PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION AND THE ACADEMIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

CALVIN W. WALTON. Performing arts education and the academic identity development of African American male high school students. (Under the direction of DR. GREG WIGGAN)

This study examined the effects of performing arts participation on the academic achievement of African American male high school students. The study investigated how engagement in school-based performing arts influenced the academic identity development and school experiences of African American males who attended an arts-themed urban high school. This interpretive case study used African American Male Academic Identity Development Theory, a proposed original theoretical framework, to address the following research questions: What are the experiences of African American male students who participated in standards driven performing arts education programs while attending an urban high school? How do performing arts education experiences influence the academic identity development of African American male high school students? Purposive criterion sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 African American males who attended and graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts (Piedmont School of the Arts is a pseudonym), an urban performing arts based high school. The findings of the study suggest that Black male students who participated in school-based performing arts 1) Experienced a positive school climate, 2) Demonstrated enhanced academic achievement, and 3) Acquired a more positive racial identity. The findings from this study help to inform educational policies and practices that are aimed at improving school outcomes for African American male students.

DEDICATION

In loving memory, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Vera Jean Walton, who

fought to insure that her children got the very best education possible. I also dedicate this

work to my father, Calvin Leroy Walton, who continues to motivate and inspire me. Last,

but definitely not least, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kris, and to my children,

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Access to school-based performing arts learning experiences may be a critical link for improving academic outcomes for African American males (Anderson, 1992; Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). Over the last twenty five years, numerous studies have been conducted which demonstrate strong connections between school-based performing arts learning opportunities and improved educational outcomes for Pre K-12 students in the United States (Caterall, 1998; Dupont, 1992; Fowler, 1996; Gazzaniga, 2008; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Rupert, 2006; Thomas et al., 2013; Wolf, 1998). Research demonstrates that students who participate in the performing arts experience enhanced cognitive and social skills development (Deutsch & Tsang, 2008; Posner & Patoine, 2009; Walton & Wiggan, 2014; Wandell, Dougherty, Ben-Shacar, Deutsch, & Tsang, 2008), improved reading comprehension (Dupont, 1992; Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010; Wolf, 1998), and higher rates of college enrollment and degree attainment (Caterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Studies have shown that enrollment in arts courses is positively correlated with higher verbal and math scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (College Board, 2005; Rupert, 2006; Vaughn & Winner, 2000), and that the presence of strong arts programs helps improve school climate and school experiences (Fowler, 1996; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004; Rupert, 2006). Research which highlights the benefits of performing arts education is important because it can be used to

develop curricular and instructional practices which improve academic outcomes and school experiences for African American male students.

In the U.S., African Americans have historically been denied access to an equitable, high quality education (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rury, 2013; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1933). Historic differences in educational opportunities have resulted in a persistent pattern of disparate educational outcomes between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Green, 1969; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Rury, 2013; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; USDOE, 2014; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1933). African American students, and African American males in particular, encounter a variety of structural inequities that engender negative school experiences and contribute to poor academic performance (Delpit, 1995; DuBois, 1903; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015; Woodson, 1933). Such inequities include lack of access to qualified teachers, inequitable school resource allocation, race-based academic tracking patterns, and discriminatory discipline practices (Haberman, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Mickelson, Smith, & Nelson, 2015; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Steinberg & Kinchloe, 2007; USDOE, 2014). As a group, African American males experience higher occurrences of school dropouts, special education placements and school suspensions and expulsions (Cartledge, Gibson & Keys, 2012; Dixon-Roman, 2013; Harry, Klingner, & Cramer, 2007; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kunjufu, 2005). Additionally, African American males encounter higher rates of school failure and grade retention, and report heightened levels of academic disengagement (Harmon, 2002; Moore & Flowers, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Schott

Foundation, 2012, 2015).

Educational research demonstrates that race-based differences in school effects can lead African American students to obtain lower grades, attain lower standardized test scores, and experience higher dropout rates than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Codrington & Fairchild, 2010; Ford, 2006; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Rudd, 2014; Wildhagen, 2012). While the body of research demonstrates that racial differences in educational treatments contribute to differences in school performance between African American students and their counterparts, persistent racial disparities in educational outcomes have consistently been framed as an "achievement gap," or difference in academic performance, primarily between Black and White students (Barton & Coley, 2010; Chambers, 2009; Ford, 2006; Haycock, 2001; Jencks & Philips, 1998; Walton & Wiggan, 2014). This deficit-based perspective suggests that the students themselves, rather than school-based structural inequities, are responsible for the differences in academic performance between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Barton & Coley, 2010; Chambers, 2009; Coleman, 1966; Payne, 2005; Pitre, 2014). The achievement gap narrative has become a widely accepted framework for examining racial disparities in school performance (Barton & Coley, 2010; Brewster & Stephenson, 2014; Chambers, 2009; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Haycock, 2001; Pitre, 2014; Taylor, 2006). This deficit based perspective has led to the implementation of instructional and administrative practices which perpetuate academic disengagement, promote low achievement and engender school failure for Black males (Chambers, 2009; Fink, 2002; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Singham, 2003).

The achievement gap depiction is problematic, because it discounts research-based evidence which demonstrates that African American males experience academic success when they are provided with effective methods of classroom instruction and school support. Research shows that African American students thrive academically when they have access to courses and experiences that emphasize academic excellence and promote college aspirations (Allen, 2015; Brooms, 2014; Evans-Winters, 2005; Flores, 2007; Ford et al., 2002; Hrabowski, 1998; King, 2005; McGee, 2013; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2004; Tatum, 2009). Culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching pedagogies have been identified as practices which support academic success for Black males (Gay, 2000; Henfield & McGee, 2012; Hill, 2013; Kafele, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It has also been demonstrated that culturally reflective teaching and mentoring techniques promote academic achievement as a positive manifestation of Black masculine identity, and support African American males' school success (Brooms, 2014; Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014; Stephenson & Ross, 2015; Whiting, 2009). Additionally, structuring school environments to create a sense of community and belonging among African American males is a critical component in strengthening school achievement for students in this population (Boykin, Lilja, & Tyler, 2004; Seiler & Elmesky, 2007; Tung, Carlo, Colon, Del Razo, Diamond, Raynor, Graves, Kuttner, Miranda, & Rose, 2015). When African American males are taught within classrooms and under school conditions which utilize research-based practices that are proven to promote high academic performance and strengthen post-school outcomes, they can, and do, achieve at high levels (McGee, 2013; McGee & Pearman, 2015; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

The achievement gap perspective provides an incomplete description of the problem of Black male academic underperformance, because it only takes into account the academic factors that influence and reflect student performance (Barton & Coley, 2010; Coleman, 1966; Haycock, 2001; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Singham, 2003). Such factors include grades, grade point average, and performance on standardized tests. Over the last forty years, educational researchers have demonstrated that non-cognitive factors significantly impact academic performance as well (Bandura & Shunk, 1981; Covington & Beery, 1976; Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, & Beechum, 2012; Rosen, 2010; Shunk, 1984). Non-cognitive factors refer to the range of behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that are critical for success in school and in life, which cannot be measured by commonly administered cognitive tests (Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman, 2008). Non-cognitive factors include academic identity, academic self-concept, academic self-efficacy, attitudes about learning, beliefs about intelligence, confidence, study skills, attendance, work habits, time management, problem solving skills, and help-seeking behaviors (Ames & Archer, 1988; Bandura, 1997; Conley, 2007; Farkas, 2003; Paris & Wingograd, 1990; Stankov & Lee, 2013; Stankov, Morony, & Lee, 2014). Thus, a thorough analysis of disparities in achievement between students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds should investigate and analyze how non-cognitive factors influence academic performance for African American students and other students of color.

 While most non-cognitive factors share some relationship with academic achievement, academic identity development has been identified as a non-cognitive factor with a particularly strong correlation to school performance (Awad, 2007; Calsyn

& Kenny, 1977; Cokley, 2002; Marsh, 1986; Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung, 1999; Matthews, 2014; Prince & Nurius, 2014; Wang & Neihart, 2014). Academic identity development refers to the psychological and social processes students experience which influence how they perceive of themselves as students, and assess their academic performance in relationship with others (Osborne & Jones, 2011; Schachter & Rich, 2011). Grade point average, performance in specific subject areas, attendance, cultural engagement, school experiences, and school-based involvement and social connections are all factors which influence academic identity development (Chen, Yeh, Wang, & Lin, 2012; Irving & Hudley, 2004; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Koller, 2004; Prince & Nurius, 2014; Wang & Neihart, 2014). Researchers have identified academic identity development as a process that has a positive reciprocal effect on school performance and as a critical element for motivation and achievement (Marsh, 1990a; Marsh, 1990b; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Matthews, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014). Additionally, academic identity development has been identified as an important indicator of school attainment, and has become one of the major goals of education worldwide (Areepattamannil & Freeman, 2008; Chen, Yeh, & Hwang, 2013; Marsh & Hau, 2003).

Targeted efforts to bolster academic identity development among African American males may significantly improve school outcomes for students in this population (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Matthews, 2014). Ongoing, school based experiences in the performing arts may serve as a transformative space for enhancing academic identity development among African American males who attend high schools in the U.S. (Kazembe, 2014). Performing arts education refers to school-based instruction in dance, music, and theater that are driven by national, state, and local

standards (ArtsEdge, 2014; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Performing arts education programs are designed to help students achieve basic literacy in the performing arts, gain greater depth of understanding of the performing arts, communicate through the performing arts, and develop proficiency in the performing arts (Maine Department of Education, 2007; New Jersey Department of Education, 2014). Standards for performing arts education serve as a framework for teaching students to develop artistic ideas, to interpret artistic ideas through performance, and to understand how the arts convey meaning (ArtsEdge, 2014; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Student involvement in performing arts education experiences includes classroom instruction, individualized practice, rehearsals, and performances (ArtsEdge, 2014; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Effective performing arts education experiences use students' culture to promote positive ethnic and racial identity (Engdahl, 2012; Kazembe, 2014). Additionally, performing arts education encourages high achievement, and may help redirect the sense of anxiety, anger and alienation reported by students of color (Hanley & Noblit, 2009; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014).

This investigation sought to provide information and evidence on the role performing arts education may play in strengthening academic identity development and school achievement among African American males. This study utilized a qualitative research approach to explore how involvement in school-based, standards driven performing arts education may influence academic identity development among African American male high school students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is the persistent pattern of disparities in academic performance between African American males and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups. International assessment data indicates that students from the U.S. perform below their peers from other developed nations in reading, mathematics, and science (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Arora, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Stanco, 2012). Data from the most recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Mullis et al., 2012) demonstrates that students from five educational systems outperform U.S. fourth grade students in reading achievement. Statistics from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Mullis 20et al., 2012) show that U.S. fourth and eighth grade students lag behind their peers from other developed nations in mathematics and science achievement as well. When compared with their peers internationally, U.S. fourth graders rank 7th and 9th in science and mathematics achievement (Mullis et al., 2012). Eighth graders from the U.S. rank 12th in mathematics and 11th in science achievement internationally (Mullis et al., 2012). Results from internationally administered assessments clearly demonstrate that students from the U.S., irrespective of race and gender, lag behind their peers from other developed nations in the core content areas.

Additionally, disaggregated data obtained from international assessment results demonstrates significant disparities in academic performance between students from different racial and ethnic groups within the U.S. (Mullis et al., 2012). PIRLS study data is used to compare and contrast the overall performance of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Mullis et al., 2012). Reading achievement data obtained from

the 2011 PIRLS study demonstrates that, among students who attend schools in the U.S., Asian students rank first, with an average score of 588, followed by students from multiracial backgrounds, who scored an average of 576. White students ranked third, with an average score of 575, and Latino students ranked fourth, posting an average score of 532. Black students ranked fifth, with an average of 522 (Mullis et al., 2012). Data from the most recent TIMSS study shows that again, Asian students rank the highest, with fourth and eighth grade average math scores of 583 and 568 respectively. White students rank second, with average fourth grade scores of 559 and average eighth grade scores of 530. Multiracial students ranked third, scoring an average of 554 in fourth grade and 513 in eighth grade. Latino students ranked fourth, with average scores of 520 and 485, and Black students rank fifth, with average scores of 489 and 465 (Mullis et al., 2012).

In spite of the evidence presented above, the pattern of racial and ethnic disparities in standards-based academic performance among students in the U.S. is consistently presented as an achievement gap, or difference in the standardized test scores of Black and White students, even though Asians students generally outperform their White peers (Bell, 2015; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horowitz & Casserly, 2010; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Quinn, 2015). This perspective for examining disparities in academic performance is inaccurate, because it discounts the full range of ethnic and racial diversity in the U.S., and contradicts the evidence which shows White students are not the top performers. A thorough examination of disaggregated assessment data is important, because it helps contextualize discussions and policy-based conversations about racial and ethnic disparities in achievement. Standardized international test data

clearly indicates that Asian students outperform all other groups in the U.S., thus, scholarship and policy initiatives on racial and ethnic disparities in school performance should not focus solely on differences between Black and White students. Disparities in performance should be addressed as they occur across all ethnic and racial groups.

While there are differences in performance across racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., the specific educational challenges faced by Black male students are well documented in the literature, and must be addressed. Disparities in reading achievement are present in the early elementary grades and persist through the high school years (Finkel, 2010; Reardon, Valentino & Shores, 2012). Data obtained from the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that 10% of African American males score at or above proficiency in 8th grade reading, while 16% of Latino Males and 35% of white males performed above proficiency (NCES, 2011). Statistics from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that approximately six percent of Black males in the 12th grade scored at or above proficiency in mathematics, as compared with 35% of White males (NCES, 2009). To put these results in context, males in all racial categories performed below proficiency, but Black males in the same demographic group scored significantly below students in the other racial groups. Further, while White males underperformed in reading and math (35% in both subjects), Black males generally have the lowest scores, as they tend to receive the worst access to high quality instruction (Pitre, 2014; USDOE, 2014; Wolf, 1998).

In addition to academic achievement data, high school graduation rates provide important information on racial and ethnic differences in school completion rates. Nationally, only 59% of Black males graduated from high school, in comparison with

65% of Latino males and 80% of White males (Schott Foundation, 2015). In thirty five states and the District of Columbia, Black males have the lowest high school graduation rates (Schott Foundation, 2015). In California, Texas, and Florida, the states with the largest populations, Black males have graduation rates of 62%, 65%, and 56% respectively. In the same three states, White males graduate at rates of 82%, 81%, and 68%, and Latino males post school completion rates of 70%, 67% and 64% respectively (Schott Foundation, 2015). While Black males tend to graduate from high school at lower rates than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups, it must be noted that they have higher graduation rates than White males in Maine, Hawaii, and Arizona (Schott Foundation, 2015). Data which shows that Black males persist and graduate from high school at higher rates than their White counterparts in some states and cities is important. Higher graduation rates for Black males in these states may be due largely to the fact that Black students do not comprise a significant percentage of the overall student populations in these locations. Nonetheless, this information, along with the international assessment data discussed previously, shows that White students, and White males in particular, are not necessarily the top academic performers, as they are often portrayed though scholarship and in the popular media.

While standardized assessment data and graduation statistics demonstrate differences in academic performance between Black males and their peers in other racial and ethnic groups, the achievement gap narrative provides an inadequate analysis of the problem. The achievement gap explanation is problematic because it suggests that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, have equal access to a high quality education, and assumes that academic success is based purely on individualized effort

and hard work. Educational researchers have identified a variety of factors which give more holistic and comprehensive explanations for the differences in academic performance between African American males and their Asian, White, and Latino counterparts. These factors and causes include student placement and tracking inequities (American Psychology Association, 2012; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Kohli, 2014; Mickelson, 2001; USDOE, 2014), school finance disparities (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Ostrander, 2015; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Steinberg & Kinchloe, 2007), differences in teacher qualification levels (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Lemke, Thomsen, Wayne, & Birman, 2012), discriminatory discipline practices (Butler, Lewis, Moore & Scott, 2012; Kim et al., 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; USDOE, 2014), overrepresentation in remedial and special education (Herrera, 1998; Kunjufu, 2005; Losen, Hodson, Ee, & Martinez, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014), culturally mismatched instructional practices (Ford, 2015; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and race-based differences in teacher expectations (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Gershonson, Holt, Papageorge, 2015; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Each of these factors negatively affect African American males' academic identity development and school performance (Herrera, 1998; Kohli, 2014; Lynn et. al., 2010; Noltmeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Tatum, 2012). A thorough and ongoing analysis of their effects are necessary for understanding differences in achievement between African American males and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups.

