as eight-years-old but has recently begun to focus on children ages 11-17 to deal specifically with the needs of adolescent readers.

Students receiving services in the Reading Clinic are screened using the Gray Diagnostic Reading Test (GDRT). GDRT is a norm-referenced assessment that has four core tests:

Letter/Word Identification, Phonetic Analysis, Reading Vocabulary, and Meaningful Reading. Students can also be accepted to the Clinic based on teacher recommendation and parent phone interviews. After initial screenings and placement in the Clinic, students are assigned a graduate student who is working on a master's degree. This site was chosen because the students in the Clinic are already identified as struggling readers as defined in this research and the Black students in the clinic were the appropriate age for this study. Students were interviewed during the spring semester of 2012.

Participants

To attract participants, flyers were displayed at the university's Reading Clinic. Interested parents were asked to call the number on the flyer. Participants had to be between the ages of 9 and 17, attend public school, and be current students in the Reading Clinic. Fortunately, parents were waiting for their children when I first advertised the research and I was able to collect contact information from them at that time. I worked with parents to establish a time for the interview. All interviews were held at the site directly following the students tutoring session. Five students participated in the study. They were Jahare, (age 9), below the lower-middle grades who fit the age range of the research, Harlem (age 10), and Kenyon (age 10), both in the lower-middle grades, and Casey (age 12) and Terry (age 13), both in the upper-middle grades. Before the interview each parent completed and signed a parent consent form.

Data Collection

During the interview process, I read a child assent form aloud to the participants and obtained their signature. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants chose a book and a pencil as a thank-you gift. All interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed the same day or one day after the interviews. I also took notes about body language and responses to

questions during the interview (Wolcott, 1990) to determine how comfortable students were answering questions, whether a question needed follow up or be reworded, and to gauge students' understanding of the questions presented.

The identity we create as readers is important to literacy itself and our literacy experiences (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). So within the interview, students were asked if they agree with being identified as a struggling reader and were given the space to redefine their identity as a reader. Students were also asked questions to indicate if they have had experience with particular culturally relevant practices. Responses to questions about access to culturally relevant practices and quality education can indicate the presence of historic issues of the quality of education for Black children. Some very direct questions about being Black and its relationship to reading achievement and comparisons to White youth were asked. See the Appendix for a copy of the interview protocol.

Data Analysis

As indicated above, there were three major foci of this research: (1) To better understand, through first person accounts, if early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability; (2) to explore how their narratives might offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school, and most importantly; (3) to examine how making race central to the analysis of students' experiences might help us understand its impact on student reading achievement and potentially inform policy, curriculum, and practice.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education works a little differently from other CRT research (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). To get at the layers of race, it is important to attempt to challenge what has been said or not said about race, as well as consider how social constructs (such as race and gender) intersect and impact communities of color (Solorzano, et al., 2000). To

look at the layers of race and the foci of the research, I first tried to use open coding with some ideas and categories in mind based on the research questions. Open coding allows for additional categories to emerge from the data. But traditional coding methods did not allow me to capture students' voices in a way that put them at the center of the analysis. So, I turned the categories that emerged into questions that addressed each of the major foci for this research. The questions asked were answered using direct quotes or other evidence from students (see Table 4). Some questions did not directly align to the three major research questions; however, they surfaced as themes from the interviews.

TABLE 4
EXCERPT OF DATA ANALYSIS

Coding Question	Research Question	Examples of Evidence
Does the student see him/herself as a struggling reader?	Inform	Yes. "Feels bad" "that I need help" "My reading isn't that good"
Does the reader present any issues that he/she may have with reading?	Inform	Yes. "I need a bit more help in my reading so I can grow as I get to college"
Does it contradict his/her belief about being a struggling reader?	Inform	Only in that he recognizes he needs help with reading. "Yes, I get help. But not on every single page though." He goes to a separate class for reading
How does the student talk about his/her early reading experiences?	Racialized Experience	He remembers reading a 'baby book' with easy, small words.
What types of reading do they do now?	Inform	Likes comic books, "I read comic books every single day."
What does the student say about his/her family and how they supported their reading development?	Racialized Experience	His mother initially taught him the alphabet and helps him read word-by-word now "she taught me word by word every time I get stuck."
What types of support does the student believe he/she needs from the school to be a good reader? List phrases.	Inform	"Probably nothin' cause, I don't know like talking to the teachers."
What does the reader say that may help curriculum writers, teachers to help them be better readers at school?	Inform	Have students read every day and discuss 'advice' or benefits of reading.
How does the student feel about being an African American? Positive statements? Negative statements?	Race	Both negative and positive. Negative statements: "Because most of us really don't like to read or we don't like to read what we have to read" Positive: "Because there are a lot of African American inventors so some of them can be like an idol to you."
Does the student point out issues with access to quality in education?	Racialized Experience	No. Speaks highly of school and all things school has provided from preschool onward, "learn new things from different books and like compare and contrast different books."
Does the student point out issues of access to books by or about African Americans in school?	Racialized Experience	Yes. Initial response was that they have no books. Then with follow up says, "They got Martin Luther King. That's all I saw."
Does the student point out issues relative to learning about African Americans (history, etc.) in school?	Racialized Experience	No. Learns African American history. Able to articulate things about the slave trade and inequality.
Does the student point out issues of access to technology in school?	Racialized Experience	No. They use computers for research papers and before school to do their homework
Has the student been exposed to culturally relevant practices at school? (Access to books by or about African American? Discussing what is read in class with peers and/or teachers?)	Racialized Experiences	They read about African American history; discuss books in reading circles with the teacher. "My reading teacher he has a lot of books that is based on African American history on shelves in the classroom."
Does the student believe that being an African American has anything to do with his/her reading ability?	Race	No. "Just because I'm black doesn't mean I'm not gone be able to read as good as an Asian or White or anybody else"
In your opinion, how does the student "see" reading, that is, how do they discuss and describe readings impact on	Inform*	Reading for pleasure "we read books that we don't like to read. And then we don't have time to read other books that we want

their life? For instance, do they see reading as only important for school? See reading as something you do for pleasure? See reading as learning?		to read" and Reading is for learning (talks a lot about learning history)
The racial ideology refers to how people believe the African American community should act. (Scottham, Sellers & Ngye'n, 2008). Based on what the student says about race, which category do you think the student falls in?	Race	Assimilationist. "Black and whites should learn the same thing" "Blacks and Whites should get along and read at the same height" "Yes" (Blacks receive the same quality education as Whites) . "Black doesn't affect anything because it doesn't matter what color you is."

An explanation of student evidence coded and the abbreviations of the major questions in Table 4 are as follows:

(1) *Do early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability?* **Race**

Students' responses were coded to understand how the students feel about being Black.

What positive statements did they say? What negative statements did they share? This analysis is critical to the use of CRT as the students' understanding about race help me understand what children believed about being Black. Their voices are unique and their voices come with a certain status. If their narrative about being Black are or are not aligned with the literature on how adolescents identify with their race/ethnicity, then it will inform how we address their cultural identities.

(2) *Can early adolescent Black struggling readers' narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school?* **Racialized experiences**

Along with determining what children think about being Black it is equally important to unearth the particular experiences these children have when it comes to learning how to read. Racialized experiences refer to the events that happen as the result of the socially-constructed phenomenon of race. These experiences are often the result of stereotypes and are imposed on Black people by groups assigned to a higher position on the racial hierarchy and those who are not members of the Black race. Critical race theory calls on the researcher to look at how stereotypes, marginalization, or lack of access may be

present in the experiences of the subjects. For example, the coding question, “What does the student say about their family and how they supported their reading development?,” is asked to compare how contemporary conversations about Black students include negative portrayals of Black families being disengaged in the education of their children and to compare whether their responses concur with the historic importance of literacy in the Black community. Another example is the coding question, “Does the student point out issues of access to books by or about African Americans in school?” As discussed in Chapters One and Two, historic injustice in terms of access to positive cultural identities and curriculum that uplifts the community is an issue. Additionally, research has noted books by or about African Americans as a feature of culturally relevant pedagogy.

(3) How can making race central to the analysis of students’ experiences help us understand its impact on students’ reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum and practice? Inform

Statements the readers make based on questions aligned to this research theme offer information regarding what early adolescents say they need. For example, the coding question, “Does the student see him/herself as a struggling reader?” would help inform schools and teachers about how to approach students and design curriculum if readers readily identify with this characterization of their reading. In essence, the student is the informant indicating the types of support they need to be a good reader, what interest them, and how they see reading and its impact on their lives.