While there are a variety of school-based factors which negatively affect African American male students' academic performance, there are several practices that have a

particularly deleterious impact, and warrant closer scrutiny. One such factor is the

disproportional use of exclusionary discipline on Black male students. Exclusionary

discipline refers to the practice of removing students from school as a way to punish them

for violating school rules and engaging in perceived negative behaviors (Darensbourg,

Perez, & Blake, 2010; Kim et al., 2010). In the U.S., Black students are suspended and

expelled from school at significantly higher rates than their counterparts in all other racial

and ethnic groups (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2010; USDOE, 2014). According

to data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014),

African American youth comprise only 16% of the total national school enrollment, but

make up 32% of in-school suspensions, 33% of single out of school suspensions, 42% of

multiple out of school suspensions and 34% of expulsions (USDOE, 2014).

Comparatively, White students make up 51% of the total U.S. school enrollment, but

account for 40% of in-school suspensions, 36% of single out-of-school suspensions, 31%

of multiple out-of-school suspensions and 36% of expulsions (USDOE, 2014). When

categorized by race and gender, 20%, or one-fifth of all African American males are

suspended at least once, in contrast with 13% of white males, 9% of Latino males and

10% of Asian-Pacific Island males (USDOE, 2014). For students with disabilities, the

disparities are more striking. Twenty seven percent of African American males with

disabilities are suspended (USDOE, 2014). Comparatively, only 12% of White males,

17% of Latino males, and 10% of Asian American males with disabilities have been

suspended (USDOE, 2014).

Racial and gender-based disparities in suspension and expulsion rates contribute

to race-based differences in academic outcomes, and have a decidedly negative effect on

academic identity development and school performance for African American males (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). African American males who are frequently suspended and expelled experience a heightened sense of alienation from school, lose interest in learning, and express resentment of school personnel (Darensbourg et al., 2010; McNeely, Nonemaker & Blum, 2002). African American males who experience frequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are more likely to perform poorly on standardized assessments (Lewis et al., 2010). Additionally, African American males who are frequently suspended and expelled increase their association with deviant peers, and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (Darensbourg et al., 2010; McNeely et al., 2002). Moreover, Black males who experience frequent suspensions and expulsions have elevated dropout rates and high incarceration rates (Brown, 2007; Darensbourg et al., 2010, Skiba et al., 2000). Disproportional exclusionary discipline has a decidedly negative impact on the academic performance and school experiences of African American males. Academic identity development is heavily influenced by academic achievement and school experiences (Awad, 2007; Osborne & Jones, 2011; Schacter & Rich, 2011), thus, disproportional exclusionary discipline is a factor which may damage academic identity development for Black male students.

Racial and gender-based differences in special education placement are school-based factors which lead to disparities in academic performance between African American males and their peers in other racial and ethnic groups (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Harry, Klingner, & Cramer, 2007; Hosp & Reschley, 2003; Losen, Hodson, Ee, & Martinez, 2014; Skiba,

Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado, & Chung, 2008). Since the establishment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, Black males have been disproportionately placed in special education classes (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Herrera, 1998; Kunjufu, 2005; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). The composite index (CI; Donovan & Cross, 2002) and the risk ratio (RR; Hosp & Reschley, 2003; Parish, 2002), two primary measures for determining disproportionality for students with disabilities, both indicate that African American students are at greater risk of placement in special education programs (Coutinho & Oswald, 2004; Skiba et al., 2008; USDOE, 2015). The composite index, or the percentage of students in special education from a particular group (Coutinho & Oswald, 2004; Gibb & Skiba, 2008), indicates that nationally, African American students make up 16% to 17% of the total student population, but comprise 33% to 34% of students diagnosed with an intellectual disability (Donovan & Cross, 2002; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). The risk ratio measures how much more or less likely is it that students from a given racial or ethnic group will be served in special education in relationship to students from other groups (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). According to risk ratio measures, African American students are 2.32 times more likely to be placed in special education for emotional and behavioral disturbances, and 2.78 times more likely to receive special education for intellectual disabilities (Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Parrish, 2002; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). In addition, African Americans are more likely to experience restrictive special education placements (Brown, 2010; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Toldson, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). Restrictive placements segregate students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Toldson, 2011).

The disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs is of major concern, because it leads to a bevy of negative educational consequences which seriously disrupt academic attainment, thwart positive academic identity development, and create negative school experiences (Adkinson-Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, & Plunkett, 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Kunjufu, 2005; Losen et al., 2014; Toldson, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). In general, special education placement perpetuates schooling in which students have few positive experiences. It stigmatizes students because it signals to peers that they have low ability (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Hale, 2014; Kunjufu, 2005; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). It also suggests to teachers that students have low capacities for learning, which provides teachers with an excuse to teach students less rigorously, or not teach them at all (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Kunjufu, 2005; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). Additional research demonstrates that African American males in special education programs are more likely to have the school contact their parent about poor performance, avoid school, repeat a grade, or drop out altogether (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Toldson, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010).

Disproportional special education placement has a negative impact on school completion rates and raises suspension and expulsion risk rates for African American males (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Losen et al., 2014). Special education students often receive a certificate of completion, an unsanctioned diploma that is not recognized by colleges, universities, post-secondary technical training programs and potential employers as an official high school completion credential

(Walton & Wiggan, 2010). As a result, African American males who matriculate from high school special education programs often have difficulty gaining access to higher education and experience high rates of unemployment (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). Additionally, school suspension rates for Black males with disabilities are even higher than they are for their Black male counterparts who do not have disabilities (Adkinson-Bradley et al., 2006; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Losen et al., 2014). Overall, 24% of all Black secondary students have been suspended, while 36% of all Black male secondary students with disabilities were suspended. Roughly one-in-five Black males with disabilities have been suspended from school (Losen et al., 2014). Additionally, they are three times more likely to be suspended than white males with disabilities, and two times more likely to be suspended than Latino males with disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

The lack of access to high quality instruction is an additional source for disparities in performance between African American male students and their peers in other racial and ethnic groups. This is an important issue because there is a direct relationship between teacher quality and student outcomes (Darling Hammond, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2015; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005). Highly qualified teachers are more experienced professionals who receive their licensure through traditional certification programs (Darling Hammond, 1997, 2000). Additionally, high quality teachers have been identified as content area specialists who possess excellent pedagogical skills (Haycock, 1998). Students who have highly qualified teachers make consistent and significant academic gains, while students with unqualified and ineffective teachers make modest gains, or make no gains at all (Haycock, 1998).

It is well documented that poor Black and Latino students generally do not have access to the most qualified teachers (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Bumgardner, 2010). Data indicates that teacher qualification levels in schools that serve students of color who come from low income backgrounds tend to be lower (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; Hanushek, Rivkin & Kain, 2004). It is estimated that 28% of teachers in core academic subjects lack appropriate certification in schools that serve large numbers of Black and Latino students (NEA, 2011). State and local district data have been used to document patterns of inequitable access to high quality teachers as well. In Tennessee, 20% of the state's least effective teachers were concentrated in schools with high percentages of students of color from low income backgrounds, while only 13% were found in schools with high percentages of White students from middle and upper class backgrounds (Metz, 2015; Tennessee Department of Education, 2010). In Los Angeles, White and Asian students have twice the level of access to high quality teachers as their Black and Latino counterparts (Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Metz, 2015).

Scholarship and policy-based conversations on improving educational outcomes for African American males must address the issue of teacher quality. An infusion of highly qualified and effective teachers may potentially improve outcomes for African American males and other underserved students. Studies have shown that high quality teachers have a positive effect on low income students and students of color (Carey, 2004; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Good teachers have high expectations of students and push them to achieve, regardless of race, income, and levels of parental support (Darling Hammond, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition, it has been proven that under-resourced schools with higher percentages of high quality teachers

produce greater gains in student achievement than schools with fewer highly qualified teachers (Haycock, 1998).

Discriminatory disciplinary practices, disparate student placement patterns and inequitable access to high quality instruction exemplify some of the ways in which race and gender influence the treatment African American males receive in schools in the U.S. An examination of these factors show that, on average, Black males experience school differently than their counterparts from other groups (Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2003). Race and gender-based differences in educational treatments have a cumulative negative effect on African American males' academic performance, and should be included in all scholarly examinations of disparities in academic performance between students from different groups (Brooms, 2014; Emdin, 2012; Lynn et al., 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012, 2014; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). Differences in academic performance between Black males and their peers are not a matter of achievement; they are the direct result of structural inequalities and educational policies and practices which are widely implemented in American public schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005; Noguera, 2003, 2009; Schott Foundation, 2015; Tatum, 2012). Significant improvements in educational outcomes for African American males can be made if African American males are provided with access to highly effective teachers, receive high quality instruction, and are not subjected to discriminatory disciplinary and school placement practices.

While African American males experience race and gender-based barriers to school achievement, not all students in this population are failing, at risk or academically disengaged (Allen, 2015; Harper & Associates, 2014; Rose, 2013). Educational

researchers have focused more attention on the population of African American males in urban schools who thrive academically (Grantham, 2004; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Harper & Associates, 2014; Iruka, Winn, & Harradine, 2014). There is a visible and identifiable population of African American male students in urban public schools who perform well on standardized assessments, have high GPAs, graduate from high school and matriculate to college (Howard, 2014; Scott, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Many African American males who attend urban schools report that their families encourage academic achievement by placing a high value on education and setting high standards for their school performance (Harper, 2012; Harper & Associates, 2014). Even among those considered "at-risk", many African American male students identify with academics and achieve positive outcomes (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Increased research on the academic successes of African American males is important, because literature which documents positive academic outcomes for African American males conveys powerful counter-narratives to the depictions of underachievement, pathology and poor performance typically ascribed to African American male students (Gayles, 2006; Harper, 2012; Wright, 2011).

While a growing body of literature demonstrates that many African American males earn high grades, perform well on standardized tests, complete high school and continue on to post-secondary education, scholars and practitioners acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve the quality of education received by the majority of Black males in U.S. PreK-12 schools (Council of Great City Schools, 2012; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015). In a concerted effort to improve academic outcomes, researchers and educators are identifying and using instructional practices that enhance cognitive development, improve grades, foster high school completion and produce a

college going culture among African American males (Council of Great City Schools, 2012; Kunjufu, 2010; Orange County Public Schools, 2008; Tatum, 2012). Strategies which improve Black males' performance in literacy (Hale, 2001; Hughes, Hassell, Kumasi, Rawson, & Hitson, 2012; Tatum, 2012), mathematics (Berry, Thunder, & McClain, 2011; Moses & Moses, 2012; Noble, 2011), and the STEM fields (Emdin, 2011; Hrabowski, 1998; Wright, 2011) are receiving increased attention from educational researchers. Such studies indicate that African American males can perform at high academic levels when they are provided with high quality, culturally relevant instruction and academic support (Emdin, 2011; Hughes, et al., 2012; Moses & Moses, 2012).

While a growing body of research has been dedicated to improving Black males' academic performance in the traditional content areas, few studies have been conducted which link performing arts education with high academic achievement, specifically among African American males. There is an expanding body of evidence which links performing arts-based learning, academic achievement, and cognitive development (Caterall, 1998; Gazzaniga, 2008; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Rose & Magnotta, 2012; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). Findings from these studies are promising and may serve as the basis for designing and implementing instructional practices that lead to improved academic performance and enhanced school outcomes for African American males (Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2014). In a seminal three-year study, Gazzaniga and associates (2008) demonstrated the existence of important connections between performing arts engagement and cognitive development. Results from this study indicate positive correlations between music training, reading acquisition and geometric reasoning (Gazzaniga, 2008). Findings also demonstrated that involvement

in the arts can increase motivation, and that training in acting can improve memory (Gazzaniga, 2008). In a meta-analysis of 16 studies of classroom drama, positive relationships were identified between participation in drama and reading, oral language development, self-esteem development, and moral reasoning (Hetland & Winner, 2004). In addition, high school students with high levels of in-school and out-of-school arts class participation are inclined to earn higher grades and perform better on standardized assessments than their counterparts with lower levels of arts participation (Caterall, 1998). In urban PreK-12 schools, students who are engaged in classes where the arts are integrated into the curriculum generally outperform their peers on formal reading assessments (Caterall & Waldorf, 1999).

While the majority of studies examine the effects of performing arts education on achievement and cognition, irrespective of race and gender, a few noteworthy studies have been conducted which explore the relationships between performing arts education and academic achievement among African American males. In a theoretical inquiry, Walton and Wiggan (2010) propose using arts education as a framework for reducing the disproportional placement of African American males into special education classrooms. In a second discussion, the authors examined Readers' Theater as an effective technique for improving Black males' reading comprehension skills (Walton & Wiggan, 2014). Kazembe (2014) introduces and discusses a Black Arts curricular framework to promote critical literacy and improve academic engagement among urban African American male students. Additionally, Thomas (2011) revealed positive correlations between school-based musical performing arts participation and achievement on standardized English/language arts and mathematics assessments.

Research which targets performing arts education may provide important information for improving outcomes for Black males in urban schools. Results from such studies may help practitioners and policymakers identify strategies for using the performing arts to elevate academic performance and improve school experiences for Black male students. More research which specifically targets the influence performing arts education experiences may have on the academic identity development and school outcomes of African American males should be conducted. Research which has been conducted thus far indicates that the performing arts may indeed play a critical role in enhancing academic achievement and improving school experiences for African American males. In order to provide conclusive evidence, more studies which link performing arts education and high academic achievement among African American males must be designed and implemented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between participation in standards-driven, school-based performing arts programs and academic identity development among African American males. The existing body of literature suggests that performing arts education represents a potentially promising line of research for educators and policymakers who are committed to improving school experiences and the academic performance of African American male high school students.

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1) What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in standards-driven performing arts education programs at an urban high school?

1) How do performing arts education experiences influence the academic identity development of African American male high school students?

This investigation employed a qualitative research design to develop an interpretive case study method (Creswell, 2003; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012; Merriam, 2002) situated within an African American Male Academic Identity Development (AAMAID) theoretical framework. AAMAID is a proposed theoretical framework designed by the researcher as a tool for analyzing the effects of school-based performing arts participation on academic achievement among African American male high school students.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Academic Identity Development

Academic identity development refers to the psychological and social processes students experience which influence how they perceive themselves as students, and assess their academic performance in relationship to others (Osborne & Jones, 2011; Schachter & Rich, 2011). Grade point average, performance in particular subject areas, attendance, cultural engagement, school experiences, and school-based involvement and social connections are all factors which influence academic identity development (Chen, Yeh, Hwang, & Lin, 2012; Irving & Hudley, 2004; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Koller, 2004). Researchers have identified academic identity development as a process that has a positive reciprocal effect on school performance and as a critical element for motivation and achievement (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept refers to an individual's knowledge and perceptions about him or herself in academic situations (Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991) and denotes his or her self-

perceived abilities in specific academic areas (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Academic self-concept is both global and domain specific (Marsh, 1990). Students have a general academic self-concept, and they also have academic self-concepts which indicate their perceptions of their academic abilities in specific content areas. Additionally, there is a positive, reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and academic performance. Academic performance influences academic self-concept development, and academic self-concept impacts future academic performance (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

Academic Standards

Academic standards are benchmark measures that define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will complete high school with the ability to succeed in workforce training programs and in entry-level, credit bearing academic college courses (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). Academic standards are measures which determine what a student should know and be able to do at a specified grade level (Olson, 2005). Such measures include standardized assessment scores, teacher-made tests, class grades, grade point average, and performance-based assessment scores (Olson, 2005). Academic standards are mandated by the various State Boards of Education and must be used as the basis for designing curriculum and delivering instruction (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015).

Academic standards should be:

- Aligned with college and work expectations
- Clear, understandable and consistent
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher order skills
- Incorporate learning materials derived from current state standards

- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society

- Based on rigorous research (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015).

African American

An ethnic group of citizens of the United States with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census, 2010).