To establish reliability and credibility to the data collected, two methods were employed: member checking and intercoder agreement. Member checking is “the process of returning analyses to informants for the confirmation of accuracy” (Angen, 2000 p. 383). Member

checking can be done formally or informally. For this research, it was used during the course of the interview by restating statements or my interpretations of statements made by participants to ensure that I accurately reflected their voice (Angen, 2000; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

I and another doctoral student, who is a reading specialist and former special education teacher, reviewed the transcribed data independently to establish intercoder reliability (Angen, 2000; Harris, Pryor, & Adams, 1997). Intercoder reliability is the level of agreement across different persons reviewing the same set of data; that is, independent coders evaluate the same message and reach the same conclusion (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Braken, 2010). All five interviews were transcribed and used to gain intercoder reliability.

To make sure we were both looking at data in the same way, I created a step-by-step instruction guide, which posed a series of questions of the data and gave explicit examples of how to find evidence for the questions. After data were coded, we came together and discussed points of disagreement as well as the themes that emerged from the interviews. We used the following guiding questions: How do these readers see race? What are struggling readers telling us they need? How does race impact their reading development? What themes are the same as what we see in the literature on struggling readers? What's different? During the discussion we used research and went back to the voices of the readers to help us talk through the questions.

To determine reliability, the responses were scored as follows: if we found the same evidence and came to equal understanding, the question was given a score of 3; if there were different quotes used but the same understanding drawn from the evidence, the question was given a score of 2; finally, if we were not in agreement by evidence or drawing the same understanding, the question was given a score of 1. Ninety-two percent reliability was established when coding separately. After discussion, 96% reliability was achieved (see Table 5).

Table 5 shows the rating for each transcribed interview and the total percent of agreement before and after corroboration.

TABLE 5
RELIABILITY SCORE

	Jahare	Change after discussion	Harlem	Kenyon	Change after discussion	Terry	Casey	Total
Question								
1. Does the student see him/herself as a struggling reader?	3		3	3		3	3	
2. Does the reader present any issues they may have with reading?	1	3	3	3		3	3	
2a. Does it contradict his/her belief about being a struggling reader?	1	3	3	3		3	3	
3. How does the student talk about his/her early reading experiences?	3		3	3		3	3	
3a. What types of reading do they do now?	3		3	3		3	3	
4. What does the student say about his/her family and how they supported his/her reading development?	3		3	3		3	3	
5. What does the student say about how his/her school supports them as readers?	3		3	3		3	3	
6. What types of support does the student believe he/she needs from the school to be a good reader? List phrases.	3		3	1		3	3	
7. What does the reader say that may help curriculum writers, teachers to help him/her be better readers at school?	2		3	2		2	1	
8. How does the student feel about being an African American? Positive statements? Negative statements.	3		3	3		2	3	
9. Does the student point out issues with access to quality in education?	3		3	3		3	3	
10. Does the student point out issues of access to books by or about African Americans in school?	3		3	3		3	3	
11. Does the student point out issues relative to learning about African Americans (history, etc.) in school?	3		3	3		1	3	
12. Does the student point out issues of access to technology in school?	3		3	3		3	1	
13. Has the student been exposed to culturally relevant practices at school?	2		3	3		3	3	
14. Does the student believe that being an African American has anything to do with their reading ability?	3		3	3		3	3	
15. In your opinion, how does the student "see" reading, that is, how do they discuss and describe readings impact on their life?	3		3	1	3 CHANGE: It's not quite reading for learning. More about act.	3	3	
16. The racial ideology refers to how people believe the African American community should act. (Scottham, Sellers & Nguye'n, 2008). Based on what the student says about race, which category do you think the student falls in?	3		3	1	3 CHANGE: In agreement	3	2	
Raw score (270 total score)	48	54	54	47	51	50	49	248

Percent Agreement	89%	100%	100%	87%	94%	93%	91%	92%
Raw score after corroboration								258
Percent Agreement after corroboration								96%

After transcription and initial analysis of the data, I put all student responses side-by-side so I could look across all of the students and ensure that I was shifting through the layers of race, racialized experiences, and struggling reader identity. As stated earlier, to capture race both what has been said or not said about race and how the social construct of race might have intersected and impacted these struggling readers were explored.

Summary

This chapter describes the context of the study, the site the research took place as well as the methods in which data were collected and analyzed. In the next chapter I discuss the findings of the study.

IV. Meet the Readers: Findings from the Research

This study focused on early adolescent Black children and their beliefs about race and their reading ability. As indicated above, three research questions were posed: (1) Do early adolescent Black students see race as a factor in their reading ability? (2) Can early adolescent Black struggling readers' narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school? and (3) How can making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on students' reading achievement thereby informing policy, curriculum, and practice?

In this chapter, I first introduce the readers by sharing a short description of each participant. Subsequently, I share the findings from each research question noted above.

The Readers

Jahare

Jahare (age 9), is a young reader who remembers his mother reading to him when he was younger and reading baby books with easy words to himself. He does not see himself as a struggling reader and sees reading as important for doing well on tests and getting good grades.

Harlem

Harlem (age 10), is in the lower-middle grades and depicts his early reading experiences by describing a book that he remembers being read to him. He called it *The Coconut Tree* but I believe he was referring to *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* (Martin, 1989), an alphabet book. He was not able to describe why reading was important to him but he did say he needed a little help with his reading so he could get to college.

Kenyon

Kenyon (age 10), is in the lower-middle grades and remembers his mother and aunts helping him with reading. He remembers reading *Cat in the Hat* (Suess, 1957) as his earliest reading experience. He was clear about his struggles with reading. He offered that he feels bad when he has to read, that his reading is not that good, and that he needs help. He says he doesn't really like reading but sees reading as important to knowing how to comprehend and understand words better.

Terry

Terry (age 12), is an upper-middle grade student who enjoys reading graphic novels. She remembers her dad and her grandma reading to her when she was younger. Reading is important to her because it allows her to learn new things. She shared that her school does not let her read the books that she likes to read.

Casey

Casey (age 13), is an upper-middle grade student who does not read much outside of school. He remembers the book, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985), as part of his early reading experiences, along with a personalized book given to him by his mom and dad that he believes was titled *My Day at the Circus*. Reading is important to him because it is needed for everyday life: to sign a contract, so he won't get cheated, and to be aware of the things that are going on around you.

Do Early Adolescent Black Students see Race as a Factor in Their Reading Ability?

The first question of this research dealt with whether early adolescent struggling Black readers see race as a factor in their reading ability. To answer this research question I looked at how the readers talked about race throughout the interview, as well as how they responded to

direct questions about Blacks' performance on standardized tests and whether being Black affected their reading experiences. Table 6 shows the interview questions that were aligned to the first research question.

TABLE 6
RESEARCH QUESTION ONE AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Major Research Question	Interview Questions
Do early adolescent struggling Black readers see race as a factor in their reading ability?	Here in Chicago, Black children score the lowest on all Reading test. You know like the ISAT/ACT. If the Chief of Schools asked you why do you think this is the case, what would you say?
	Many Black youth feel that they receive a poorer education than White youth. Do you believe this and why? Do you believe White people are better readers? Follow-up: Why do you believe this?
	Do you believe that being Black/African American has anything to do with your reading skills? Explain how being Black affects your reading experience.

First I describe the students' racial ideology, and then I discuss how the readers saw race and its effect on their reading.

To determine their racial ideological belief, I used the categories and definitions in the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) by Scottham, Sellers and Ngyeⁿ (2008). This component of the MMRI deals with one's racial ideology—how they believe the African American community should act. I used the terms to categorize the types of statements the readers said in relation to race (i.e., whether they believed Whites were better readers, whether they believe they receive a poorer education than White youth, whether being Black affects their reading), to get a sense of how they situate themselves as part of society. The four categories in the MMRI are: (1) Nationalist—“emphasizes the uniqueness of being African American and is

characterized by the support of African American organizations and preference for African American social environments”; (2) Oppressed Minority—“emphasizes the similarities between African Americans’ experiences and those of other oppressed minority groups”; (3) Assimilationist—“emphasizes the similarities between African American and mainstream American society”; and (4) Humanist—“emphasizes the similarities among all people regardless of race” (p. 298). In Table 7, I provide the categories and a description of the types of responses that would align to each racial ideological category.