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Pedagogical practices which utilize students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching uses students' backgrounds, knowledge and experiences to inform lessons and teaching methodologies. Teachers who use culturally relevant practices work to create a bridge between students' home and school lives while meeting the expectations of the district and state curricular requirements (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Non-Cognitive Factors

Non-cognitive factors are the behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that are critical for success in school and in life, which cannot be measured by performance on traditional, cognitive assessments (Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman, 2008). Common non-cognitive factors include academic identity, academic self-concept, attitudes about learning, beliefs about intelligence, study skills, attendance, work habits, time management, problem solving skills, and help-seeking behaviors (Ames & Archer, 1988; Bandura, 1997; Conley, 2007; Farkas, 2003; Paris & Wingograd, 1990).

Performing Arts Education

Performing arts education refers to school-based instructional programs in dance, music,

and theater that are driven by national, state, and local standards (ArtsEdge, 2015;

National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Performing arts education programs

are designed to help students achieve basic literacy in the performing arts, to gain greater

depth of understanding of the performing arts, to communicate through the performing

arts, and to develop proficiency in the performing arts (Maine Department of Education,

2007; State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2014). Performing arts education

standards serve as a framework for teaching students to develop artistic ideas, to interpret

artistic ideas through performance, and to understand how the arts convey meaning

(National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Student involvement includes

instruction, rehearsal, and performance. Effective performing arts education experiences

use students' culture to promote positive ethnic and racial identity (Engdahl, 2012).

Performing arts education classes must be taught by highly qualified and certified

instructors who specialize in dance, music, or theater (Washington State Board of

Education, 2015).

Performing Arts High School

A secondary level institution serving students in grades 9-12 which provides students

with both academic instruction and focused, high level instruction and involvement in the

performing arts, specifically in dance, music and theatre arts (ArtsEdge, 2015).

School-Based Performing Arts

Focused, standards-based immersion in dance, music, and theater that takes place in a

school setting. Student involvement includes instruction, rehearsal, and performance

(ArtsEdge, 2015; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014).

Thus far, evidence demonstrates that school-based involvement in the performing

arts strengthens cognitive development, improves academic achievement, and enhances students' school experiences (Gazzaniga, 2008; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Rupert, 2006). Evidence exists which indicates that access to school-based performing arts learning experiences may help significantly improve academic performance, school experiences, and ultimately strengthen academic identity development for African American males (Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014).

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

African American Male Academic Identity Development (AAMAID) theory is the framework that was used to guide this study. African American Male Academic Identity Development theory is an original framework, proposed and developed by the researcher, as a tool for understanding how school-based, standards-driven performing arts learning experiences influenced the academic identity development and school experiences of the Black males who participated in this study. AAMAID maintains that individualized, academic self-perception formation processes and school-based patterns of structural racism are co-contributing factors which influence academic identity development for African American male students.

The AAMAID framework is grounded in two pre-existing theoretical models: Academic Self-Concept Development Theory (Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Matthews, 2014; Sheirer & Kraut, 1979; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1977; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004). For the purposes of this study, Academic Self-Concept (ASC) theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT) have been combined,

because neither construct, in and of itself, provided a comprehensive analysis of how African American males formulate their academic identities. Taken individually, ASC and CRT provide information for understanding the respective internal and external factors which influence Black male academic identity development. ASC provides an explanation of the relationship between student self-concept and academic performance, but it does not account for the impact race-based differences in school effects may have on academic identity development for African American males. CRT offers a thorough analysis of the impact race-based educational disparities have on school outcomes and academic identity formation for African American male students, but it does not adequately describe the specific, psychological and cognitive processes Black males employ to determine their academic self-perceptions. The AAMAID framework attempts to combine key elements of ASC and CRT to provide a more thorough analysis of academic identity development and school performance for African American males.

For African American males, academic self-concept development is a process in which intrinsic and extrinsic psychological and social factors combine to influence how they come to understand their academic strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities (Matthews, 2014). ASC is primarily concerned with the internally-based psychosocial processes students engage in to formulate their academic identities (Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Matthews, Banjeree, & Lauerman, 2014). Conversely, CRT provides a theoretical explanation for understanding how race-based educational inequities, such as disparities in school funding, poorly prepared teachers, teacher biases, and the disproportional use of exclusionary discipline create school conditions which have negative effects on the academic outcomes and school experiences of African American

students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn et al., 2010 Noguera, 2003). These negative experiences damage academic identity development for African American male students. Thus, AAMAID seeks to combine key elements of ASC and CRT to create a paradigm for understanding how intrinsically based self-perceptions of academic ability and extrinsic, racially biased educational practices combine to influence academic identity development processes for African American male students.

Prior to detailing the specifics of AAMAID, a discussion of the existing theories of Academic Self-Concept Development and Critical Race theories are identified and explained. This account describes how each theory informs academic identity development processes for African American males. Additionally, it addresses why it is necessary to incorporate ideas from each framework to develop a more comprehensive theory for understanding academic identity development processes for African American male students.

Academic Self-Concept Theory

The Academic Self-Concept development paradigm provides a psychosocial frame of reference for understanding how students develop perceptions of their academic abilities (Osborne & Jones, 2011; Schacter & Rich, 2011). ASC theory links academic achievement with generalized self-concept development theory to help explain how students develop and maintain an understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses (Valentine, Dubois, & Cooper, 2004). ASC theorists contend that there is a reciprocal relationship between a student's academic identity and his or her school performance (Marsh, 1990; Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung. 1999), and that academic self-concept has a direct effect on a student's grades, grade point average, performance in

particular subject areas, school attendance, extracurricular involvement and social connections with students, teachers, and school personnel (Chen, Yeh, Hwang, & Lin, 2012; Irving & Hudley, 2004; Marsh and Koller, 2004). Additionally, ASC theorists maintain that identifying with academics is a critical component for student motivation and achievement (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Marsh & Craven, 2006), and is an important indicator of student performance (Brunner, Keller, Dierendonck, Reichert, Ugen, Fischback, & Martin, 2010; Chen, et al., 2012). Thus, ASC has received increased scrutiny from scholars, educational practitioners and policy-makers in developed and developing nations (Areepattamannil & Freeman, 2008; Liu, Wang, & Parkins, 2005; Wouters, Germeijs, Colpin, & Verschueren, 2011).

ASC theory developed in the early 1960s and has been supported by over 50 years of qualitative and quantitative scholarship (Awad, 2007; Bandura, 1997; Brookover, Erickson, & Jordan, 1962, 1967; Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Cokley et al., 2003, 2011; Coopersmith, 1967; Gordon, 1968; Graham & Anderson, 2008; Marsh, 1986, 1990; Prince & Nurius, 2014; Purkey, 1970; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Research in ASC theory is designed to create a framework for analyzing how the academic dimensions of self-concept (Baumeister, 1999, Rogers, 1959) influence academic performance and affect students' school experiences. General self-concept is described as the beliefs, ideas, and perceptions an individual has about himself or herself (Baumeister, 1999; Coopersmith & Feldman, 1976). By extension, academic self-concept consists of the set of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions held by students about their academic abilities and skill sets (Awad, 2007; Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997).

Academic Self-Concept development theorists maintain that academic self-concept is an observable and measurable psychosocial construct which provides a reliable indication of how students gauge their academic abilities and assess their performance in relationship to other students (Brookover et al., 1962, 1967; Coopersmith, 1967; Gordon, 1968). In their seminal longitudinal study, Brookover and his associates (1962, 1965, and 1967) determined that students' grades were affected and limited by students' self-concepts of their ability to learn. They also concluded that students' self-concepts of ability are a reflection of the evaluation parents, teachers and other students hold for them (Brookover et al., 1962, 1965, 1967). In an effort to improve researchers' ability to identify and operationalize academic self-concept, a variety of scales and assessment tools have been designed to measure and analyze academic self-concept (Bracken, 1992; Byrne, 1996; Gordon, 1968; Harter, 1982; Marsh, 1990). Subsequent studies have employed such assessments in a variety of research projects which examine academic self-concept development (Baran & Maskan, 2011; Culp & Bernacci, 2009; Jordan, 1981; Ruedi & West, 1973; Yeatts & Gordon, 1968). In his extensive review of the existing literature, Purkey (1968) provided additional evidence of a strong and persistent relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement. Additionally, his analysis identified teachers and parents as critical factors in positive academic self-concept development among students (Purkey, 1968).

Additionally, academic self-concept theorists contend that academic self-concept is a hierarchical construct (Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). An individual's academic self-concept can be subdivided into self-concepts in specific subject areas, based on school context and individual experiences

(Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). ASC theory

purports that students can have a global academic self-concept and subject specific self-

concepts in math, social studies, English, history, science, performing arts, and the visual

arts. Furthermore, ASC contends that academic self-concepts can be subdivided into

specific factors within subject areas. As a refinement, Marsh and Shavelson (1986)

proposed that individuals have math/academic self-concepts and verbal/academic self-

concepts as higher order academic factors which influence academic performance in

specific subject areas (Marsh, Byrne, and Shavelson, 1988).

ASC theory maintains that there is a causal relationship between academic self-

concept and academic achievement. Using data from previously conducted longitudinal

studies, Calsyn and Kenny (1977) conducted an analysis which determined that academic

achievement is causally predominant over academic self-concept. Using grade point

average as a measure of academic achievement, the researchers promoted a skill

development model, which concluded that school performance was causally predominant

over both self-concept of ability and perceived academic evaluations of teachers and

peers (Calsyn & Kenny, 1977). Subsequent studies of academic self-concept among early

learners support the skill development model (Chapman et al., 2000; Muijs, 1997).

Academic achievement in early reading skills, such as letter-name recognition, phonemic

awareness, and sound matching all had positive correlations with academic self-concept

for students in the early elementary school grades (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow,

2000; Muijs, 1997; Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990).

Conversely, there is some evidence of a self-enhancement model of academic

self-concept development. This framework postulates that academic self-concept

variables directly affect academic achievement (Buhs, 2005; Green, Nelson, Martin, & Marsh, 2006). There is some empirical support for a self-enhancement model of academic self-concept development. Negative school experiences such as victimization, exclusion and peer rejection have been associated with reports of decreased levels of classroom engagement, and decreased levels of academic achievement (Buhs, 2005; Green et al., 2006). The presence of a causal relation from self-concept to achievement suggests that schools should spend more time, effort and resources enhancing students' academic self-concepts as a means for fostering academic achievement (Buhs, 2005; Green et al., 2006).

While there is some evidence which supports skill development and self-enhancement models of academic self-concept development, the body of literature overwhelmingly supports a reciprocal effects model of achievement and identity development (Chen, Yeh, Hwang, & Lin, 2013; Marsh, 1990; Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung, 1999; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Prince & Nurius, 2014; Seaton et. al., 2014). The reciprocal effects model blends the strengths of the skill development and self-enhancement frameworks and contends that academic self-concept and academic achievement are mutually reinforcing constructs in which prior academic self-concept affects subsequent academic achievement, and prior academic achievement affects subsequent academic self-concept (Dramanu & Balarabe, 2013; Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003; Marsh, 1990, Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung, 1999; Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990). Results from qualitative and quantitative studies which relate academic achievement and academic self-concept provide strong support for a reciprocal effects model of academic self-concept development (Chen et al., 2013; Dramanu & Balarabe, 2013; Green et al., 2006; Marsh,

& Hau, 2003; Prince & Nurius, 2014). Data obtained from reciprocal effects oriented studies indicate that academic self-concept is highly correlated with academic success. Additionally, reciprocal effects studies suggest that there are strong connections between academic self-concept, motivation and achievement (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Dramanu & Balarabe, 2013). Students who have positive academic self-concepts are more likely to be highly engaged in the classroom, work hard to achieve good grades, spend more time studying, and persist in completing challenging academic tasks (Dramanu & Balarabe, 2013; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998).

The body of literature clearly demonstrates that academic self-concept is an identifiable and measurable non-cognitive construct which correlates positively with academic performance. Research reveals that there is a powerful reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and school achievement for students. High academic achievement begets positive academic self-concept development, and positive academic self-concept engenders high academic achievement for students who have been included in studies which examine this phenomenon.

While there is empirical and qualitative evidence which supports its validity, ASC is a problematic framework for understanding how African American males develop their academic identities. African American students were excluded from many of the early studies which were used to formulate ASC. From its very inception, ASC was designed to describe academic identity development processes as they occur among White middle class students from developed nations. The earliest studies on academic self-concept development were conducted almost exclusively with White, middle class students from the U.S., Australia, and Canada (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). African American

students, students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and students from low income backgrounds were not included in the original studies that were used to construct the ASC framework (Brookover et al., 1965; Coopersmith, 1967; Gordon, 1968; Piers & Harris, 1964; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). The exclusion of African American students and youth from other racial and ethnic groups suggests that the propositions presented by ASC theorists may not be generalizable to a diverse population of students. Responses from a diversified population of students may have led to the formulation of a theory of academic self-concept development which acknowledges the roles race, socioeconomic status, and school setting play in academic self-concept development.

Over the last fifteen years more research has been conducted which addresses the effects of race and gender on academic self-concept development (Awad, 2007; Bacon, 2011; Cokley, 2000; Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009; Rouse & Cashin, 2000). Such studies have been conducted to fill acknowledged gaps in the literature concerning race and gender as potential mitigating factors in academic self-concept development. Rouse and Cashin (2000) maintain that ASC is an effective and appropriate framework for assessing academic self-concept among Black, White, and Latino students. Additionally, the researchers argue that traditional quantitative methods provide valid and reliable data for measuring academic self-concept for Black, Latino, and White students. Awad (2007) corroborates ASC development theory as a valid measure of academic identity development for African American students. Results from his study indicate that GPA was a reliable and valid indicator of academic self-concept development for African American college students, and was a

more reliable reflection of academic self-concept than verbal Graduate Record

Examination scores or scores on a racial identity scale (Awad, 2007).

While there is some evidence which supports ASC development theory as an

appropriate framework for assessing academic identity among African American

students, there is an expanding body of literature which indicates that racial differences

may, in fact, have effects on students' academic self-perceptions (Cokley, 2002, Cokley

et al., 2003, 2011; Evans, Copping, Rowley, & Kurtz-Costes, 2011; Matthews, 2014;

Okeke et al., 2009). In a series of studies conducted among college students, Cokley and

his associates (2000, 2002, 2003) determined that school setting played a major role in

self-concept development for African American students. For Black students who

attended historically White colleges and universities (HWCUs), students' GPA was the

best predictor of academic self-concept (Cokley, 2000, 2002; Cokley et al., 2003).

Conversely, the quality of student-faculty interactions was the best predictor of ASC for

African American students who attended historically Black colleges and universities

(HBCUs) (Cokley, 2000, 2002; Cokley et al., 2003). Additionally, African American

students at HBCUs reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation, more positive self-

concepts, and greater faculty encouragement than students who attended HWCUs

(Cokley, 2000, 2002, Cokley et al., 2003). This suggests that the quality of the

relationships students have with teachers and administrators may be key elements in

academic identity development for African American students. Okeke and her associates

(2009) found that African American middle school students who endorsed traditional

academic race stereotypes, which reinforce the idea that White students are smarter than

Black students, have lower academic self-concepts and do not perform as well as Black

students who have non-stereotypical, egalitarian perspectives concerning race and academic performance (Okeke et al., 2009). Evans and associates (2011) maintain that African American males' academic self-concepts are influenced by academic achievement scores and racial and gender-based stereotypes (Evans et al., 2011).

Thus far, the body of literature does not clearly conclude that ASC, in and of itself, is an effective framework for understanding academic identity development processes for African American male students. While some studies indicate that ASC is an appropriate and effective method for understanding how African American males come to understand themselves as students (Awad, 2007, Rouse & Cashin, 2000) others studies suggest that race and gender-based differences in school experiences influence academic self-concept development for African American males (Cokely, 2000, 2002; Cokley et al., 2003; Evans, 2011; Matthews, 2014; Okeke et al., 2009). Additional research indicates that discriminatory educational practices have direct, negative effects on African American males' academic self-concept development (Matthews, 2014; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Such studies demonstrate that systemic educational inequities experienced by African American males, like disproportionately high special education placement rates, inequitably applied exclusionary discipline practices, and lack of access to highly effective teachers are additional factors which erode academic self-concept for African American males (Brown, 2010; Losen et al., 2015; Lynn et al., 2010; Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Hence, the researcher has developed a theoretical model which incorporates Critical Race Theory with Academic Self-Concept Theory to build a new framework for understanding the effects of racial differences on African American males' academic identity development.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a form of oppositional scholarship which maintains that racism is a foundational, deeply ingrained aspect of the individual and collective daily experiences of people in the U.S. (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Tate, 1997). Critical Race Theory originated within the legal studies movement in the late 1970s as a reaction to the perceived failure of traditional civil rights legislation to produce racial reforms that could change the subordinated status of people of color in the U.S. (Bell, 1977; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Love, 2004). CRT argues that a) racism is not a series of isolated acts but is an endemic fixture in everyday life, and is a deeply rooted aspect of the American legal, psychological and cultural experience, b) traditional civil rights legislation has failed to address racial injustices and should be reinterpreted, c) claims of colorblindness, neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy are used to conceal self-interest among dominant groups in society, d) legal doctrine should be reformulated to reflect the experiences of those who have been victimized by racism, and e) the use of stories and first person accounts is necessary for understanding the impact racism has on people of color (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT has been applied as a tool for analyzing the educational inequities people of color experience in K-12 schools and in higher education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tate, 1997). Critical Race theorists in education argue that race continues to be a significant factor in determining social inequities in the U.S., and that structural racism is the root cause of the disparities in academic performance between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Kumasi, 2011). Additionally, CRT in

education maintains that U.S. society is based on property rights, thus the intersection of race and property provides an analytic tool for understanding racial inequities in academic achievement and school performance (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical race theorists maintain that the intersection of race and socioeconomic status helps explain deeply entrenched patterns of inequities in U.S. public schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, education funding is determined by property taxes. Schools which are located in wealthy and upper-income areas receive more funding than schools which are located in lower income and poor communities. Hence, students from more affluent communities have access to better schools than students from working class and poor communities (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Schools in more affluent communities have better trained and more experienced teachers, richer curricula and the material resources necessary to support learning. In this sense, curricula serves as a form of "intellectual property", and curriculum quality and quantity varies with the property values of the school (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Those who have better or more expensive property are entitled to better schools. Conversely, schools that serve Black students from working class and low income backgrounds do not have the same level of resources, so students have limited opportunities to learn (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Additionally, critical race theorists provide evidence which demonstrates that public schools in the U.S. have become increasingly segregated by race and socioeconomic status (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Kozol, 2006; Sturgis, 2013). The

majority of African American students attend schools in less affluent neighborhoods and in areas with lower property values (Mickelson, Bottia, & Southworth, 2008; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). By default, many African American students attend under-funded schools that are staffed by poorly trained teachers, offer low level, functional curricula, and lack the resources necessary to support student learning (Mickelson, Bottia, & Southworth, 2008; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

CRT relies on the use of stories, counter-stories, parables, chronicles and other forms of personal narratives to challenge the false notions of neutrality, colorblindness and objectivity (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). A crucial component of this study involves the use of student narratives as a source for analyzing the factors which influence academic identity development among African American males who attended a performing arts oriented high school.

Critical race theory provides an analysis for understanding structural inequities in U.S. schools. CRT offers an important perspective for examining why African American male students often attend underfunded schools, have poorly qualified teachers, get suspended and expelled at higher rates than their counterparts in other racial groups, and are disproportionately placed in special and remedial education programs. Such disparities have been proven to have a negative effect on the academic performance of African American males, and contribute to decreased GPAs, poor performance on standardized assessments, and reduced school completion rates. According to the reciprocal effects framework, poor school outcomes experienced by many African American males may have a negative effect on their academic identity development. In spite of the presence of deeply entrenched, race-based educational inequities experienced

by African American males, many students in this population succeed and prosper academically in American schools. While CRT provides an effective global analysis for understanding race-based structural differences in educational opportunities, it does not necessarily explain how individual agency, academic resilience, and culturally relevant instructional practices enhance school performance and influence academic identity development among African American males.

ASC and CRT offer incomplete explanations of academic identity development processes for African American male students. ASC provides an analysis of the relationship between school performance and academic identity development, but it does not address the effects which educational inequities may have on African American males' academic achievement and identity development. CRT offers an explanation of how structural, school-based racism limits learning opportunities and engenders poor academic performance for many African American males, but it does not adequately explain the internal, psychosocial processes Black males employ to develop their academic identities. To address this concern, the researcher has developed and proposed AAMAID as an alternative framework for understanding how African American males formulate their academic identities.

African American Male Academic Identity Development Theory

African American Male Academic Identity Development Theory, or AAMAID, is an original framework which integrates components of Academic Self-Concept theory and Critical Race Theory to explain academic identity development processes for African American males. The AAMAID framework was developed by the researcher as a more effective lens for understanding how Black male students acquire and maintain their

academic identities. AAMAID maintains that academic identity development is an internally negotiated, psychological process that is also influenced by externally applied, racially biased educational practices. While ASC argues that academic performance and academic self-concept have a reciprocal relationship, CRT maintains that school-based, racially biased academic practices create conditions which may compromise positive academic identity development and lead to lower levels of academic performance for African American male students. AAMAID incorporates these central elements of ASC and CRT and argues that, for African American males, academic identity development is not simply a function of decontextualized, individual academic performance. External factors such as student placement patterns, disciplinary practices, teacher quality, and teacher efficacy beliefs influence academic performance and affect academic identity development processes for Black male students. Additionally, AAMAID provides prescriptions for improving academic identity development and school performance for African American males. AAMAID offers a multidimensional and balanced perspective for understanding academic identity development for African American males. AAMAID acknowledges that there is a reciprocal relationship between academic identity development and academic performance. Students' past academic performance influences academic identity development, and academic identity development influences future academic performance (Chen et al., 2013; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2006). Thus, students who have high overall grade point averages, maintain good grades in specific subject areas, and perform well on assessments generally develop positive academic identities. Conversely, students who struggle in school, have low GPAs and do not garner positive academic track records in

specific domains are more likely to acquire poor academic identities, and will see themselves as struggling students (Byrne, 1996; Matthews, 2014, Matthews et al., 2014, Purkey, 1970). Additionally, AAMAID recognizes that African American males face a unique set of circumstances which may make it difficult for them to perform well in school. Such circumstances include disproportional special education placement patterns, inequitable exclusionary discipline practices, poor teacher quality and low teacher expectations; all factors which have been proven to diminish academic performance (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Lynn et al., 2010; Matthews et al., 2014). Poor academic performance, induced by racially biased educational practices, leads to negative academic identity development for some African American males.

As a prescription, AAMAID maintains that enhancing a sense of school belonging, and bolstering academic engagement levels are important processes for strengthening academic identity development and improving academic performance for African American male students. School belonging is the extent to which students perceive of themselves as welcomed, valued, and respected members of the school community (Goodenow, 1993). School belonging is characterized by positive interactions with teachers, administrators and peers and includes increased academic engagement (Taylor, 1991). Academic engagement refers to the effort, enjoyment, and interest students express while participating in academic activities, and is characterized by a strong emotional investment in achievement oriented behaviors (Fine, 1991; Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Research demonstrates that enhanced school belonging and increased academic engagement improve overall school

performance, and strengthen academic identity development for African American male students (Singh et al., 2010; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005; Uwah et al., 2008; White, 2009).

A variety of studies have demonstrated that a psychological sense of school belonging improves school performance and academic identity development (Anderman, 2002; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Finn, 1989; Flaxman & Asher, 1992; Goodenow, 1992; Osterman, 2000). Research indicates that a psychological sense of school belonging has a strong influence on the educational adjustment of adolescent students (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1992) and is positively associated with higher grades, increased motivation, and improved high school completion rates (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1992; Osterman, 2000). Additionally, a sense of school belonging is positively correlated with GPA and academic self-concept, and is negatively correlated with school problems and absenteeism (Anderman, 2002).

School belonging is a particularly important factor in improving academic identity development processes for African American males. The racially biased practices African American males experience in schools often make it difficult for them to foster a strong sense of school belonging (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Matthews, 2014; Singh et al., 2010). Excessive suspensions and expulsions, disproportional special education placements, poor teacher quality and an overall lack of support for African American males makes it difficult for them to develop effective social and personal connections with teachers, administrators and guidance counselors (Bennett, 1981; Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Rudd, 2014; USDOE, 2014). As a result, African American males may display more mistrust of school personnel and have difficulties buying into school roles and expectations (Honora, 2002; Roderick, 2003; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005).

Understanding, accepting, and carrying out academic and social expectations in school settings are important prerequisites for academic identity development and school performance (Allen, 2015; Cotton, 1989; Matthews, 2014). Thus, strengthening school belonging and social interconnections are key components for improving academic identity development and school achievement for African American males (Matthews et al., 2014).

The AAMAID framework is influenced by a growing body of literature which reinforces existing correlations between school belonging, academic identity development and achievement for African American males in U.S. public schools (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2005; Singh et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Research indicates that academic success for African American males is influenced by how they see themselves within the school context (Uwah et al., 2008). In their qualitative study, Hamm and Faircloth (2005) determined that school belonging correlated more highly with academic self-belief and performance for African American and Latino youth than it did for White youth. Walton and Cohen (2011) found that interventions aimed at increasing belonging had lasting achievement and mental health benefits for African American youth as compared with White youth. Singh and associates (2010) discovered that belonging was a stronger predictor of academic performance for African American students and other students of color. Such findings may result from African American males' awareness of the negative racial and gender-based perceptions some teachers, administrators and school personnel have of them. Thus, specific gestures of invitation and involvement in academic and extracurricular activities may play an increasingly important role in supporting their academic identity

development and achievement.

The AAMAID framework also maintains that enhancing academic engagement levels is a crucial step for supporting positive academic identity development among African American males. Students who have an emotional investment in school and who engage in behaviors that engender academic success are considered to be academically engaged. (Fine, 1991; Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005; Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons, 2013). Students who experienced heightened levels of academic engagement are more involved in classroom interactions, show genuine interest in learning, are highly motivated, get better grades, and are less likely to be bored, inattentive, or disrespectful (Fine, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In contrast, students who are disengaged have lower grades, are less likely to aspire to higher education, and are more likely to drop out of school (Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997).

AAMAID's goal of improving academic engagement for African American males may be achieved by strengthening teacher-student relationships (Crosnoe, 2002; Irvine, 1985; Lynn et al., 2010), and implementing culturally relevant instructional practices (Boykin, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005). For African American males, positive teacher-student relationships are critical components for academic success (Lynn et al., 2010), and are positively correlated with higher levels of student achievement (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Black males often use teachers as important resources for navigating through schools, improving academic performance, and becoming successful students. In urban schools, teachers' perceptions of students' capacities and behaviors are often shaped by negative stereotypes and expectations

(Toldson, et al., 2013). Such negative attitudes create poor teacher-student relationships and encourage the use of instructional practices which are detrimental and impede learning for African American male students (Toldson, et al., 2013). Racial biases held by teachers serve as barriers to teacher-student bonding and generate negative relationships between students, families and schools. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to develop effective and positive strategies for supporting African American males' academic identity development and school success.

The AAMAID model maintains that learning context is an important factor in academic identity development and school performance for African American males. Changing the trajectory of African American males' academic identity development and academic performance will require noticeable shifts in pedagogical practices that have traditionally been used with Black students in urban school settings. Effectively developing and implementing culturally relevant teaching practices is a promising method for improving outcomes for African American males (Boykin, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to the use of teaching practices that draw meaningfully on the culture, language and experiences students bring into the classroom in order to increase engagement and encourage academic achievement for students of color (Au, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching which is committed to the individual and collective empowerment of African American students and other students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Additionally, culturally relevant pedagogy prioritizes academic excellence, incorporates cultural competence and encourages the development of a critical consciousness for students (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008; Ladson-

Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Schools and teachers that operate from culturally relevant teaching and learning contexts demand academic excellence in ways that are meaningful to African American males (Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Students' unique skills are valued and are channeled in academically important ways. Culturally relevant instruction uses students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Au, 2005; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Students' music, home language, and community resources are used to create and enhance learning experiences (Au, 2005; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; White, 2009). Additionally, culturally relevant instruction encourages students to develop a sociopolitical consciousness which enables them to critique the values and norms of institutions that create and maintain social inequities (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

A variety of studies have been conducted which demonstrate the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching methods with African American males (Acevez & Orosco, 2014; Howard, 2014; Tatum, 2006; Wood & Jocius, 2013). Quantitative and qualitative studies indicate that teachers and schools that effectively implement key elements of culturally relevant teaching improve student outcomes across subject areas and improve students' academic, cultural and linguistic identities (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Wood & Jocius, 2013). As it pertains to African American males, culturally relevant instruction increases engagement by enabling them to immerse themselves in content and conversations that address the realities of their everyday lives (Tatum, 2006). Moreover, culturally relevant instruction provides African American males with opportunities to strengthen their literacy skills and improve test scores. Additionally, AAMAID maintains that African American males should be taught in group contexts which emphasize

collaborative learning experiences. Collaborative learning, a central element of culturally

relevant instruction, refers to school-based academic experiences in which students work

together to perform tasks, solve problems, learn skills, create projects, and acquire

knowledge (Dooly, 2008; Gokhale, 1995). Collaborative learning shifts the responsibility

of learning from the teacher to the students. In an effective collaborative learning setting,

students interact, build knowledge together, and assume responsibility for each other's

learning (Dooly, 2008; Gokhale, 1995; Srinivas, 2015). Additionally, collaborative

learning emphasizes the development of structured approaches to solving real world

problems (Bruffee, 1999). The effective application of collaborative learning strategies

has academic and social benefits for all students. In collaborative settings, the act of

exchanging, debating, and negotiating ideas and information within groups increases

student engagement (Dooly, 2008). Engaging in discussion and accepting responsibility

for their own learning increases students' critical thinking skills (Totten, Sills, Digby, &

Russ, 1989). Additionally, there is evidence which suggests that students who work in

collaborative teams are more likely to utilize higher order thinking skills and retain

information longer than students who work quietly and individually (Johnson & Johnson,

2009). Finally, students who work in groups learn more of what it taught, retain more

information, and tend to express more satisfaction with their classes than students who do

not get to experience working in collaborative groups (Bruffee, 1999; Dooly, 2008;

Gokhale, 1995).

The use of collaborative teaching and learning methodologies are particularly

beneficial for African American males (Boykin, 1994; Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005;

Toldson et al., 2013; Wood & Jocius, 2013). There is a strong, positive relationship

between the academic performance of African American students and group-oriented learning contexts (Boykin et al., 2004). African American males who participate in on-going collaborative learning experiences report feelings of enhanced acceptance and support, and demonstrate reduced levels of learning anxiety (Wood & Jocius, 2013). Additionally, collaborative teaching and learning promotes interdependence by allowing students to develop their own academic skills while supporting the academic growth and development of their peers (Hurley et al., 2005; Wood & Jocius, 2013). Collaborative approaches to teaching and learning have resulted in enhanced school performance for African American students (Bailey & Boykin, 2001; Cabrera, Crissman, Bernal, Nora, Pascarella, 2002; Dill & Boykin, 2000; Strayhorn, 2008). For African American males, involvement in collaborative learning positively correlates with self-reported intellectual gains (Strayhorn, 2008). African American students who were enrolled in collaborative learning courses had higher GPAs and were more likely to enroll in advanced level math classes than their African American peers who were enrolled in courses that were taught using traditional teaching methods (Cabrera et al., 2002).

AAMAID is a newly proposed framework which is both descriptive and prescriptive in nature. It attempts to explain academic identity development processes for African American males and provides concrete solutions for improving academic outcomes for students in this population as well. In this study, the AAMAID model was used to examine the role performing arts participation played in strengthening academic identity development and improving academic outcomes for African American male high school students.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the application of school-based performing arts as a model for strengthening academic identity development and improving achievement for African American male high school students. A plethora of studies examine the disparities in achievement and school outcomes experienced by African American males in relationship to their peers in other ethnic and racial groups (Davis, 2003; Lewis et al., 2012; Lynn et al., 2010; Moore III & Lewis, 2014; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2010, 2012, 2015; Tatum, 2006, 2012). This study attempts to connect academic identity development to school performance, and investigates the potential role that active, school-based performing arts participation may have on enhancing African American males' academic performance and school experiences.