TABLE 7
RACIAL IDEOLOGY AND READER’S RESPONSES

Racial Ideology	Reader Responses Aligned to Racial Ideology
Nationalist	Responses may reflect the unique experiences of Black people with reading, schooling or access to a quality education or include the use of pronouns like, us or we .
Oppressed Minority	Responses express that people of color are experiencing the same disparities in school or on reading achievement as Black people.
Assimilationist	Responses recognize no uniqueness in Black peoples’ experiences with reading, schooling, or access to quality education with mainstream American society
Humanist	Responses reflect that the reading experiences, schooling, or quality of education are the same among all people regardless of race.

It is important to note that the MMRI was used on students ages 11-17 and some of the students in this study are younger (specifically, Jahare, Kenyon and Harlem) than those given the MMRI during its development. In addition, one’s racial ideology is not fixed, it can change based on experiences. One’s racial ideology can also reflect more than one category. These students are still young and may not have experienced discrimination and other experiences that may affect how they see the quality of their education.

Jahare, Harlem, and Terry were categorized as assimilationist, Kenyon as nationalist, and Casey as humanist/assimilationist. When Jahare, Harlem, and Terry talked about Black people they made statements such as: “[Being] Black doesn’t affect anything. It doesn’t matter what

color you are.” Kenyon had a nationalist ideological belief. While he didn’t believe that Whites were better readers or had a better education, he added these caveats: Blacks work harder than White people because they have to—“We concentrate more or better sometimes than White people because we trying to make a difference in our Black history so we try to focus harder” and “[Our education] is a little better than White people.” He also cited that “[historically] Black people have been taken advantage of.” The other students who were labeled as assimilationist in ideological belief made statements such as: “We don’t have to feel stupider than Whites” and “There are Black inventors so our education is not poorer than Whites.” Casey was categorized as humanist/assimilationist because he added other races to his explanations, “Just because I’m Black doesn’t mean I’m not gone be able to read as good as an Asian or White or anybody else.”

No students felt that White youth were better readers or received a better education than they did. They have a belief and confidence that they are equal to their White counterparts in ability and access to quality education even when presented with statements that in part contradicted equality in terms of performance on standardized assessments. Reading is a personal thing it’s not a ‘Black thang’ (‘Black thang’ is a reference to the slogan “It’s a Black thang, you wouldn’t understand” often repeated in the 90s to represent the complexities of being Black and the uniqueness of being Black in America. It was also a statement that represented a sense of pride in being Black).

To further answer this first research question, I reviewed how students felt about being Black, and an interesting pattern emerged. Their feelings were positive in relation to how they feel about being Black. However, they offered negative statements when asked questions about Blacks’ reading performance. Positive statements revolved around statements of equality and not feeling that Whites were better readers than Blacks or had a better quality education. Positive

statements were viewed as those that showed good intentions or strong affection towards Black people. Examples are when Harlem said, “Black people don’t have to feel that they are stupider than White people,” or when Terry said that there are “a lot of Black inventors” as proof that Whites do not receive a better education than Blacks. They also felt strongly that Whites do not read better than Blacks but more because they believe anyone can be a good reader. Harlem noted, “Anybody can be a better reader.” Kenyon said “Cause anybody could be a great reader. And that they can just have a nice voice while they read”; and Terry added, “Not really cause everybody reads differently.”

However, positive statements did not hold when asked about why Blacks were underachieving. The younger readers were not as confident as to why they thought Blacks do not perform as well as others on reading achievement tests. Harlem noted that Black students may not be “studying enough,” and Jahare’s wonderings included, “because they don’t read a lot. Or sometimes they don’t remember stuff. ‘Cause it’s a lot of stories and they can’t remember all of it at the same time.” But their body language and tone indicated that they were not sure. Older readers were more confident. Kenyon believed that “[Black students] goof around a lot, and Casey mused, “Most Black kids don’t care about their education. They just care about what people think about them.” Terry stated, “Because most of us really don’t like to read or we don’t like to read what we have to read.” In all, their statements assigned the performance of Black children on reading achievement tests to issues of ability and lack of caring about their education. These remarks are concerning as research has shown historically that Black communities cared deeply about literacy and being educated (Belt-Beyan, 2003; Fisher, 2009; Gadsen, 1993; Perry, 2003)

Finally, when asked directly about whether race affected their reading, they overwhelmingly said no. None of the children felt that being Black was connected to the act of reading. Jahare sums up what everyone but Terry felt: “Black doesn’t affect anything because it doesn’t matter what color you is. It just it helps you with everything.” Interestingly, Terry had difficulty answering the question as she saw the question as being tied to what you read or who you want to be. She thinks being Black only affects you if you read about Black people, “It depends on what you want to be like when you be older, it depends on what you want to be to learn about Black History or if you just want to learn about what happened.”

Do Struggling Readers’ Narratives Offer Insight into the Impact of their Racialized Experiences?

The second research question addressed the extent to which early adolescent Black struggling readers’ narratives might offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school. Racialized experiences refer to the events that happen as the result of the socially constructed phenomenon of race. These experiences are often the result of stereotypes and are imposed on Black people by groups assigned to a higher position on the racial hierarchy and those who are not members of the Black race. These experiences also happen within the context of school and community. To answer this research question I looked at how the readers responded to questions about their early experiences with reading, their access to culturally relevant practices at school, and their view of the quality of their education. That is, what types of experiences in and out of school did these readers have and how was race impacting these experiences? See Table 8.

TABLE 8
RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Major Research Question	Interview Questions
Can early adolescent African American struggling reader’s narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school?	Tell me about the earliest reading experience you remember. For instance what book do you remember first being read to you or reading by yourself when you were younger?
	What kinds of reading and writing do you do? Where do you do this—at home, at school? Anywhere else?

All of the students expressed that someone in their family impacted their reading development. They recalled mostly mothers reading to them and teaching them the alphabet when they were younger. Terry mentioned that her dad read aloud to her. The extended family was also a part of their reading development. Terry shared, "My grandma mostly helped me do the spelling and the letters and mostly math. And some of my family, some of them are teachers already, so they mostly helped me read." Kenyon stated, "My mom and aunties and grandmas, they like help me a lot."

Three out of the five students associated their earliest memories with books such as *Cat in the Hat* (Suess, 1957) and *When You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985). They recalled someone reading to them such as their mother, father, and grandmother. Casey mentioned a personalized book that his parents bought for him. Jahare shared, "My mom taught me my ABCs and kept reading to me, and had me start reading by myself. Or we read together."

Access to African American Literature and History and Culturally Relevant Practices

A number of questions were asked to the readers to see if they believed they had access to quality education and books by and about African Americans, and had learned about African American history and African American contemporary realities. These questions were used to gain insight on whether what we already know about appropriate education for Black children is

evident in these children's experience and to determine again, the type of in-school experiences Black early adolescent struggling readers receive. In short, these questions attempted to capture the presence (or not) of culturally relevant pedagogy. See Table 9.

TABLE 9
RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS-CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Major Question	Interview Questions
Can early adolescent African American struggling reader's narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school?	There is this boy/girl named Tyrone (for a girl, Tasha) that I know who goes to school here in Chicago. He (She) thinks his (her) school is pretty cool because s/he learns a lot. He (she) has to read 2 chapter books a month (which he (she) doesn't always do) and write book reports. At school, Tyrone (Tasha) also has to do research on the computer and write research papers. He (She) also has a class where he (she) learns about African Americans past, present, and hopes for the future. How is your school like Tyrone's (Tasha's)? How is it different?
	Do you have opportunities to talk about the things you read with your classmates during class time? Tell me about that.
	What types of books are available to you at your school that are written by or about African Americans?

When asked what types of books were available to them, all of the students indicated that they had access to books by or about African Americans. However, Jahare stated that the only books available were about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. Kenyon shared that they have books on African Americans but they have more "fun books like Harry Potter."

When asked if they learned about their history, the present, and hopes for the future, Jahare commented that it was limited to Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Lincoln. Terry said they did not talk about African Americans much at her school. In contrast, Kenyon

and Casey were clear about learning African American history in school with more than one reference to their social studies teacher along with access to many books about African Americans. In sum, participants seemed to have been exposed to their history at school although only through a narrow story (slaves, Emancipation, Martin Luther King, Jr., equality) at best. However, they did not appear to have been taught about the modern day realities of Black people.