There is an expanding body of research which establishes that learning in and through the performing arts improves academic performance, strengthens cognitive development and enhances school outcomes for students (College Board, 2009; Scheuler, 2010; Whisman & Hixson, 2012). Several studies also indicate that performing arts learning experiences contribute to improved academic achievement and social development among at-risk youth (Caterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Rose & Magnotta, 2012). Few studies examine the impact performing arts learning has specifically on academic identity development and academic achievement for African American males. This study is important because it contributes to our understanding of the relatively unexplored relationship between performing arts learning experiences and academic achievement for African American male high school students.

Research on the connections between school-based performing arts education,

academic identity development and school achievement have important implications for the teaching and learning opportunities afforded to African American male high school students. Evidence of its successful use as a model for improving school experiences and enhancing academic performance indicate that educators should consider integrating the performing arts into the school curriculum on a wider scale, in order to make such opportunities available to greater numbers of African American males. The persistent use of ineffective instructional practices is a factor in the poor academic performance outcomes demonstrated by many African American male students. Researchers, educators and policymakers should consider integrating performing arts learning opportunities into urban school reform models.

<div align="center">Delimitations and Limitations</div>

Delimitations are the factors, constructs, and variables that have been intentionally left out of the study, and are identified by the researcher to help delineate the boundaries of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). This study contains several delimitations. This study is narrowed by participant criteria. All participants are those who self-identified as African American males who had previously attended and graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts. Participants were purposively selected based on race, gender, and level of school-based engagement in the performing arts. In order to insure the involvement of participants who fit the criteria outlined in this study, recruitment was limited to graduates of Piedmont School of the Arts, thus, the participants do not reflect a national sample. Finally, the study is delimited by my examination of performing arts education and its influence on the academic identity development of African American male high school students.

Limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with a study that have been identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2005). One potential limitation related to this study may be the region of the country it was conducted in. All participants lived and attended high school in a large urban center in the southeastern U.S. Their attitudes and opinions may be influenced heavily by the context in which they lived while they were in high school, and may not reflect attitudes and beliefs held by Black male high school students from other regions. Another limitation is that this study did not involve African American males who studied the visual arts. The inclusion of participants with visual arts backgrounds may have widened the scope of the study and provided the researcher with richer and more varied data concerning the connection between school-based arts immersion and academic identity development among African American male high school students.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This study explored the relationship between participation in standards-based performing arts education programs and academic identity development among African American male high school students. Chapter one investigated the relationship between arts participation, academic achievement and cognitive development. This chapter addressed the disparities in academic performance between African American male students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups. In addition, chapter one challenged the achievement gap narrative by exposing some of the contextual factors which lead to tangible racialized differences in academic performance among students of different racial groups. Finally, chapter one proposed the AAMAID framework as a

model for understanding academic identity development and the role performing arts

education may play in improving outcomes for Black male high school students.

<div align="center">Organization of Dissertation Chapters</div>

The remaining chapters of this dissertation outline and detail critical components

of this study. Chapter two, the literature review, identifies and underscores the research

that established the foundation for this study. In chapter two, the connections between

academic identity development and participation in the performing arts are explored. This

chapter provides an in-depth examination of the connections between learning in and

through the arts, cognitive development and academic achievement. In addition, this

chapter analyzes contemporary public education policy and its impact on access to

performing arts education for African American students and other underserved

populations. Chapter two includes an analysis of studies that explore the influence

performing arts education has on academic performance among African American males.

Finally, this chapter reveals that more research must be conducted in order to fully

understand the role performing arts education may play in improving academic and post-

school outcomes for African American males.

Chapter three identifies and outlines the research method employed in this study.

This research project sought to understand a particular, school-based phenomenon. The

single case study method was the most appropriate research design for this study. The

single case study allowed the researcher to explore a particular phenomenon in a single

setting. In this particular instance, the single case was a performing arts oriented high

school in an urban setting. Within this particular setting the researcher used interviews to

examine how involvement in structured, standards-based performing arts programs

influenced school experiences and academic identity development for African American males who attended a performing arts oriented high school. Chapter four presents the findings of this study, and includes analyses of the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the interview data. Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of the findings, including the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was conducted in an effort to examine academic identity development processes and school experiences for African American males who participated in school-based performing arts programs. From historical and contemporary perspectives, the majority of African American males have not received the types of educational opportunities and experiences that would enable them to attain similar levels of academic success as their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Anderson, 1988; Noguera, 2008; Woodson, 1933). An expanding body of literature indicates that systematized and ongoing experiences in the performing arts enhance academic achievement, improve school experiences and engender pro-social development for students (Caterall et al., 2012; Fiske, 1999; Fowler, 1996). The research presented here explores the potential mitigating influence performing arts learning may have on African American male students. Additionally, this investigation has implications for how performing arts education may be used as a treatment for improving school and life outcomes for Black male students.

To provide context to this study, this chapter explores the literature on academic identity development and school-based performing arts participation among African American male students. It begins with a brief review of the literature on academic identity development. It continues with an examination of the literature on academic identity development among African American male students. Additionally, this chapter will explore the relationship between performing arts education, cognitive development

and academic achievement. This chapter concludes with a review of the existing body of literature on performing arts education and African American male students.

Academic Identity Development

Academic identity development is defined as an individual's attempt to construct self-understanding and meaning by defining himself or herself through academic values, school belonging, regard, and performance (Osborne & Jones, 2011; Schacter & Rich, 2011). Academic identity has been characterized as "the personal commitment to a standard of excellence, the willingness to persist in the challenge, struggle, excitement and disappointment intrinsic in the learning process" (Welch & Hodges, 1997, p. 37) and is a foundational aspect of academic performance and achievement motivation. Research demonstrates that academic identity development is a powerful indicator for assessing and understanding academic performance, school satisfaction and school success (Graham & Anderson, 2008). As a result, the concept of academic identity development has garnered increased interest from educational researchers and policy makers (Marsh & Hau, 2003).

Academic identity is very closely aligned with academic self-concept. Academic self-concept has been defined as beliefs about oneself as a student (Prince & Nurius, 2014), mental representations of one's abilities in academic domains and school subjects (Valentine, DuBois & Cooper, 2004), or self-perceptions that are formed through students' experiences and interpretations of the school environment (Marsh & Craven, 1997). High academic self-concepts are associated with positive psychological and behavioral outcomes, such as feelings of competence and self-confidence (Marsh & Craven, 1997), academic effort (Trautwein, Ludtke, Schnyder & Niggli, 2006) and school

success (Helmke & Van Aken, 1995). The enhancement of academic self-concepts is one of the major goals of education worldwide (Marsh & Hau, 2003). Academic self-concept and academic identity are constructs that indicate how students perceive their academic abilities, and process their school experiences. Additionally, they correlate with academic performance in specific domains. For the purposes of this study, academic identity and academic self-concept will be used interchangeably as descriptions of students' awareness of their academic abilities, and the processes by which these attitudes and impressions influence academic performance and school experiences.

<center>Academic Identity Development for African American Males</center>

Educational research confirms that identifying with academics is an essential element for motivation and achievement (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Yeung, 1997). However, African American males face unique challenges that may impede their identity development, motivation and performance. Across the K-12 educational landscape, African American males must contend with the excessive application of exclusionary discipline practices, negative teacher expectations, and inequitable special and remedial education placement methods (Cartledge, Gibson & Keys, 2012; Dixon-Roman, 2013). Each of these factors retard positive academic identity development. African American males experience exclusionary discipline practices at higher rates than students in other racial and ethnic groups (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002). Statistics demonstrate that African American males are 2 to 3 times more likely to be suspended from school than their counterparts in other groups (Brooks, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1999; Wald & Losen, 2003). The excessive use of exclusionary discipline results in significant amounts of lost instructional time, has a negative effect on

academic achievement, and contributes to increased dropout rates among this population of students (Brown, 2007; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Students who experience suspensions and expulsions perceive the school as a hostile and unsupportive environment (Brown, 2007; Sekayi, 2001). Racial discrepancies in the use of exclusionary discipline creates feelings of injustice among Black students, and further erodes their confidence in schools as safe spaces for learning (Skiba, 2001). As a consequence, African American male students experience disaffection from the educational system and lose interest in learning (Brown, 2007; Wald & Kurlaender, 2003). Ultimately, persistent patterns of disproportional exclusionary discipline frustrate positive academic identity development among African American males.

Negative and disparaging teacher expectations serve as an additional barrier to African American males' academic identity development (Matthews, 2014). Research shows that teachers display persistent patterns of negative attitudes about the behavior and academic abilities of Black male students (Aaron & Powell, 1982; Lynn et al., 2010; Simpson & Erickson, 1983). Studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that White teachers had more negative beliefs about Black children concerning initial impressions, ability, deviant behavior and potential for success in college (Irvine, 1985, 1990). Additionally, teachers had more negative comments about Black male students' behavior than they did for other students, and these perceptions heavily influenced how they rated students academically. Even when African American male students displayed the ability to meet high academic standards, it did not change negative beliefs teachers harbored about these students (Irvine, 1985; Lynn et al, 2010). In general, teacher expectations for success were higher for White students than for African American

students (Ferguson, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008).

There is evidence that teacher efficacy beliefs have implications for African American males' academic achievement and self-concept development. The academic performance of African American male high school students decreases when they encounter teachers who do not believe they have the ability to master course content (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Ferguson, 2003; Lynn et al., 2010). Teacher belief patterns underscore race-based disparities in the quality of instruction African American males receive in American K-12 schools.

Persistent disproportional placement in special education programs erodes academic identity development for African American males. Since the establishment of federally mandated public education programs for students with disabilities (EHA, 1975; IDEA, 2004), Black males have been disproportionately placed in special education classes and programs for students with intellectual, emotional and behavioral problems (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; USDOE, 2007; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). African American males are four-times more likely to be placed in special education programs than females (Kunjufu, 2005, 2009). While African American males comprise only nine percent of the total student enrollment in public schools, they comprise 21% of placements for intellectual disabilities and 20% of placements for behavioral and emotional disabilities (Kunjufu, 2005, 2009). Black boys are more likely to receive special education services and the least likely to be enrolled in honors courses (Toldson, 2011). For African American males, special education has become a space for racial segregation. Black males in special education programs are consistently placed in more restrictive environments than their white peers who have the same diagnoses (Kunjufu,

2005, 2009).

As mentioned, disproportionate placement in special education programs is a major concern because it perpetuates schooling in which students have few positive experiences (Hammer, 2012; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). It stigmatizes students because it signals to peers that they have low abilities. Additionally it suggests to teachers that these students have low capacities for learning and provides an excuse to teach them less or not teach them at all (Hammer, 2012; Walton & Wiggan, 2010). Having a disability and receiving special education services have dire consequences for Black boys. Students with disabilities are more likely to repeat a grade, be suspended or expelled from school, and have their parents contacted about poor academic performance and problem behaviors (Losen et al., 2014; Toldson, 2011). African American males in special education are more likely to avoid school and drop out (Losen et al., 2014). Additionally, they have difficulty gaining access to higher education, suffer from high unemployment and have disproportionately high rates of incarceration (Losen et al., 2014).

Educational researchers have implemented a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies to examine how school-based structural inequities affect the academic identity development of African American male students. During the last twenty years, a series of studies have been conducted which apply academic self-concept and identity development frameworks to African American male students (Awad, 2007; Bacon, 2011; Cokley, 2000; Cokley et al., 2003, 2011; Hatcher, Stiff-Williams, & Haynes, 2015; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009; Rouse & Cashin, 2000). These studies help establish the reliability and validity of academic self-concept and identity development measures for African American students and students from other

racial and ethnic groups (Rouse & Cashin, 2000). In addition, they examine how factors such as racial identity, socioeconomic status, and gender impact academic identity development and academic self-concept development and school performance (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997). Gordon, Rouse, and Cashin (2000) investigated the reliability and validity of scores on the Assessment of Academic Self-Concept and Motivation scale (Gordon, 1995) across several ethnic groups. The AASCM is an eighty-item, 16 subscale instrument that measures the cognitive, social, extracurricular and personal dimensions of academic self-concept. The researchers administered the AASCM to a group of Black, Latino and White high school sophomores in an urban school district. The results of a principal factor analysis yielded promising initial reliability coefficients ranging from .80 to .94. This study provides researchers with some evidence that carefully designed instruments can serve as valid, reliable, and meaningful measures of academic self-concept among African American students and students in other racial and ethnic groups.

Researchers have explored a variety of psychological, social and school effects that influence academic identity development among African American students. Identifying, defining and operationalizing these factors is a major concern for researchers interested in understanding academic identity development among students in this population. Effects which may potentially cause differences in academic identity development among African American students include racial and ethnic identity (Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003; Awad, 2007; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009), race stereotypes (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009), academic dis-identification (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011),

and perceptions of school belonging and engagement (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010).

Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas (1997) examined the extent to which racial identity, self-esteem and academic self-concept predict success for African American high school students. As a secondary question they studied the interplay between family and peer support on school performance. Using a sample of 86 African American students at Upward Bound programs at two different universities, the researches administered assessments which addressed students' self-esteem (Shostrom, 1963), academic self-concept (Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina, & Allen, 1980), and racial identity (Parham & Helms, 1981). Additionally, they administered a questionnaire that explored student attitudes concerning popularity, social cohesion, academic performance and relationships with family and friends. Using this data the researchers conducted a series of ANOVAs for program location, gender and class rank on all predictor variables. Academic self-concept scores were most positively correlated with GPA and self-esteem scores (Witherspoon et al., 1997).

Results from studies which examine academic self-concept for African American students demonstrate that academic self-concept and identity are non-cognitive factors which have a positive correlation for Black students and for Black males (Cokley et al., 2003, 2011; Rouse & Cashin, 2000; Witherspoon et al., 1997). Research also demonstrates that school-based patterns of structural racism have an impact on academic achievement and school outcomes for African American males (Losen et al., 2014; Matthews, 2014; Noguera, 2008; Toldson, 2011). Preliminary investigations indicate that increased access to school-based performing arts learning opportunities may be a critical element for improving academic achievement and enhancing academic identity

development for African American males (Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). More research needs to be conducted to determine the extent to which performing arts engagement benefits African American male students.

Performing Arts Education and Academic Identity Development Academic identity development theorists agree that there is a reciprocal relationship between academic identity and school achievement (Guay et al., 2003; Marsh & Yeung, 1997). Thus far, the majority of studies used to substantiate this framework have examined the correlation between academic self-concept and school performance in the core academic subject areas. Theorists and researchers have conducted studies which examine correlations between academic self-concept and reading achievement (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986), math performance (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986), science (Abu-Hilal, 2012; Brunner et al., 2010), and foreign languages (Brunner et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2010). Additionally, studies have been conducted which explore the correlation between academic identity and cumulative academic achievement and grade point average (Cokley et al., 2003; Guay et al., 2010; Prince & Nurius, 2014). What has not been thoroughly explored is the relationship between school-based performing arts instruction, academic identity development and school experiences for students. While there is an expanding body of literature which demonstrates positive correlations between performing arts education, cognitive development and academic achievement, an insufficient amount of research has been conducted which examines the influence dance, music, and theater education have on academic self-concept and identity development.

Performing arts education is a critical area of study for researchers and

practitioners who seek to understand academic identity development and school

experiences for students. Over forty years of scholarly literature has been targeted

towards performing arts participation, cognitive development and student achievement

(Bradley, Bonbright, & Dooling, 2013; Bresler, 2007; Caterall, 1998; Dansky, 1980;

Deasy, 2002; Dupont, 1992; Eisner & Day, 2004; Gazzaniga, 2008; Hetland & Winner,

2004; Rupert, 2006; Scheuler, 2010; Smilansky, 1968; Whisman & Hixson, 2012). The

potential impact of performing arts education on academic achievement and cognitive

development has been explored from a variety of perspectives. Studies have been

conducted which examine the effects of performing arts participation on students'

neurological development (Gazzaniga, 2008; Posner et al., 2008; Wandell et al., 2008),

cumulative academic performance (Nelson, 2001), and performance on standardized tests

(Vaughn & Winner, 2000). Numerous studies have been conducted which examine

participation in specific performing arts areas and student performance in particular

content areas. Research literature has addressed possible correlations between

participation in dance education and improvement in reading skills (Rose, 1999), learning

in and through drama and reading comprehension (Dupont, 1992; Goodman, 1990), and

music and spatial reasoning (Graziano et al., 1999; Hetland & Winner, 2004).

The last thirty years have witnessed a rapid expansion of the literature on

performing arts education and academic achievement. This increased interest has been

motivated by a body of research in educational psychology which transformed

traditionally held ideas about intelligence, assessment and academic achievement. The

theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1987, 1993) challenged the assumption

that intelligence is a one-dimensional concept based strictly on linguistic and

logical/mathematical reasoning (Gardner, 1983, 1987, 1993). Multiple intelligences

theory (MI) draws on evidence from brain research, human development theory,

evolution and cross cultural comparisons to propose that all people possess a range of

intelligences which enable them to create products and solve problems (Gardner, 1983,

1987, 1993). Multiple intelligences theory maintains that humans possess eight distinct

intelligences: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial,

interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic (Gardner, 2011). According to this model,

each intelligence is independent of the others; a high level of ability in one area does not

require high functioning in another. Additionally, within each individual, multiple

intelligences operate interdependently, and require that people have the ability to use a

combination of intelligences in order to perform cultural roles and daily tasks (Gardner,

2011).

Multiple intelligences theory helped shift the educational paradigm from a one-

dimensional view of intelligence and uniform schooling to a pluralistic perspective on

intelligence (Gardner, 2011). This multidimensional perspective of intelligence inspired

educators because it provided evidence that students process information, demonstrate

understanding and synthesize information in different ways. This line of reasoning led

educators to the conclusion that the arts deserve a featured position in the school

curriculum. Multiple intelligences theory provides a basis for education in the arts,

because each of the eight intelligences outlined has the potential to be mobilized through

the arts (Gardner, 1999). For example, linguistic intelligence can be used to sing and

write song lyrics, musical composition and dance choreography require logical-

mathematical intelligence, and spatial reasoning can be employed in acting, pantomime

and creative movement (Creative Learning and Performing Arts, 2015).

Gardner's proposed connections between multiple intelligences and learning in and through the arts has led researchers and practitioners to conduct a plethora of studies involving arts education. Investigations have addressed the arts and cognitive transfer (Deasy, 2002; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Rupert, 2006), arts engagement and brain development (Gazzaniga, 2008; Grafton & Cross, 2008; Posner et al., 2008; Wandell et al., 2008), and performing arts education and achievement in specific content areas (Podlozny, 2000; Graziano et al., 1999; Vaughn, 2000). The literature has also addressed arts education and cumulative academic performance (Dobb, 2010; Scheuler, 2010; Whisman & Hixson, 2012). Studies have also explored the relationship between multiple intelligences theory, arts education and education policy (College Board, 2009; Dallas Independent School District, 2006; Lowell, 2008; President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2014; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008). Recent studies have addressed the impact performing arts education has on African American male student achievement (Anderson, 1992; Walton & Wiggan, 2010; Walton & Wiggan, 2014), and the effects of arts education on underserved populations (Dobb, 2010; Engdahl, 2012).

Research linking arts education and student achievement has been heavily influenced by accountability-based education legislation. Howard Gardner proposed the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983, the same year the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* (USDOE, 1983) a scathing indictment of the American educational system. This report highlighted a host of problems and challenges with public education in the U.S., including declining test scores, low teacher salaries, a high national illiteracy rate and a diluted curriculum which

lacked intellectual rigor (Graham, 2013). This report's demand for more rigorous and measurable learning outcomes led to the development and implementation of accountability-based initiatives such as the Goals 2000 Act (1994), the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Race to the Top (2010). Such reform efforts called for the development of rigorous academic standards, research-based instructional methods and high-stakes assessment programs. In response to calls for standards based and assessment driven reform efforts, arts education proponents and researchers have conducted studies which were, and are, largely utilitarian (Gardner, 1999). To bolster arguments for the inclusion of arts education into the official curricula, researchers have sought to connect learning in and through the arts and subsequent academic achievement and cognitive development to student performance on standardized tests. Few studies have been dedicated to valuing the arts on their own terms (Gee, 2007).

Multiple independent studies have been conducted which correlate school-based arts participation and performance on the SAT examination (College Board, 2013). High school students who take arts classes have higher SAT scores than those who do not (College Board, 2013; Deasy, 2002). Arts participation and SAT scores co-vary: the more arts courses students take, the higher their SAT scores are (College Board, 2013). Students with four or more years of arts coursework outscore their peers who have a half-year or less of coursework in the arts by 58 points on the verbal portion and 38 points on the math portion of the SAT (Rupert, 2006). In terms of the performing arts, students who participate in music appreciation, music performance, dance, acting, play production and theatre appreciation consistently post higher SAT verbal and math scores than their peers who do not participate in performing arts programs (College Board, 2013). Similar

connections between arts participation and student performance on statewide assessments have been observed as well. A study conducted in West Virginia examined whether arts participation beyond the 1-credit minimum required for high school graduation correlated with improved academic performance (Whisman & Hixson, 2012). Researchers studied a cohort of 14,653 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds who performed at or above grade level for three years. Using a binary logistic regression analysis, the researchers assessed the presence and magnitude of associations between arts participation and proficiency in mathematics and reading/language arts on the WESTEST 2, the West Virginia statewide assessment program, and on ACT PLAN (ACT, 2010), a nationally administered college admissions preparatory exam that assesses achievement in English, math, reading and science. Results of this study indicate that students who earn two or more credits during their tenure in high school were 1.3 to 1.6 times more likely to perform at or above proficiency on the WESTEST 2 in mathematics and reading/language arts respectively. Students who earned two or more arts credits throughout their high school years were about 1.5 times more likely to have scored at or above the national average composite score on the ACT PLAN examination in 10th grade. Additionally, the more arts credits students obtained the more likely they were to perform at or above proficiency on the WESTEST. The Mississippi Whole Schools Initiative (WSI) provides more evidence of the impact arts participation has on standardized test performance. WSI is an education reform model which uses the arts as a vehicle for supporting high quality instruction for students in 70 schools throughout the state (Phillips, Harper, Lee & Boone, 2011). A large scale assessment of program effectiveness revealed that the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on

standardized Mississippi Curriculum Tests in language arts, mathematics, science and writing were significantly higher at WSI participating schools, as compared to students district- and state-wide (Phillips et al., 2011). Additionally, WSI schools with effective implementation strategies reduced or eliminated achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged students (Phillips et al., 2011).

The body of literature provides evidence of correlations between student participation in the performing arts, academic achievement and cognitive development. Studies have linked all three performing arts domains, dance, music and theater, to student performance gains in the traditional academic content areas (Bradley et al., 2013; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Rupert, 2006). Learning and participation in dance education has been linked to student growth in reading/language arts, math, science and social studies (Bradley et al., 2013; Keinanan, Hetland & Winner, 2000). Studies demonstrate that authentic dance study can be used to inform learning about written language and text (MacBean, 2001). Integrating language arts and writing activities into dance classes can improve high school students' writing, critical reading and thinking skills (MacBean, 2001). Qualitative case studies indicate that integrating dance and mathematics increases student engagement, encourages cooperative learning and facilitates a deeper understanding of abstract geometrical concepts (Moore & Linder, 2012; Westreich, 2000). Dance instruction and participation is also associated with enhanced spatial reasoning skills. In a meta-analysis of four studies, researchers found that dance participation in school settings enhances performance on nonverbal spatial reasoning tasks used to complete math and science tasks.

There is research-based evidence which demonstrates that music education has

positive effects on several academic and cognitive domains. There is a strong correlation between music listening and spatial reasoning (Hetland, 2000a). A synthesis of thirty-six relevant experiments which measured the correlation between music listening and spatial reasoning produced highly significant effect sizes (Hetland, 2000a). This suggests that integrating music into instructional practices may enhance student performance in math and the natural sciences. In a second study, Hetland (2000b) conducted a meta-analysis of nineteen studies in which children ages 3-12 received active music instruction for up to two years. Musical instruction included singing, playing musical games, learning notation, improvising, composing and playing musical instruments. Overall, effect sizes were moderate to large by meta-analysis standards and did not vary along socioeconomic status and other potential moderates. The results of this study provides solid generalizable evidence that active instruction in music enhances performance on spatial-temporal tasks, and may enhance academic performance in mathematics and science (Hetland, 2000b).

In a subject specific study, Whitehead (2001) studied the effects of music instruction on math scores among students in middle and high school. Students were randomly placed in three groups: a full treatment group in which students received music instruction for 50 minutes, five times per week, a partial treatment group in which students received one 50 minute period of music instruction per week, and a third group which received no musical instruction. After twenty weeks, the full treatment group showed higher and more significant levels of gains in mathematics than students in the other two groups. The partial treatment group showed some gains and the group that received no treatment demonstrated the lowest level of gains of all three groups (Whitehead, 2001).

There is some evidence that participation in music education affects reading skills. In a meta-analysis of 30 studies using music education programs to improve reading skills, the researcher reported a moderately strong and significant overall effect (Standley, 2008). Benefits were largest when music activities included specific reading skills of the students. Additionally, benefits were greater when special music reading activities were added to existing music education programs (Standley, 2008). In a quasi-experimental comparative analysis, elementary school students who studied piano formally for three years posted significantly better vocabulary and verbal sequencing scores than students who had no exposure to music lessons (Piro & Ortiz, 2009). The cognitive skills targeted in this study are both closely associated with language and literacy.

Theater and drama-based education programs provide positive measurable effects on academic achievement and cognitive development. The relationship between classroom drama and verbal skills is a well-researched area of arts to academic transfer (Hetland & Winner, 2004). Classroom drama involves the use of acting techniques within the regular classroom curriculum. Studies have demonstrated positive correlations between classroom drama and reading achievement (Kardash & Wright, 1986; Podlozny, 2000; Smilansky, 1968), oral language development (de la Cruz, 1995; Kardash & Wright, 1986; Podlozny, 2000), verbal achievement (Conrad, 1992) and story comprehension (Rose, Parks, Androes & McMahon, 2000). Additionally, drama-based reading instruction challenges students to use expression, or prosodic reading, which is a critical element of reading fluency (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnson, 2009). Readers' Theater, a drama-

based, interactive strategy for teaching reading, has been shown to improve reading fluency and is an effective method for increasing reading time on task (Dupont, 1992; Rose & Magnotta, 2012).

Drama techniques have served as an important and effective method for foreign language instruction. Classroom and school-based theater techniques enable foreign language learners to achieve greater proficiency in the language of study and allow for less controlled and more creative use of language (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004). Drama-based activities have been effectively used to strengthen spontaneous language use in beginning and intermediate classes (Di Pietro, 1987; Dodson, 2000, 2002). Full-scale foreign language play production has been used to support language community building and interdisciplinary learning (Schultz & Heingk, 2002). Additionally, drama techniques have been employed to introduce foreign language learners to the target cultures' literary cannon (Di Pietro, 1987; Savoia, 2002).

The body of research provides evidence of positive relationships between performing arts participation, cognitive growth, and academic achievement for students in the general population. Academic achievement has been proven to have a reciprocal effect on academic identity development. Thus, performing arts participation may have beneficial effects on academic identity development as well. Few studies explicitly explore the effects school-based participation in the performing arts may have on academic self-concept and identity development. More research on this phenomenon needs to be conducted in order to fill this gap in the literature.

Performing Arts Education and African American Male High School Students

In comparison to the overall body of literature on performing arts education and

academic performance, a small, but growing number of studies have been conducted

which examine the correlation between school-based performing arts education programs

and outcomes for African American males. Several studies have been conducted which

target school-based performing arts participation among Black male students in K-12

schools (Kazembe, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). Speculative

literature in this area has suggested using arts education as a model for improving

outcomes for African American males. Arts education has been proposed as an

alternative method for mediating disproportional placements of African American males

in special education (Walton & Wiggan, 2010). Readers Theater has been presented as a

method for improving the reading fluency and comprehension skills of Black male

elementary students (Walton & Wiggan, 2014). Additionally, specialized, arts-based

curricula have been proposed as models for engaging Black male students (Kazembe,

2014).

Schools in districts throughout the nation have adopted arts integration as a

method for increasing student access and participation in the arts. Arts integration models

provide students with rigorous instruction in the arts and integrates arts learning

throughout the curriculum (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Effective arts integration models

increase student participation in the arts, generate gains in student achievement, and

contribute to improved school climate (Fowler, 1996). Large-scale arts integration

initiatives serve significant numbers of African American males, and infuse arts-based

instruction throughout the content areas (Rabkin & Redmond, 2014). Thus far, program

evaluations and reports do not disaggregate data by race and gender. It is known that

African American males participate in these programs, but what remains unknown is

whether these programs improve academic identity development, achievement patterns and school experiences for African American males.

From a policy perspective, state and local agencies have developed position papers which highlight school-based arts programs as components of wider initiatives which may improve academic performance for Black males and students from other underserved groups (Dobb, 2010; Scheuler, 2010). Other local initiatives highlight arts education programs which have the potential to enhance learning for all students (Dallas Independent School District, 2006). Unfortunately, many policy-based arts programs fail to provide evidence of outcomes for Black male students. Existing programs such as these should be modified to include evaluations that target performance indicators for this specific group of students.

In contrast with scholarship conducted on traditional dance, drama and music education programs, research on Hip Hop Based Education (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009) and hip hop pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005) directly explores the connections between arts-based education, academic engagement, and school achievement among African American males and other urban students of color. Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) refers to the use of hip hop elements (rapping, dancing, dj-ing, fashion, language, knowledge and entrepreneurialism) as curricular and pedagogical elements, and employs hip hop music and culture as platforms for instruction in history, spirituality and Black power politics (Gosa & Fields, 2012). Hip hop pedagogy addresses the application of teaching styles, classroom strategies, and social justice perspectives to make schooling a more critical and culturally relevant process (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009; Prier, 2012).

HHBE and hip hop pedagogy draw from critical theory and culturally relevant instructional practices to improve academic outcomes and school experiences for students. Critical elements of hip hop pedagogy and HHBE are designed to make Black and Latino students more empowered through the use of active exchange and discussion, as opposed to the passive transmission of knowledge used in traditional classroom settings (Freire, 1970). Non-traditional texts such as music, lyrics, graffiti and videos are employed, and indigenous meaning and heritage serve as legitimate forms of knowledge (Gosa & Fields, 2012). Culturally relevant hip hop pedagogy breaks down hierarchical structures of knowledge, challenges assumptions that adults are the sole sources of important information, and incorporates knowledge from students' social worlds into classroom experiences (Prier, 2012). HHBE and hip hop pedagogy have the flexibility necessary to be applied in all academic disciplines and can be used to teach interdisciplinary lessons (Diaz, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Runell & Diaz, 2007).

Of all school-based arts education models implemented thus far, those which implement HHBE or are guided by hip hop pedagogy may be best positioned to support achievement, identity development and school experiences for African American males. In a recent survey of identified hip hop education programs, eighty-one percent of students served are ages 14-18, and almost 90% of the programs surveyed have African American students in them (Diaz, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Hip hop education is a nascent field, and the research literature which guides curriculum, pedagogy and outcomes is expanding. More studies which explore the potential benefits of hip hop education on African American male high school students must be conducted to determine how it influences self-concept development and school experiences for

students in this population.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature regarding academic identity development, performing arts education and academic achievement among African American males. The literature indicates that performing arts engagement has a positive impact on cognitive development, school performance and academic identity development. A review of the literature also reveals that scant research has been conducted on the relationship between performing arts participation and academic achievement for African American males. Additional research will be necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of performing arts education on African American males' academic identity development. Next, chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the research method that was used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Chapter 3 outlines the research method used for this dissertation, and includes discussions of the guiding theoretical framework, research design, sample selection, data collection, analysis of the data, and researcher subjectivity. The focus of this chapter is to highlight the research method utilized to obtain an in-depth understanding of the influence performing arts education has on the academic identity development of African American male high school students. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1) What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in standards-driven performing arts education programs at an urban high school?

2) How do performing arts education experiences influence the academic identity development of African American male high school students?

The goal of this interpretive case study is to provide teachers, administrators and policymakers with an understanding of the role which learning in and through the arts has on school experiences and academic outcomes for African American males. The information gleaned from this study has implications which may potentially influence curriculum development strategies, classroom teaching practices, and teacher training techniques.