All of the readers said they had access to computers to do research or do their homework. Kenyon, Casey, Terry, and Harlem noted that their teachers allow them to discuss books with them and their peers. While discussion is a good practice for all students, it has found to be a particularly useful and culturally relevant tool for Black students and students of color (Au, 1980; Dillon, 1989; Heflin, 2002).

None of the students believed that they have received a poorer education than White youth. The responses range from a “no” to Kenyon saying he believed that Blacks receive a little bit better education than Whites compared to the poor education Blacks used to have. Terry spoke highly of school and discussed what school had provided even since she had been in preschool. Casey discussed the many activities they do in school and stated that the quality of education he receives is his responsibility, “The responsibility of receiving an education is based on me. So if I want to do better than a White kid or less than a White kid, it's all on me.”

Other statements about quality as it relates to reading and school practice that arose through the interviews were concerning. For example, Jahare shared that he does not have to do as much work as the student in the “Tyrone” scenario, “It’s different cause we don’t have to read all those books and do all that hard work.” He also talked about reading just as a means of

passing the state test and for grades. Kenyon mentioned that during state testing they just watched television.

How Can Making Race Central to Students' Experiences Provide Understandings on Students' Reading Achievement?

The third research question is: how can making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on students' reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum, and practice? Here, I looked at how students' talked about being struggling readers, how the school might support their reading, what types of reading they do, how reading is important to them, and what were their purposes for reading. See Table 10.

TABLE 10
RESEARCH QUESTION THREE AND ALIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Major Research Question	Interview Questions
How can making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on students' reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum, and practice?	In what ways is reading important to your life?
	People use the word struggling to describe things that just do not come easy. Would you say that this word is appropriate in describing how you feel when you have to read? If participant says yes, ask participant to describe their struggle or what just doesn't come easy for them when they read. If they say no, ask participant what word would they use to describe how they feel when they read and why.
	What kinds of reading and writing do you do? Where do you do this—at home, at school? Anywhere else?
	Describe the supports you receive at school that help you as a reader.
	If you could tell your school or teachers things that would help you to be a good reader, what would you say? Why?
Do you believe that being Black/African American has anything to do with your reading skills? Explain how being Black affects your reading experience.	

Struggling Reader Identity

Of the five readers interviewed, only Kenyon acknowledged that he had difficulty with reading. In response to the question, “People use the word *struggling* to describe things that just do not come easy. Would you say that this word is appropriate in describing how you feel when you have to read?” He responded that he feels bad, he needs help, and that he does not read well. Terry initially responded by saying, “sometimes, but for me, I would say hard.” But then followed up and said it’s only hard when she is learning new information. Although the rest of the readers said they were not struggling, or would not use that word to describe their reading, most of them made comments about some issue they had with reading. Harlem stated he goes to a separate class for reading, and that he needs “a bit more help in my reading so I can grow as I get to college.” Kenyon stated he reads slowly, doesn’t like to read a lot, and that “I can explain more than I could read or write.” As noted early, Terry said reading is hard when she is learning “like new things we haven’t heard or seen before. Like new different words you haven’t seen or read about a new thing.” Casey noted he may “stumble on a word.”

How the School can and does Support Readers

Students were varied in their responses to what the school can do for them to help them become better readers. Some direct questions were posed to them such as, “What type of reading do you do now?” and “If you could tell your school or teachers things that would help you to be a good reader what would you say? Why?” These questions were asked to understand what Black struggling readers say they need. They all reported that they liked to read a variety of genres. For example, Jahare likes non-fiction and Harlem likes comic books. Casey only enjoys *Harry Potter* in the fantasy category, but also occasionally reads books about movies and

magazines about sports and celebrities. Terry likes reading graphic novels and Kenyon likes to read books about Black history.

Students said different things about how their school supports them as a reader. Jahare noted that the school gives him advice about reading. Kenyon and Harlem discussed the school helping them with words when they get stuck. Both of these students also receive pull out services. Harlem goes to a separate class for reading while Kenyon gets one-on-one help through his school's Response to Intervention program, "We have this RtI thing." Kenyon mentioned that sometimes the instruction in the RtI is fun but what they have been working on had changed because of testing, "Like now we are reading *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. We're like in the 2nd chapter and we started like last month. But we haven't been getting to it lately because of the ISAT." Terry had difficulty with the question and just talked about, "learn[ing] things before you were born" is how the school could help her be a better reader. Casey, the oldest student, noted specific things that his teacher does to support him as a reader including, teaching his class Cornell notes, having them break down the sections they do not understand, and also giving background information to help them comprehend the text. He says the school could help him be a good reader by giving him "a good book that is interesting and sometimes sugar." That is, he needs the sugar for energy when he has to read boring books.

Type of Instruction Readers Need

Students give clues as to what type of instruction they think they need to help them be better readers. As research on adolescent readers (Alvermann & Eakle, 2007; Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey, 1999b) suggest that interest is important to readers. Sixty percent of the students in this study noted interest as important to reading. These comments included needing teachers to help them get through "the

boring stuff” and provide time to read the things they want to read. For example, Case stated, "If I don't like it, it's not interesting to me, I'll get bored and I'll start to tune out and don't really think about the book." Kenyon said that reading needs to be made fun, and Harlem said after-school classes would help. Learning how to say the words (i.e. decoding strategies) came up for Terry and Harlem and overall, 4 out of 5 of the students mentioned getting help when stuck on words was a good way to help them with their reading.

Three of the five students indicated that they do most of their reading at school. Jahare does most of his reading at home, Harlem said home and school, and Terry mentioned school and the Reading Clinic. However, overall they seemed to have some time at school to read books that they like but they are not reading much when they are at home. Casey explained why he doesn't read at home, "Well, at home I don't read a lot 'cause I don't like to read a lot so I don't do it at home." No students mentioned needing any particular culturally relevant tasks or practices to help them read better.

Purpose for Reading

Based on the comments of the students, another theme emerged—how the readers saw the purpose of reading. Did they see reading as only important for schooling? Do they see that reading is for learning or pleasure? The difference between reading for learning and reading for school is that reading for learning is more what you get out of reading, while reading for schooling is what one has been told to do with reading (to learn words) or is outcome based (reading is for grades versus “reading is for learning different things that happened before”).

Students' views on reading ranged from reading is for schooling Jahare said, "Reading helps you on the ISAT [Illinois State Achievement Test]" and "Reading could make you have straight A's" to reading for functional purposes. Casey said “if I have to sign a contract or

something...so you have to know what's going on around you or in your life." Harlem, Jahare, and Terry seemed to have a view that reading is for school or success in college. Terry also saw reading as important for learning and for pleasure, "[In school] we read books that we don't like to read. And then we don't have time to read other books that we want to read." And during the interview, Terry expressed a number of times all the things she learned through reading, as well as articulating a broader purpose for reading, "When you grow older, you will be able to use those words when you're talking or in high school, you'll be able to use it in stories that you write or explain with."

Summary Profile of the Readers

Table 11 is a summary profile of the readers. It includes their racial ideological belief, access to culturally relevant pedagogical practices, and reading identity. This table uses two symbols "+" and "-." The plus symbol means that they included these ideas in their narratives. The minus symbol represents that the ideas were not included in their remarks.

Table 11
READER PROFILE

	Jahare	Harlem	Kenyon	Terry	Casey
Racial ideology	Assim.	Assim.	Nation.	Assim.	Assim./Human.
Identify self as a struggling reader	-	+	-	-	-
Positive orientation towards the reading performance of Black people	-	-	-	-	-
Family support in early reading experiences	+	+	+	+	+
Race impacts reading	-	-	-	-	-
Adequate access to a variety of books by and about African Americans	-	+	+	+	+
Learn about African American history in school	+	+	+	-	+
Learn about contemporary African American cultural stories	-	-	-	-	-
Discuss text to enhance comprehension	-	+	+	+	+
Access to computers for homework or research	+	+	+	+	+
Exposed to or view literacy as a means of cultural uplift/ literacy as freedom	-	-	-	-	-
School supports evident for reading	-	+	+	+	+

African Americans receive the same quality of education as Whites	+	+	+	+	+
Interest important to reading	+	+	+	+	+
Most interest-based reading occurs at home	+	+	-	-	-

As I examined students' responses to a variety of questions, it became clear that Black early adolescent readers do not believe that race has an impact on their reading. As Casey summed up, "Just because I'm Black doesn't mean I'm not gone be able to read as good as an Asian or White or anybody else. I can read better than an Asian or White. So it doesn't really affect how I read." They have a different orientation to what it means to be Black, although for most their racial ideology represents an assimilationist meaning in that they emphasized the similarities between races. Overall, they have a positive view towards being Black but believe the poor performance of Blacks on standardized tests is the fault of Black people.

As Black readers, their racialized experiences with reading point towards some historical issues. While they do not believe they received a worse education than White children, they described some limited access to culturally relevant materials, practices, and to their cultural stories. There is no evidence that they learned about the current realities of Black people and the variety of stories there are available to tell. Their early reading experiences involve their families supporting their reading development.

Finally, these Black struggling readers are by no means the same. They, as the research has noted, are multidimensional (Ivey, 1999b) with different interests in types of books and in how they view reading as important to them. While some of the readers see it as important to school (i.e., school outcomes like grades and standardized tests), another saw reading as something you do for pleasure and for learning. But they are similar in that interest in a book is key to helping them read. They find it helpful when schools or teachers help them figure out the words in text (how to say them and what they mean).

IV. Discussion of Findings and Implications

I went into this study using Critical Race theory (CRT) to understand the layered notion of reading while Black. What is going on when Black children are learning how to read? Is race affecting their reading? I have been a teacher, a librarian, and a literacy coach, among other positions in Chicago's public schools. I have witnessed the struggles of hundreds of Black children when it came to reading. Did early adolescent Black readers see race as a factor in their reading ability? Could their narratives offer insight into the impact of their racialized experiences inside or outside of school? And could making race central to the analysis of students' experiences help us understand its impact on student's reading achievement and inform policy, curriculum, and practice? Using CRT, I analyzed the students' statements to see if race impacted their reading development, and/or their access to quality and culturally relevant instructional practices. It was critical for me to understand how Casey, Kenyon, Terry, Harlem and Jahare's voices wove stories of their reading experiences as Black readers. The discussion covers what I learned from the voices of these young readers regarding their ideas about being Black, their racialized experiences, reading identity, and purposes for reading. Subsequently I address the implications of the findings from this research, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

“Struggling” Doesn't Fit

Most of the readers did not identify themselves as *struggling* readers. This particular label was one major focus of the research. But most of the readers do not see themselves as such. Only Kenyon, who used the word “bad,” discussed the many difficulties he had with reading. Yet, the phrase *struggling reader* is not in their lexicon. They admit to having trouble with words and having additional services at school and the university's Reading Clinic twice a week to get help

with their reading and writing. However, they do not think that these experiences translate to their being “struggling readers.” Researchers have difficulty defining what it means to be a struggling reader. We assign ability to read at grade level, trouble with comprehension, and other identifiers to the term (Allington, 2001; Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Ivey 1999b). Kenyon talks of reading slow and how he explains better than he can read or write. Others just talked about times they had trouble with a word and a teacher helped them. However, these early adolescent readers do not claim the identity of struggling reader.

Race Has Nothing to Do with It

For these early adolescent readers, race has absolutely nothing to do with their reading. The voices of these young readers say that reading is personal. That is, how well you read is based on your own personal performance, how much you practice, and your own effort and focus. They believe that Blacks and Whites receive the same quality of education, or in some cases, should receive the same quality. As Terry shared, there are a lot of African American inventors so how can race be a factor? How can Black people be receiving a poorer education than White youth if this is the case? They don't think Whites are better readers, because for them, reading is not about race, “Cause anybody could be a great reader,” said Kenyon.

The Context

Even though race is not a factor for these young adolescent struggling readers when it comes to reading, their voices do highlight that there are racialized contexts in which reading and learning how to read occur. Counter-story is a method of telling the stories of those whom we do not hear often (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009; Yosso, 2006). It is a way of responding to a dominant story or by telling the story, refusing to remain silent. In sharing their experiences with reading,

two main ideas as it relates to context emerge: supports they had learning how to read in the home and the access to their cultural stories and culturally relevant practices in school.

The Counter-story: Part I-Black Families Support Reading Development

In the media and in personal conversations I have had with educators, the story of the uncooperative Black parent, the uninterested Black parent, and the young, single Black mother who just doesn't know what she is doing, become reasons to explain why Black children are not performing well (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011; McNeir, 2012; Ross, 2011). Based on the stories that these struggling Black readers shared, this is not an accurate picture of what is going on in their homes. These readers shared that their mothers, fathers, and extended family members were active in their early reading development. Their mother or father taught them the alphabets, read out loud to them, taught them how to pronounce words, or read a book along with them. Their grandmothers and aunties helped them learn how to read. One student said his mother bought him *Hooked on Phonics* reading program and his family worked with him using the program. That they had such support in their early development was refreshing to hear and encouraging as the families in these children's lives showed them that reading is important. Moreover, the families are still supporting them by taking them to the Reading Clinic.

The Counter-story: Part II-Access

As discussed in other research from middle school through college, with Black people (Lynn, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Solorzano, et al., 2001) racism appears through what has been termed microaggressions, "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solorzano, et al, 2001, p. 60). For example, microaggressions can be stereotypes of writing ability, a teacher asking; "Did you write this?", or not being called on in class. More egregious acts of race and its impact in school would

include little to no placement of Black students into Advance Placement or Honors courses (Morrell, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Moreover, limited access to quality instructional materials, better building facilities, qualified teachers, equal funding, and best instructional practices have all been documented as factors impacting the education of Black children (Diamond, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Lewis et al., 2010; Morrell, 2004; Ogbu, 1993).

Based on students' statements, they appear to have access to resources such as computers and different genres of books. Some students pointed out that they learned a lot and there are expectations around reading lots of books, completing book reports, and conducting research. However issues arise in respect to their learning about Black people and their having a limited view of and purpose for reading.

Using CRT, the voices of these Black struggling readers support a picture of Black children sitting in classrooms uninterested, learning of their enslaved past, and sounding out words or the teacher giving them every other word when they read aloud. Jahare shared that reading helps you do well on a state test and that he learns about Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Abraham Lincoln. Terry stated they do not really talk about African Americans. When asked if he learned about things going on with African Americans in the present, Kenyon responded, "Well we learned about the Amendments, the ten Amendments." These statements highlight a negative kind of racialized context that affects the type of cultural stories Black children learn, instruction that Black children are exposed to, and how adults may perceive Black children and their needs around reading.

The students did not talk about strategies around reading text, which could be an indication of their receiving only a skill-based instruction without a more holistic meaning-oriented approach as suggested by Boykins (as cited in Au & Kawakami, 1984) and Ladson-

Billings (1994). Research has indicated that Black children in urban settings receive word-based curriculum when they are learning how to read. Teale, Paciga and Hoffman (2007) found that in urban classrooms the gap in reading curriculum includes a lack of comprehension instruction and the development of knowledge of the world and in domains like science and social studies. They are convinced that the gap will lead to the continued achievement gap between Blacks and Latinos and Whites. Limited culturally relevant practices such as discussing text, and having access to books by and about Black people, learning about Black people, and experiencing mostly skill-based instruction are the racialized experiences of these Black readers.

Such practices represent a social construction of race and racism. Whose story gets told, how, and in what ways children learn is a power that schools have over those who participate. It is what schools were set up to be. As Boykin (2001) contends,

In raising the issue of culturally appropriate pedagogy, it must not be ignored that traditional schooling in America has always been and continues to be conducted in profoundly cultural ways...In the American public education system, schooling is more than the confluence of reading, writing and arithmetic, so to speak. Indeed while these activities are going on, the schooling process also conveys certain ways of viewing the world, ways of codifying reality...[Schools] are about the business of conveying such activities as they relate to certain cultural vantage points and as they are embedded in particular cultural substrates. Public schools never were conceived to be culturally neutral sites, and schooling was never conceived to be a culturally neutral exercise. (p. 192)

In the present study, these students' voices are important because they help us understand that they are receiving limited stories. If we believe that these stories are important to creating a particular context for reading and learning, we must continue to express the need for culturally

relevant practices. The familiar stories of slavery, then civil rights, and now we are all equal are oft taught but inaccurate ones. As we listen to what the children say they receive in school, we see that it is still the master script (Swartz, 1992). Swartz notes that textbooks are “masterscripts” where Eurocentric and White supremacist thought are legitimized. She notes, “all other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, *mastered*, and then reshaped before it can become part of the master script.” (p. 341).