African American Male Academic Identity Development Theory

As discussed in chapter 1, the premise of this study rests upon African American

Male Academic Identity Development theory (AAMAID). AAMAID is an original, blended theoretical framework developed by the researcher to guide this study. AAMAID combines elements of Academic Self-Concept theory and Critical Race theory, to help create a construct for understanding how Black males develop perceptions of their academic abilities and school prospects. Academic Self-Concept theory, or ASC, is a framework that examines the social and psychological processes which influence how students define themselves academically (Awad, 2007; Calsyn & Kenny, 1977; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Matthews, 2014; Nasir et al., 2009). ASC investigates how students formulate an understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses, and analyzes relationships between academic self-concept and academic achievement. Critical Race theory, or CRT, is a form of oppositional scholarship which argues that racism is a foundational and deeply ingrained aspect of American life (Bell, 1977; Delgado, 1995; Love, 2004). When applied in the field of education, CRT maintains that race and gender-based differences in educational treatments may negatively affect African American males' academic performance and school experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). AAMAID is also a prescriptive framework, and proposes the widespread use of culturally relevant instructional and administrative practices to strengthen academic engagement, enhance school belonging, and improve academic outcomes for Black males.

AAMAID is a balanced framework which maintains that academic identity formation for Black males is influenced by internal psychosocial processes which affect how they perceive of themselves as students, and proposes that structural differences in educational practices have an impact on school performance and academic identity

development among Black males. AAMAID is guided by the following propositions:

1) For African American males, academic identity development is a critical component for motivation and achievement in school (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

2) African American males' academic identity development and school performance are mutually engaged, reciprocal processes. Academic performance directly influences academic identity development, and academic identity influences future academic performance. Students who earn high grades in classes and perform well on assessments have positive academic identities and expect to continue to perform well academically. Conversely, students who perform poorly or fail academically tend to develop negative academic identities and expect to struggle in school over time (Marsh, 1990; Marsh, Byrne, & Yeung, 1999).

3) Academic identity development is a multifaceted process for African American males. Black males may have subject or content specific academic identities, based upon how well they perform and how engaged they are in a particular subject area. For example, a Black male student may perform well in mathematics and develop a positive academic identity in that subject, while developing a negative academic identity in English, due to poor past performance in that area (Marsh, 1990, Matthews, 2014).

4) In general, African American males consistently encounter educational risk factors which may make it difficult for them to perform well academically. They often have inexperienced and poorly qualified teachers (Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Metz, 2015), are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school (Darensbourg et al., 2010; USDOE Office of Civil Rights, 2014), and are at greater risk for special education placement

(Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Skiba et al., 2008). These risk factors are known to have a negative net effect on school performance and academic identity development for Black male students (Herrera, 1998; Kohli, 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Noltmeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Tatum, 2012).

5) Targeted efforts to incorporate culturally relevant instructional and administrative strategies that increase academic engagement and enhance school belonging can markedly improve school performance and enhance academic identity development among African American males (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McDougal, 2009).

AAMAID provides a perspective for the researcher to use to analyze the experiences of African American males who attended an urban performing arts high school. This theoretical perspective enables the researcher to examine whether school based performing arts learning experiences have a positive effect on academic identity development and school achievement for Black male high school students. Moreover, the findings from this study help fill gaps in the body of literature on the links between performing arts education and academic achievement among African American males.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

A qualitative research approach was used to examine academic identity development processes for African American male high school students who study the performing arts. Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Data sources employed in qualitative research include text, images, and sounds (Nkwi, Nyamongo, & Ryan, 2001). Qualitative research asserts that people operate in particular contexts and have different perspectives, and rejects the

idea that phenomenon can only be understood through uniform, stable and quantifiable inquiry methods (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Within qualitative research frameworks, meaning is socially constructed by individuals as they interact in their environments, thus there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that change over time (Merriam, 2002).

This study utilized an interpretive case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). An interpretive case study provides an intensive description and analysis of a particular social unit, such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2002). The social unit under investigation is an integrated system bounded by place and time (Stake, 1995). In this study the case being investigated was African American male high school students who studied and actively participated in school-based performing arts disciplines while they attended high school. This case is bounded in that all participants were African American males who attended Piedmont School of the Arts during their high school careers. Case study methodology is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic: it focuses on a particular group, illustrates the complexity of the situation, and can explain the reasons behind a problem or question (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, case studies allow multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data to be used for analysis and interpretation. In an interpretive case study, the goal is to use thick and rich descriptive data to identify and describe themes which illustrate or support theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1998). This information allows the researcher to interpret and theorize about the phenomenon under investigation. This particular study was informed by participant interviews and the existing literature in the field.

Participants

Purposive criterion sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012), and is effective because it relies on a clearly defined criteria to identity appropriate participants for a study. Direct recruitment was used to locate participants for this study. Using social media and personal connections within the Regent City education and performing arts communities, I made personal appeals to obtain participants for this study. All participants were African American male graduates of Piedmont School of the Arts (a pseudonym for the arts themed urban high school used in this investigation). As an incentive, prospective participants received a $25.00 gift card which participants were able to redeem at a local restaurant or retail establishment of their choice.

The participants in this study were African American male graduates of Piedmont School of the Arts who actively participated in the performing arts disciplines while they were students at the school. This particular group of individuals was identified as information-rich in regards to describing the possible influence performing arts participation may have on their academic identity development and their school experiences. The desired sample size for the population under study was 5 participants. This number of participants had been selected because it provided a sufficient amount of data to reach saturation based on the scope of the study (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) maintains that sample sizes of 5 to 25 participants are acceptable in qualitative research. African American male graduates of Piedmont School of the Arts who actively participated in the performing arts while they attended the school were selected because

their participation was central to addressing the research questions which guided this study. I chose to focus on graduates of a performing arts high school because they have had an opportunity to reflect upon their school experiences. These were retrospective interviews. Additionally, the participants were older and more mature than students who attended the school during the time frame in which this study was conducted, and may have been better able to articulate their school experiences.

The IRB which outlined the goals, aims, and method which guided this study was approved by the sponsoring university. In order to comply with the principles of full disclosure (Adams, 2013), individuals who agreed to participate in this study were required to sign an informed consent letter which identified the researcher, clarified the goals of the study and explained that they would be interviewed during the course of the research project. Additionally, this letter highlighted the research questions, outlined the nature of the study, explained what participants would be asked to do, and acknowledged the existence of potentially unforeseeable risks associated with this study. Finally, the informed consent letter outlined the benefits of participation in the study, underscored the voluntary nature of participation, and asserted participants rights to cease involvement in the study at any time.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

As previously stated, this study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Upon receiving consent from the dissertation committee, the data collection process began. This study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 5 African American male graduates of Piedmont School of the Arts, an arts-based magnet middle and high school. Piedmont School of the Arts is located in Regent City (a

pseudonym), a large metropolitan area in the southwestern region of North Carolina. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow new ideas to inform the dialog which occurred between the researcher and his participants. The protocol was piloted with subjects as part of previous coursework in qualitative research design, which helped improve the clarity of the questions. Using the AAMAID paradigm enabled me to frame interview questions in a manner which explicitly addressed how involvement in the performing arts influenced their academic identity development, school experiences, and academic outcomes. The interview protocol was organized in a manner that used broad-based, specific, open and closed ended questions which provided structure and organization to participants' thoughts and experiences. Interviews were conducted either in-person or by telephone, depending upon the location of individual participants. Each interview ran from 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes.

Participant interviews were central to this study. Interviews provided me with opportunities to learn about what cannot be seen, and they allowed me to explore alternative explanations of what can be seen (Glesne, 2006). Additionally, interview data was also provided on participants' attitudes, perceptions and experiences, which were crucial for this study.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Constant comparative analysis was used as the primary method for analyzing the data compiled from this study. Constant comparative analysis is an integrated approach to data collection, coding and analysis which generates and refines theory in a manner that allows for further testing and examination (Conrad, Neuman, Haworth, & Scott, 1993).

With this method, I developed concepts by simultaneously coding and analyzing the data (Kolb, 2012). Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the analysis to be shaped by the participants in a more fundamental way than if analysis is left until after data collection has been finished (Creswell, 2003; Ezzy, 2002). Additionally, simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds (Glesne, 2006). Concurrent data collection and analysis was achieved by organizing data as it was collected, writing memos, developing analytic files and organizing it into emergent concepts or themes.

Constant comparative analysis was achieved through coding. Coding is the process of identifying themes or concepts that are found within the data (Ezzy, 2002), and involves sorting data into themes that are germane to the research focus (Glesne, 2006). Coding enables the researcher to attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment represents (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, it distills data, sorts them, and gives the researcher a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data (Charmaz, 2006). Coding allowed me to build an account of what had been observed and recorded, and theory emerged as a result of the coding process.

Initially, the data collection process involved reviewing the interview transcripts and the interviewer's notes. Interview transcripts were transcribed to a digital medium which was used to facilitate the coding process. Line-by-line, or open coding was conducted by the researcher to scour the data for concepts and themes relevant to the focus of this study. This process revealed categories that pertained to academic identity development, performing arts education, school experiences, and academic achievement patterns for student participants. Next, the researcher conducted axial coding, a process

which reconstructs fractured bits of data by making connections between categories and subcategories (Straus & Corbin, 1990). This step allowed data to be pieced together in new ways, and enabled the researcher to understand categories in relationship to other categories and their subcategories. Selective coding was the final stage of the data analysis process. During the selective coding process, the researcher was able to identify and choose core categories. Through this process, categories were systematically connected to other categories in order to validate similarities and relationships (Kolb, 2012). Additionally, this process helped complete categories that needed further development and refinement.

I used AAMAID to frame the analysis of the data. Through this framework, I analyzed the interview data and the emergent themes from a position that places performing arts participation, academic identity development, race and gender as the focus of the analysis. I explicitly looked for ways in which the stories participants told revealed information about how performing arts involvement helped shape their academic identity development and school experiences. In addition, I focused on information concerning how the participants' identities as African American males influenced their educational experiences as well.

<center>Research Validity</center>

In qualitative research, validity is the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauges what the researcher is trying to assess (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Researchers can take specific steps to establish the validity, or trustworthiness of their research. Creswell (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline specific verification procedures that can be used to enhance the credibility of qualitative research:

1. Prolonged engagement
2. Persistent observation
3. Triangulation
4. Peer review
5. Negative case analysis
6. Clarification of researcher bias
7. Member checking
8. Rich, thick descriptions
9. External audit
10. Reflexivity

This study used five of the verification procedures outlined above. Research validity was established through the use of data triangulation. Triangulation involves using different sources of information to increase the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2003; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011), and strengthens validity by analyzing the research topic from multiple perspectives (Glesne, 2006). Data from multiple sources was used in order to establish consistency within the data. Each participant was interviewed twice in order to establish the consistency of the primary source of data used to conduct this study. In addition, documentation was obtained which demonstrated that each participant graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts.

Reflexivity is another method that was employed to strengthen the validity of this study. Conducting a credible qualitative study requires the researcher to intentionally reveal underlying assumptions or biases that may influence data collection and analysis (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). In qualitative studies the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Lave & Kvale, 1995). Therefore, it was not possible for me to extricate personally held ideas, beliefs, and assumptions from my role as the researcher. This necessitates the use of reflexivity practices, which helped me minimize bias by developing an awareness of how I was conducting my research, how I related to the participants, and how I represented them in reports (Charmaz, 2006).

Throughout this study, I employed reflexivity practices, which enabled me to maintain awareness of how my personal ideas and beliefs may have influence how I asked questions, interpreted observations, and interacted with the participants. I used journaling and note-taking strategies to ask reflexive questions (Patton, 2002), which helped me develop a consistent pattern of awareness of potential subjectivity and bias.

Research validity was established by member checking. Member checking refers to the practice of sharing interview questions, analytical thoughts and drafts of reports with research participants to ensure that the researcher is representing them and their thoughts accurately (Glesne, 2006). Member checking can also be achieved by explaining major categories to select participants who have participated in the study and then inquire as to whether these categories fit participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Member checks provide participants with opportunities to confirm the validity of their responses, challenge interpretations of the data, provide their own interpretations of the data and give additional information to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were provided with transcripts of their responses as a member checking strategy, and given the opportunity to verify accuracy and make corrections. Additionally, participants were briefed on emergent categories and themes, and given opportunities to offer their own interpretations of the data.

To provide increased credibility to this study, I employed peer review and debriefing as verification strategies. Peer review and debriefing takes place when the researcher invites colleagues and peers to examine and provide feedback during the data collection and analysis process (Ezzy, 2002). Peer review and debriefing has three main benefits:

- Makes the researcher aware of the influence of personal values and theoretical interpretations on data collection and analysis
- Provides opportunities for testing theories and interpretations of data through discussion with colleagues
- Allows the researcher to address potential problems with planning and implementing methodology
  (Ezzy, 2002)

Peer reviews and debriefings were conducted by peers with experience in case study methodology to examine and make comments on the researcher's work at various points during the data collection and analysis process.

Rich, thick description is the fifth strategy that was used to enhance the validity of this study. Rich, thick description refers to the task of providing a detailed description and interpretation of observed social action or behavior within a particular social context (Ponterotto, 2006), and is characterized by the following facets:

- Describes observed social actions
- Assigns intentionality to these actions
- Captures the thoughts and feelings of participants
- Describes the relationships between participants
- Encourages thick and meaningful interpretation of the data (Ponterotto, 2006)

Rich data are detailed, focused and full, and provide solid material for building a substantive analysis of the case. Detailed transcriptions of interviews were used to illustrate the distinct perspectives of individual participants. This information enabled me to create a detailed description of the case and the context of each participant's experiences.

Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative studies it is essential for researchers to be aware of their own biases, and have a clear understanding of how their background and experiences may influence

data collection and analysis (Glesne, 2006). My decision to conduct a study examining performing arts participation and the academic identity development of African American male high school students was influenced by my professional experiences in urban education and in the performing arts. As an urban secondary level teacher I have observed persistent race and gender-based disparities in special education placement. I have taught in secondary schools in three urban districts, and at each school, the majority of the students in my classes were African American males. These students were often categorized with intellectual, learning and behavioral disabilities, and received services in more restrictive placements than girls and students from other racial and ethnic groups. After teaching in urban schools for few years, I noticed that I always had some students whose placement in special education classes were, at best, questionable. The conversations, observations and classroom experiences I had with my students indicated that some of them did not have disabilities. In reality, they had learning and behavioral needs that could have been addressed by using culturally responsive instructional and classroom management strategies. Discriminatory intervention practices, assessment biases and differences in learning and behavioral styles contributed to their misdiagnoses and misplacements, and had a negative impact on their academic performance, academic identity development and behavior. Additional patterns of discrimination were also apparent throughout the schools I worked in. I noticed that African American male students were often treated differently than their white counterparts by teachers, administrators, and within the communities the schools were located in. More often than not, Black males were tracked into remedial and standard level academic classes, and did not have opportunities to take Honors and AP courses.

Most of the schools I worked in did not offer instruction and extracurricular involvement in the performing, visual, and industrial arts. If arts programs were offered, Black males did not participate. In terms of school discipline, Black male students were more likely to be suspended and expelled from school, or apprehended by school resource officers. In one school I worked in, African American males who ran on the cross country team would routinely be harassed and arrested by law enforcement officers during workouts in the community. In majoritarian school communities it is common to see high school cross country athletes running on sidewalks as part of their daily workout regimen. In this particular community the police had profiled the student athletes and made running through the neighborhood a criminal offense.

In addition to my teaching background, I have a background in the performing arts, which may have served as an additional source of bias that I needed to be aware of as I conducted this study. I am a professional actor. I have over 30 years of experience performing in theatre and in independent films. I started acting during my freshman year of college, and I have continued to study and perform throughout my adult life. During this time period I have buttressed practical experience with formal training in acting and directing. My performing arts experiences have had a profoundly positive impact on my personal, social, artistic and academic development. This has led me to become increasingly curious about the connections between arts participation, social development and academic achievement.

My doctoral coursework has afforded me the opportunity to engage in a deeper examination of the relationship between performing arts participation, social development and academic achievement. Research indicates that performing arts

participation may positively influence cognitive development, academic achievement and post-school outcomes. Given my personal observations of African American males' negative school experiences, my desire is to conduct potentially transformative research on performing arts participation and academic identity development for this population of students.