The school curriculum is the gatekeeper for concepts and instructional practices that are impressed on children of all cultural and ethnic groups. Consider the following (Banks, 1993):

Studies of textbooks indicate that these are some of the major themes in school knowledge (Anyon, 1979, 1981; Sleeter & Grant, 1991b): (a) America’s founding fathers, such as Washington and Jefferson, were highly moral, liberty-loving men who championed equality and justice for all Americans; (b) the United States is a nation with justice, liberty, and freedom for all; (c) social class divisions are not significant issues in the United States; (d) there are no significant gender, class, or racial divisions within U.S. society; and (e) ethnic groups of color and Whites interact largely in harmony in the United States. (p. 11)

Textbook studies by Sleeter and Grant (1991) have also shown that there is no impetus to teach the dynamic complexities of racism, sexism, and cultural groups.

However, within the curriculum studies field, it has been acknowledged that curriculum is political, racial, gender-based, and reveres the identity of white men (Castenall & Pinar, 1993; Pinar, Reynolds, Slater, & Taubman, 2004). Historical African American curricular texts have been relegated to a field of “other” or “alternative,” and to this day, are not integrated with the

great canon of curricular texts. As noted by Pinar et al. (2004), “The absence of African American knowledge in many American schools’ curriculum is not a simple oversight. Its absence represents an academic instance of racism” (p. 329). The failure to recognize African American stores of knowledge is believed to negatively impact Black children’s approach to schooling and literacy learning by some scholars (Asante, 1988, 1992; Holt, 1990; Wilson, 1978). As Sizemore (1990) points out, while mastery of Hirsch’s list of ‘what every American needs to know’ may help African Americans reinforce their American selves, it does little to reconstruct their understanding of their Africanness or of the contradictory value system which is also a part of American national culture” (p. 80). Critical race theory calls on us to challenge the masterscript and the absence of African American knowledge in school curricula. It is to be critiqued, questioned, and changed.

Counter-story to CRT: A Struggle from Within

While CRT does well in helping understand the racialized context of students’ reading experiences, in this study, it was difficult to use CRT to look at reading itself. These children simply did not see race as a factor in their reading development and their reading ability. To assign race as an impediment to the reading ability of early adolescents, thereby saying it may be impacting Black children’s reading achievement, is superimposing the notion on what they see as critical to their identity. That is, at this stage of their development, these readers do not see race as important when it comes to reading. So, it may not be useful to use CRT younger populations who may not yet have experienced direct discrimination as their predecessors have. While CRT was born out of a very visible struggle, these children are the products of a new generation, where racism may not be so visible. Instead, racism is hidden in the backstory of achievement, in the disparities in income, and in low reading scores. But these students are not connecting their

schooling context with their reading ability. They are not even saying they get a different education than White people. As a thirty-seven year old, I can share stories of blatant discrimination in school and outside of school, but this is not these early adolescents' experience.

CRT in education has looked at the many ways in which race has impacted “othered” people’s education. Yosso (2006) defined CRT in education as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism affect educational structures, practices and discourses. CRT is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling...CRT in education refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color” (p. 172).

So I had to ask, is using CRT the best way to look at reading specifically? These Black children do not see race as a factor in their reading ability and do not see issues with what their schools provide for them. How can race be used as central to my analysis if this is not the story these children are telling—from their perspective?

These children do not accept race as a social construction. They believe that their skin color is not determining how well they read or the level of quality of their education. For them, inequity is a thing of the past, not present in their schools. The experiences that these readers are having can and should be racialized but because they do not see through that same lens, CRT may not be best to discuss reading for this age group. Not just because they do not see race as impacting their reading, but because they are developing distinct identities—the multiple ways that we see ourselves and the social contexts in which identities are shaped (Alvermann, 2001b). However, CRT can be used to discuss systems that students do not view as overly determinant in their ability to read.

Reader Identity, Racial and Cultural Identity, and Purpose for Reading

Lastly, in this section I discuss three domains that emerged that should be the foci of developing Black early adolescent struggling readers. They are: reader identity (who am I as a reader?), racial/cultural identity (who am I as a Black person?), and purpose for reading (why is reading important to my cultural and social identities? why is reading important for me personally?). The purpose(s) for reading is foundational to developing both the racial/cultural identity and reading identity. As these readers showed, their racial ideology does not seem to drive a purpose for reading that includes a sense of urgency or empowerment. Almost none of these readers called themselves struggling readers, so this particular identity does not seem to drive their purpose for reading or help them focus on what it is they may need as readers. The participants' narratives did not make an explicit link between the students' racial/cultural identity, reader identity and purpose for reading. Because these identities are not clearly linked, there may be areas to consider related to it: Are these children having meaningful experiences around their cultural stories? And are these readers being taught that reading is just a skill rather than seeing reading as empowering and strategic?

In earlier work with Black adolescents, Tatum (2005) saw a serious need to use culturally appropriate text with students who were struggling to read. He used a combination of skills and strategy approach, along with cultural texts to help Black readers form their identities and build their capacity to read. His later work involved textual lineages where he has asked thousands of adolescents to write down books that mattered to them, ones they would always remember, and books that changed their lives. What he found was that students chose a wide variety of texts, chose text that represented them, helped them reflect or moved them to action (Tatum, 2008). Most of the research that has been done on adolescents' literacy, culture or identity has been

done mostly with high school students (Alvermann, et al. 2006; Hall, 2009; Lee, 1992, 2007; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Morrell, 2002, 2004; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Reeves, 2004; Tatum, 2008). Also the particular needs of Black children (mainly boys) have been addressed in the research (Tatum, 2006, 2008). The voices I gathered concur with the above mentioned research and brings evidence of why culturally responsive instruction, and the use of enabling text—text that “moves beyond a sole cognitive focus... to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus” (Tatum, 2006 p. 46) is critical and needed.

More specifically, there may be something distinct about early adolescent Black readers that needs to be addressed. These readers did not express a particular need for Black texts or cultural texts. In fact, of the five readers, only one mentioned that they like to read books about Black history. None of them said that in order for schools to help them become better readers, they needed books by Black authors or a particular type of text about Black people. They did not express a need to be able to talk about books in structured discussion or see literacy as power and needed for cultural uplift. They simply assigned the act of reading better to learning words, getting advice about reading, and getting text that held their interest. This means that in teaching these young readers, we have to be careful about assuming what they think about race and culture, what they think about themselves as readers, and why they think reading is important. These are three distinct areas that have to be addressed in different ways.

Implications for Policy, Curriculum, Schools, and CRT

These struggling Black readers shared what they believed they need to become better readers. What they have said is not different than what has been noted in other research or books on struggling readers (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Tatum, 2002; Valencia & Buly, 2004): (1) They need to have access to a variety of books and time to read for pleasure during school. Many of

the readers do not read at home, which is typical of struggling readers. (2) They need instruction that is engaging and fun. (3) Black struggling readers need instruction that moves beyond the skill level to include strategy instruction that is not divorced from cultural, social, and political meanings derived from reading (Alvermann et al. 2006; Tatum, 2006). Some of these features are present in models of culturally appropriate pedagogy and practice (Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). But we must look at the three domains and deal with each. To attend to the three domains is important for struggling readers racial/cultural identity, reader identity and purpose(s) for reading).

First, Black struggling readers do not need a Black book, they need a good book. They need texts that address and support their reading needs and help them become better readers. They need teachers who know how to teach them to become powerful readers. They need texts that capture their interest. However, if the intended purpose of a literacy lesson is to bring forth a particular cultural story, then that is when the consideration developing Black children's racial/cultural identity should occur. The idea that Black children need a Black text or cultural story to read better is not true for these readers. They believe race is not a factor in their reading, nor did they all raise Black history or Black-themed books as part of their interest. It cannot be assumed that being introduced to the myriad of cultural stories will interest Black readers or motivate them to read. The stories may not even concur with their experiences or beliefs (Collier, 2000). But there is a racialized context in which their reading does occur. And this has to be recognized.

Second, they need to be exposed to safe social spaces within the classroom that help them develop their reading identity. Whether they see themselves as struggling readers or not, they must know what their strengths and needs are as readers. They should know what to do when

there is confusion, they should know what to do with words. Curriculum also needs to stress that reading is about understanding and problem solving. It was very interesting that these readers talked little about comprehension. Terry did say that helping her understand what she is reading is something that her school could do to support her as a reader and Casey said that his teacher makes them “break down the sections and stuff we didn’t understand.” But there was little in the way of discussing texts that build their understanding of a topic or that this is the support they need from schools.

Third, their purpose(s) for reading need to be extended. It is the foundation for influencing their reader and racial/cultural identities. It is necessary to build a more open and broader sense of literacy and its power to impact their lives. Whether they choose to take a more liberatory stance on their purposes for reading or not, they are being kept from seeing reading as a means of empowerment. This is key because historically the Black community believed that literacy was a communal act, literacy was freedom, literacy was a necessity for cultural/communal advancement, and literacy allowed us to write our own stories and move to action. There was a deep connection between literacy as a tool of empowerment (Fisher, 2009; Holt, 1990; Perry, 2003). Lack of quality in education and of access to their stories is very real for Black people, even if these children do not see it as important. Their lack of knowledge of these racial and social context means there is a need to build a sense of urgency around being literate. As Ladson-Billings (1992a) contends, “Why become literate or Literacy for what? is both real and salient in communities for which the promise of an education has been elusive” (p. 318).

All of these children, except for Kenyon, are removed from the notion of the need for Black children to fight. That is, Kenyon was the only reader who used the pronouns “we,” “us,”

and “our” when talking about reading and race. When I asked him to explain how being Black affects his reading experience he said, “It don’t affect **our** reading experience. It’s just that, it’s **ourselves**. **We** need to do it. It’s not because **our** color of skin. It’s because like **we** need to try harder and do more...and **we** need to like focus more on boring stuff.” This idea that we as a people need to work at our reading is both disheartening and encouraging. On the first hand, it highlights a sense of community; on the other hand it brings forth the idea that Black people are the cause of their reading issues. Again, reading itself is very personal for them, not tied to social or political issues. But this narrow view of reading may be ineffective in helping them grow in their racial/cultural identity and their reading identity.

Policy must be expanded to accept various forms of research (not just experimental designs). If only one type of research is accepted in how we view literacy instruction and what is best for readers, then Black readers will continue to be at a disadvantage and their voices will continue to be silenced. As evidenced by the present research, and others done before, there are some nuances to their reading experiences that do not fit mainstream literacy initiatives like Reading First or the findings of the National Reading Panel.

For schools and for teachers, it cannot be assumed that what is meant by culture or race is the same for members within the group. As these readers have shown, there are differences in how they talked about their own race. The “struggling reader” identity is not something that students seem to assign to themselves. As researchers have discovered (Hall, 2009; Sableski, 2007), teachers have to be aware that their beliefs and interactions with struggling readers impact students’ literate identities. So do their beliefs about Black people. Being aware of this and developing professional development around unearthing these beliefs, addressing them and

showing how to develop Black children's purpose(s) for reading are critical for schools who teach Black children.

The implication for schools is that they must develop broader purposes for reading in the experiences of struggling Black readers. Schools must also expand their reading curricula to include a variety of text and stories of Black people and expand their practices to provide culturally relevant instruction. The implication for researchers is that we must continue to explore the best ways to develop reader identity and purposes for reading in early adolescents, even when students have difficulty with reading.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the study. First, there were only five participants. While it is a good start to hear these voices, the work of adolescent literacy at large must be expanded to include more Black voices. Second, the context of the research was not in the schools and the practices described by the participants about their teachers were not confirmed, nor the extent to which access to culturally relevant materials might have been available to them. It also did not include the voices of the family members and their beliefs about race and reading. The context from which the students emerge is important to consider. Context may affect how the readers see themselves. For instance, were their schools deleterious or helpful to their reading development? Does it mean something that they were participants at the Reading Clinic? Does familial context suggest how they see themselves as readers, and does it affirm their self-concept? While their voices are valid lenses to their beliefs, a deeper level of analysis by including more information about the contexts where these students learn, and are supported as they teeter in the spaces of learning how to read, reading to learn, developing purposes for reading and their racial identity, was not included.

Finally, the use of CRT to look at reading specifically did not always fit well as an analytical tool. It was useful for context but not to analyze the act of reading itself. There was nothing in the students' voices that could determine that when they read, it has to do with race. This may be because actually reading is about knowing words and understanding what is read. Critical Race Theory does not help in looking at the process of reading because the symbols in Standard English do not change whether you are Black or White. But in the broader context, CRT would ask how are children learning how to decode words, what types of text are students being asked to understand, or in what ways are reading strategies taught to Black students. This study did not examine these contextual aspects.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Upon reflection on the limitations of this study, more work needs to be done on two fronts, (1) around learning to read and struggling Black children, and (2) looking deeper into race and reading in a changing world.

Learning to Read and Struggling Black Children

As stated earlier, some believe that the underachievement of Blacks on standardized reading assessments is being impacted by the reading curriculum gap (Teale, et al., 2007). Others contend that the discontinuity between home and school cultures affects learning for Black children. This includes curricula that does not address Black culture (Boykin, 2001; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 1990; Lee, 2000; Sizemore, 1990). Still others state that Black students are more likely to be in poor neighborhoods with poor schools and bad teaching (Gorski, 2008; Kozol, 1991; Wilson, 2011). And yet another body of research on adolescents who struggle with literacy broadly notes that three domains must interact with each other to raise the potential for teaching these children: "(1) establishment of supportive and trusting relationships between teachers and

learners; (2) the cultivation of partnerships among families, their communities, and the schools; and (3) the refinement of teaching practices that connect with the lives of learners in a culturally responsive way” (Johannessen & McCann, 2009, p. 66). This suggests that improvement in reading cannot be isolated to the act of reading itself (comprehension strategies, discussion, etc.). It is inextricably linked to communities, culture, and relationships, that is, the social-cultural factors that impact learners throughout a lifetime. While all this research has their own truths, how do the voices of children bring forth these issues?

More work needs to be done on what types of strategies or learning environments can help practitioners understand how to develop children’s reading identities, racial/cultural identities, and purposes for reading. Is it just a matter of choosing the right text? What type of conditions work best for building these identities within the school, the classroom? Studies on the families of early adolescent struggling readers would add to how children are learning about their cultural/racial identities at home, how reading is situated (as functional, for learning, for empowerment, etc.), and how these ideas begin to affect struggling readers views of what it means to be Black, what it means to be a reader, and what the purposes for reading are. Lastly, it would benefit the field to hear from Black children who are not struggling to read. How do they see race? How will they describe the racialized context in which learning to read occurs?

Race, Reading, and a Changing World

This study starts a discussion that is not often had in the field of literacy—learning to read in the context of changes in society’s views about race. It’s been said we live in a “post-racial society” (Cho, 2009) where courts are grappling with the need for antidiscrimination laws (Norton, 2010) and a Black President creates an image of equality. All the while there are still gaps in literacy achievement for Black children. A post-racial society implies that the world no

longer sees through the lens of race and no longer needs laws to protect special groups from being discriminated against. The children's voices in this study seem to confirm that they don't see through this lens. A collective sense of Black literacy for Black people is seemingly curtailed by learning that reading is for school and tests and reading is something you just do. This is different than the historical context of literacy described earlier where there was a fight to be literate and a collective urgency to use literacy as a tool of empowerment.

In *Post Black* (2010), Womack explores the idea of a post-racial society and the changing identities within the African American community. She writes of the tension between the vanguards of the civil rights movement and Gen X and Y African Americans. She discusses a world post-Obama that Black people need to realize exists. She writes:

Being black is not static. Black unfolds as we unfold. The next tier of evolution is, arguably for the first time, solely and totally up to us. It's no longer funneled and distorted by debilitating institutional racism. That can be worked around. It's no longer couched solely by life experiences in the rigors of the Deep South or the 'hood, although they have an influence, too. It is as worldly and as isolated as we make it...our voice, more than ever before, can be our voice. (p. 189).

The children's voices seem to say the same thing; I can read as well as anyone, being Black doesn't matter when it comes to reading, White people don't get a better education than we do, I have assimilated.

But the reality for Black people in this society suggests that race still matters. We are not living in a post-racial society where Blacks can work around institutional racism. Race still matters because of the backstory of enslavement (roughly 1660-1865), Reconstruction and Jim Crow when Blacks fought diligently for their rights under the law (roughly 1865-1964), and

constant periods of fighting for access to a quality education that is still happening today. There are lingering negative consequences of these histories particularly in regards to educational attainment, health and wealth.

As a result of this fighting, more African Americans graduate from college than ever before and are part of the workforce. However, African Americans are still wrestling with college attainment. “From 1990 to 2004, the percentage of African American young adults aged 25-29 who had graduated from high school and attended some college increased by 16 percentage points, so that by 2004 over half of African-American young adults had attended some college. But only 17 percent of them had graduated from college, an increase of just four percentage points since 1990” (Nagaoka, Roderick & Coca, 2009, p. 4). And Blacks still struggle with maintaining jobs. In 2010, Blacks made up 11.5 percent of the labor force but accounted for 17.8 percent of the unemployed (Joint Economic Committee, 2010). Today, unemployment is 7.7 percent for the nation and Black unemployment is 13.8 percent (Jones, 2013).

This begs the conversation of how race and literacy will continue to be discussed in the future. How will the tensions between a historical context steeped in race and a changing society that wants to put race on the backburner impact the literate lives of Black children? Who will pay attention to the disparities? The cultural stories of Black people have already been narrowed in school. How can being critical of literacy instruction, purposes for reading and reading identity that are being shaped by schools, catapult Black struggling readers to participate in the debate of what it means to be Black? Future research should grapple with these questions.

Summary

Early adolescent Black struggling readers do not believe being Black affects their reading. While race is not a factor for these young adolescent struggling readers when it comes

to reading, their voices do highlight that there are racialized contexts in which reading and learning how to read occur. Their early experiences show us that their nuclear and extended family members were instrumental in helping them learn how to read. But in school, there are still some gaps in the cultural stories that are shared, as well as in access to culturally relevant materials and practices. When their stories are shared, they can often be characterized as the “masterscript” (Schwartz, 1992), a narrow rendering of the history of African Americans, reshaped and made acceptable by White people (topics of slavery, emancipation, Martin Luther King, Jr., equality).

Their voices teach us that three distinct domains are at work and need to be attended to when supporting these readers. They are: reader identity (who am I as a reader?), racial/cultural identity (who am I as a Black person?), and purpose for reading (why is reading important to my cultural and social identities? Why is reading important for me personally?). The purpose(s) for reading is foundational to developing both the racial/cultural identity and the reading identity. They do not necessarily need Black books, they need good books. They need safe social spaces within classrooms to develop their reading identity, they need the opportunity to see reading as empowering and they need access to a variety of cultural stories.

Future research needs to increase the understanding of readers such as Jahare, Harlem, Kenyon, Terry, and Casey. What are the best ways to develop Black early adolescents reading identities, their cultural/racial identities, and their purpose(s) for reading? Future research also needs to tackle how the tension between a historical context steeped in race and a current context steeped in post-racial rhetoric, will impact the literate lives of Black children. Continued work that brings Black voices to the forefront will help us all understand the nuances in learning to read that hopefully will positively impact Black children’s reading achievement.

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APPENDIX

Informal Interview Protocol

Introduction: I am interested in your story, your “reading” story; how you learned to read, who first taught you how to read and what struggles you have had along the way. So, I am going to ask you questions about your experiences. Let’s talk.

1. Tell me about the earliest reading experience you remember. For instance what book do you remember first being read to you or reading by yourself when you were younger?
2. In what ways is reading important to your life?
3. Here in Chicago, Black children score the lowest on all Reading test. You know like the ISAT/ACT. If the Chief of schools asked you why do you think this is the case, what would you say?
4. People use the word struggling to describe things that just do not come easy. Would you say that this word is appropriate in describing how you feel when you have to read? If participant says yes, ask participant to describe their struggle or what just doesn’t come easy for them when they read. If they say no, ask participant what word would they use to describe how they feel when they read and why.
5. There is this boy/girl named Tyrone (for a girl, Tasha) that I know who goes to school here in Chicago. He (She) thinks his (her) school is pretty cool because s/he learns a lot. He (she) has to read 2 chapter books a month (which he (she) doesn’t always do) and write book reports. At school, Tyrone (Tasha) also has to do research on the computer and write research papers. He (She) also has a class where he (she) learns about African Americans past, present, and hopes for the future. **How is your school like Tyrone’s (Tasha’s)? How is it different?**
6. Many Black youth feel that they receive a poorer education than White youth. Do you believe this and why? Do you believe White people are better readers? Follow-up: Why do you believe this?
7. What kinds of reading and writing do you do? Where do you do this—at home, at school? Anywhere else?
8. Many people believe that a child’s parents or their family are their first teachers. They teach them how to say the alphabet, read their first book to them and things like that. Can you tell me about things your family did to help you learn how to read?

APPENDIX

9. Describe the supports you receive at school to support you as a reader?
10. Do you have opportunities to talk about the things you read with your classmates during class time? Tell me about that.
11. What types of books are available to you at your school that are written by or about African Americans?
12. If you could tell your school or teachers things that would help you to be a good reader what would you say? Why?
13. Do you believe that being Black/African American has anything to do with your reading skills? Explain how being black affects your reading experience

VITA

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Education

2006 to present Doctoral Candidate, Curriculum Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago

May, 2007 Project Management Certificate, DePaul University

December, 2006 C.A.S, Educational Leadership, National-Louis University, Type 75 certification

2002 to 2004 Doctoral Candidate, Urban Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago

June, 2002 Masters of Education, Reading, Writing, and Instructional Leadership, University of Illinois at Chicago

May, 1998 Bachelor of Science in Education, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL

Professional Experience

2012 to present Instructional Support Leader, Chicago Public Schools

2011 to 2012 Literacy Coach, Richards High School, Chicago Public Schools

2010 to 2011 Instructional Coach, Area 27 Specialized Area, Chicago Public Schools

2008 to 2010 Literacy Coach, Social Justice High School, Chicago Public Schools

2007 to 2008 Technology Coordinator, Striving Readers Project, Chicago Public Schools, Office of Literacy, Chicago, IL

2002 to 2007 Graduate Assistant in UIC Reading Clinic, University of Illinois at Chicago

2005 to 2007 Curriculum Analyst/Project Manager IMPACT CIM, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago IL

2003 to 2005 Literacy Coordinator, Webster Elementary School, Chicago, IL

2002 to 2003 Librarian, Webster Elementary School, Chicago, IL

1999 to 2002 Teacher, Third Grade, Reed Elementary School, Chicago, IL

- 1998 to1999 Cross-Categorical teacher, Special Education, Champaign, IL
- 1997 to1998 Editor, *Umada-Newsletter for Afrikan-American Women*, Charleston, IL

Honors and Awards

- 2000 Target Teacher Scholarship
- 1998 Ona Norton Scholarship, African American with highest GPA and commitment to community, Black Student Council, Charleston, IL

Presentations

- May, 2012 International Reading Association Annual Convention: *Our Kids Can't Read: Raising the Reading Achievement of Black and Brown Adolescents with and without Learning Disabilities*, Chicago, IL
- October, 2010 YAL Conference, *Dem Kids Can't Read: Using Sunrise over Fallujah as a Springboard to Improve Adolescent Reading Achievement* St. Charles, IL
- January, 2008 No Child Left Behind Conference, *Striving Readers Project*, Chicago IL
- November, 2007 National Reading Conference, *New Beginnings: A Framework for Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction for African American Children*, Chicago IL
- March, 2006 Illinois Reading Council Conference, *Developing Standards-Based Reading Curriculum for High School*, Springfield, IL
- April, 2005 Area 8 Principal's Meeting, Chicago Public Schools, *Standards Based Change Process*, Chicago IL
- April, 2005 Partnership READ Conference, *Standards Based Change Process*, Chicago, IL
- June, 2004 Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference, *Women of Color and their Dilemmas within the Academy*, Champaign, IL

Service

- May 2011 to present Volunteer and Reading Consultant, Black Star Project Saturday University
- 2010 AERA Annual Convention Reviewer
- 2009 AERA Annual Convention Reviewer
- 2007 Panelist: “*The Future of Public Education: Implications for an African American Future*”
- 2002-2003 Chicago Council for Black Studies: Dubois Conference Committee
- 2001 Chair, Reading Committee: Research *No Child Left Behind*, Trinity United Church of Christ

Publications

- September, 2006 Transitions: Finding My Voice in T.R. Berry & N. M.D. Mitzelle (Eds.), *From Oppression to Grace: Women of Color and Their Dilemmas Within the Academy*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Memberships and Affiliations

American Educational Research Association
 Chicago Council for Black Studies
 Illinois Reading Council
 International Reading Association