From my observations and experiences as an urban educator I have formed a set of beliefs about the impact of school policies on African American male students. I believe placement, tracking and discipline policies negatively affect school experiences and academic outcomes for African American male students. I also believe Black males who attend urban schools are denied rich and rigorous academic and cultural experiences afforded to students who attend schools that serve white students and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. I also have a strong belief that the performing arts can positively impact academic performance and school experiences for all students, and may significantly enhance academic identity and school experiences for African American males. These attitudes and beliefs add bias to my study, but my awareness of these potential biases enabled me to contain my subjectivity during data collection and analysis.

Summary

This study employed a qualitative research approach. An interpretive case study method was used to examine the relationship between performing arts participation and African American males' academic identity development. Data was collected via interviews, graduation documentation review, and review of the literature. A constant comparative method was used for data analysis purposes. Primary categories and themes

were derived from initial, axial, and selective coding. Rich and thick descriptions of research participants' responses were developed from the organizational and categorical themes identified through the coding process. Validity was established through triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, peer review, and the utilization of thick, rich descriptions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter 1, the study reported here examined the connections between performing arts participation and academic achievement among African American males. It was specifically designed to capture the experiences of African American males who attended an arts oriented urban high school. This study was intended to produce narratives which explored the relationships between performing arts participation, academic identity development, and school experiences for African American male high school students. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study. Research from this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in standards driven performing arts education programs at an urban high school?

2. How do performing arts education experiences influence the academic identity development of African American male high school students?

Themes were formed based on the interview data collected. These themes highlight the academic and personal experiences of participants while they were high school students at Piedmont School of the Arts (PSOA), an arts oriented secondary school in Regent City, a major metropolitan area in the southwestern region of North Carolina.

Chapter 1 addressed the persistent problem of African American male underperformance in U.S. schools. This problem was discusses as a complex,

multilayered issue. U.S. students consistently perform below their peers from other developed nations, and, within the U.S., African American male students tend to perform below their counterparts from other racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, Chapter 1 identified school-based factors which may contribute to disparities in performance between African American males and their Asian, White, and Latino peers. Factors which may contribute to racial disparities in academic performance include disproportional special education placement rates, inequitable exclusionary discipline practices, and lack of access to highly qualified teachers. Finally, Chapter 1 presented African American Male Academic Identity Development theory (AAMAID), an original framework developed by the researcher as an analytic tool for understanding academic identity development processes for Black males, and as a prescriptive model for boosting academic performance for students in this population. Chapter 2 delved into the literature on academic identity development, African American male academic performance, and the connections between performing arts education and academic performance. This review of the literature was conducted in order to establish a logical, research-based foundation for addressing the research questions. Chapter 3 provided the method that was constructed for the purpose of examining the research questions which guided this study.

Chapter 4 describes the findings of this study. In part one of this chapter I introduce the five participants. Table 1 provides a brief introduction and description of each participant. Additionally, detailed descriptions of the participants provide important information for understanding the background in which the narratives of their experiences can be situated. This study involved five African American males who

attended and graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts between 2003 and 2014. While all participants are African American males, they are diverse in their performing arts and personal experiences.

In part two of this chapter I identify and discuss three major themes that emerged from the findings. The findings are analyzed through the lens of African American Male Academic Identity Development theory. AAMAID enabled me to ground the analysis of the narratives from the perspective that academic identity development processes, race, and gender influenced participants' academic outcomes and school experiences. Constant comparative analysis was used to organize data based on the research questions. This process allowed themes to emerge which delineate the shared experiences of participants. By comparing and contrasting the responses of participants with newly collected interview data, I was able to establish overlapping responses and formulate themes which signified common experiences among participants. These themes represent the educational outcomes and school experiences of the African American males who participated in this study. The themes that emerged were:

1. Experiencing a Positive School Climate

2. Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement

3. African American Males, Arts Based Performance and Positive Racial Identity

Part I: Participants

Table 1: African American Male Participants

Name	Years at PSOA	Performing Arts Specialty at PSOA	Education/Occupation	Age
Gary	1996-2003	Musical Theater	Works in Financial Services/Professional Actor	30
Paris	2010-2014	Musical Theater	Student at Midwestern College Conservatory of Music (MCCM)*	19
Marcus	2010-2014	Musical Theater	Student at Central State University of the Arts (CSUA)*	19
Cameron	2009-2013	Choral Music	Works in Customer Service	20
Jason	2008-2012	Musical Theater	Student at Central State University of the Arts (CSUA)*	21

*Connotes pseudonyms for the names of the schools the participants actually attend.

Gary Harris

Gary Harris is a 2003 graduate of Piedmont School of the Arts. He is 30 years old and balances professional acting jobs with a full-time position as a Training Coordinator for a Fortune 500 financial institution in Regent City. Gary's penchant for performing became apparent at an early age. At four years old Gary would create song-and-dance routines to entertain his mother and father. In elementary school he would tell funny stories and mimic voices to entertain the other students. In 4th and 5th grade he started disturbing the other students and would get into trouble for his impromptu performances. In order to channel his natural inclinations towards performing, and to keep him out of trouble, Gary's parents arranged to have him enrolled at Paisley Elementary School (a pseudonym), an arts oriented school in Regent City. At Paisley, Gary was able to channel

his need to perform in more positive and productive ways. He participated in plays and musical productions at the school, and the behavioral problems he had earlier subsided. In addition to acting and singing, Gary developed as a visual artist and began to sketch and paint as well.

Paisley Elementary was a feeder school for Piedmont School of the Arts, so students who successfully completed 5th grade were automatically enrolled at PSOA. As a 5th grader, Gary's class visited PSOA, and he describes being immediately drawn to the freedom afforded to students. Gary stated:

> The coolest thing about that school (Piedmont) was that when you were in elementary school you got to tour Piedmont. When I went there the first time it was like nothing I'd ever seen before. I don't know how it is now, but when I went there, there were like literally kids drawing and painting on the walls in the hallway. It was like, they were painting and they would let them. There were kids, like playing instruments. I remember there was this one guy who was singing to this girl, Stevie Wonder's song, 'My Cherie Amore'. He was like just singing it to her, in the middle of whatever, and people, nobody was stopping them, you know. And it was just awesome, it was like they were so free, nobody was in lines, you know, like when some people go to classes, they go in lines. There were no lines, there were no security cameras, it was just…people were wearing all sorts of crazy clothing, colored hair, and I'd just never seen anything like that before.

When Gary started attending PSOA he considered himself more of a visual artist. He was already singing, acting and dancing, but he admits to not realizing that a person could actually "do" those things. For him, art was a very literal concept. Attending PSOA helped him bridge the gap between the visual and performing arts. His experiences taking performing arts classes and participating in student performances at the school eventually led Gary to settle on musical theater as his major, or artistic focus at PSOA. Gary sees theater, dance, and music as interconnected creative experiences, which influenced his decision to focus on musical theater. He stated:

I felt like musical theater kind of interwove all of those things together. You can't like, sing a song without having a why behind it or a story that you're telling. When you dance you have a story you are telling, and all of those things are visually expressive anyway, so when you isolated it, just acting…like in school I thought "ok, this is easy, I just have to say the lines", that was easy. That's when I shifted my focus. I do all of them, I do all of them.

Gary is the only participant who attended PSOA for both middle school and high school. He expressed feeling like he had a high school experience from 6th grade on through his graduation in the 12th grade. The freedom he experienced at the school and the opportunity to focus on the arts forced him to grow up quickly. He stated "I mean, anything I thought about Power Rangers or anything that was popular at the time, it just kind of like, went out the window." Upon graduation from PSOA, Gary attended Regent City State University (a pseudonym) for a year, but dropped out because he felt like he was wasting his time and money. Gary wanted to be an actor, so he left school, got a job, and focused on acting professionally in and around Regent City. Overall, Gary enjoyed attending PSOA. He felt the school nurtured his abilities more than a traditional high school would have.

Paris Rogers

Paris Rogers, a 2014 graduate of PSOA, is a 19 year old sophomore at the Midwestern College Conservatory of Music (MCCM – a pseudonym), where he is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theater. Paris' involvement in the arts began at a local community center in Regent City. At his mother's behest, he attended a monthly arts program sponsored by the African-American Cultural Center. His mother was close with the people at the cultural center, and he soon became a fixture there as well. Through his involvement at the center he developed a close relationship with the program coordinators and facilitators. As a 6th grader, Paris' served as a stage manager

for one of the productions staged at the cultural center, in order to satisfy his community

service hours for Rolling Hills Middle School (a pseudonym). He liked what he saw the

actors do, so the next year he decided to perform in their show. He enjoyed the

experience, because they allowed participants to write and perform their own material.

He participated in his first school-based performing arts experience that year as well.

> They were doing *The Wiz* at my middle school, and my mom was like you should audition for it, because she heard me singing around the house a few times, and so, I auditioned for it, I got in the show. I was in the ensemble, I wasn't very good back then, but I decided to start doing it, and so from then on I just started to like audition for the shows. I auditioned for the next year's show, which was *Bye Bye Birdie* and I landed a small role.

> In addition to doing musical theater, Paris also played the clarinet. He auditioned

for PSOA for musical theater and for clarinet, and was admitted to the school. While

attending the school he eventually settled on majoring in musical theater. As a musical

theater student, he did not specialize in one particular area of the performing arts. He

focused equally on acting, singing and dancing.

> For what I do, I would definitely consider it a combination, because, like you know I do musicals, and like I have to be able to sing, act, and dance, all at the same time, so definitely a combination of music, singing, and um, I mean singing, dancing, and acting.

> Paris stated that attending PSOA was an educational experience that changed the

of his life:

> I loved it! I mean, that's where I kinda sorta found who, kinda who I was as a person, and not just as a person but as also a performer, I could...I found out like who and what I have the potential to be. I found out a lot about myself. If I would have went somewhere else I would have turned out so different. I like was able to be just who I am, like honestly like in, for lack of a better word that's like just, those were the reasons why I loved it.

> Paris is excelling in the musical theater program at the Midwestern College

Conservatory of Music. He recently played Jim, one of the lead roles in the school's fall

production of *Big River*. He credits his experiences at PSOA with the successful experience he is having as a student at a major performing arts university.

Marcus Lewis

Marcus Lewis is a 2014 graduate of PSOA. He is a 19 year old sophomore at Central State University of the Arts (CSUA - a pseudonym), and is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Drama. Marcus is a New York City native, and started performing at the elementary school he attended there. His 5th grade teacher produced a play and asked him to audition for it. His teacher noticed his raw talent, and started sending him out on open casting calls for shows like *The Lion King*. He had some early successes and enjoyed performing, so he kept at it. While he was in middle school his mother moved their family to Regent City, and he enrolled in Randall Middle School (a pseudonym). He continued acting at his new school. He performed in a school production of *A Raisin in the Sun*, and in an original play which had been written and produced by one of his teachers.

Marcus enjoyed doing straight plays (plays without music, dancing, and singing), but his true desire was to do musical theater. In 8th grade he auditioned for PSOA and was accepted. From the time he entered the school he made musical theater his priority. He was impressed by the performing spaces at the school, and the program provided lots of performing opportunities for students. Marcus credits the musical theater program at PSOA with helping him solidify his identity as a performing artist. He acts, sings and dances, and considers himself an artistic jack-of-all-trades. He consistently worked hard in all three areas. If he senses a weakness in one area he works hard to improve in that

medium. His coursework and performing experiences at PSOA challenged him and helped him develop confidence in his abilities. Marcus stated:

> Once I felt like there was something I could do, and that I had my stamp on, you know, being that, either a performer in musicals like that I knew that I had to keep it up. Piedmont School of the Arts gave me that push, that edge, and that comfort with doing theater and performing.

> Marcus reported that he fit in well socially at the school, and credits teachers and administrators with creating a safe and nurturing environment for students. He feels very strongly that attending Piedmont School of the Arts was a transformational experience for him. He stated that he, and some of his classmates from PSOA, would probably not be in college had they attended another school.

Cameron Stone

Cameron Stone is a 2013 graduate of Piedmont School of the Arts. He is 20 years old, and did not attend college upon graduation from high school. He ended up getting a job with Shows R Us (a pseudonym), an entertainment and events company that provides crowd management and other services at stadiums, arenas, theaters and other sports and entertainment venues. Cameron describes himself as a born performer and traces his first public performance to a church service he attended when he was four years old.

> My aunt will tell this story, she tells it every time like, family gets together and everything, that I started out when I was four, I started singing when I was four, at church. I was at her church in South Carolina and she said that the pastor asked if anyone had a song or anything on their heart. I was four. I said I want to sing something, you know, so she's like ok go up there and ask the lady in the cream suit, and so I walked up there and I told her whatever and I sang *King Jesus is Listening When You Pray*, and I sang that. That was my very first public, you know, song, performance, or whatever, so that's where it started. Then I started doing little plays in church and in, uh, school, and it just took off from there. I was in chorus and musical theater in every school that I went to.

Cameron's performing arts specialty is singing. He loves music and wants to learn how to play piano and guitar, but he never learned to read music. He started singing in elementary school productions, and joined the chorus in middle school. He counts this as his first involvement in a school-based performing arts program. Cameron loved singing in the chorus and wanted to continue his involvement in a school-oriented performing arts program, so he auditioned for admission to Piedmont School of the Arts and performed well enough to gain admission into the school.

Cameron's goal at PSOA was to develop as a musical theater artist, but acknowledges that dancing was his weakest area. He says that when it comes to dancing he has "two left feet". His goal at the school was to become stronger in all facets of musical theater, because musical theater performers must be equally adept at dancing, acting and singing. Cameron says he worked hard to get into PSOA, because it offered the training and performing opportunities he needed to become a better, more well-rounded artist. Cameron stated:

> It was to enhance all of my talent, just to get better at everything, I needed that. I was good, not to sound, you know, cocky, but I was good at what I did but I knew that I could be better, there was room for growth, so I wanted to get better…get my vocals together, and become a better dancer, for one, because I've always, I've always wanted to dance but I never had the, you know, the moves and the two left feet and all of that, and I couldn't remember a move to save my life...choreography...ooohhh....ahhhh, but yeah, I wanted to just get better at everything.

While Cameron considered attending PSOA a good experience overall, he admits to struggling academically while at the school. Mathematics was a particularly problematic subject area for him. His academic struggles impeded his artistic development. Students at PSOA were not allowed to participate in performances unless they maintained at least a "C" average. Cameron says his poor academic performance

forced him to miss out on about half of the performing opportunities he would otherwise have been able to take part in. He counts this as one of the more negative aspects of his experience at the school. However, generally the other participants had high academic achievement.

Cameron still has a great desire to sing and further his education and performing arts career. He is considering going to the local community college or to a historically Black college or University in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina.

Jason Moore

Jason Moore began attending PSOA in 2008 and graduated from the school in 2012. He is a 21 year old junior at Central State University of the Arts, where he is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Contemporary Dance. He recalls that his earliest experiences in the performing arts took place in his church. Whenever they did skits, performances and presentations, Jason always took part. Jason's experiences in school-based performing arts programs started in middle school. He played the violin, and displayed talent in the visual arts as well. Jason had a strong desire to continue studying and participating in the performing arts in high school, so he decided to apply to PSOA. He auditioned as a violinist and was admitted to PSOA in 2008. During his freshman year he majored in music and visual arts. As a sophomore he began studying musical theater. It was through the musical theater program that he discovered his gift and passion for dance. While he continued to play the violin, he decided to major in musical theater and focus on developing his dance skills for the remainder of his time at the school.

Jason considers attending PSOA as a decidedly positive, life changing experience, and credits his teachers with creating a supportive and challenging environment for students.

> I loved it (attending Piedmont School of the Arts)! To this day I still love it very much. I go back all the time and I visit my old teachers that are still there, and I help out with performances there. I go and see performances, I volunteer to do things for my teachers, um, I still am in direct contact with a lot of my teachers there and they're still major supports for me to this day, and help me, um, do in terms of my career in terms of like sometimes I need their advice on stuff. I ask them for some advice and they still are a very big help until this day. Um, so I loved my time there, I appreciated it very much, even when I was there, because a lot of people said they didn't appreciate it until they left, but I appreciated it when I was there. Um, I loved it very much. I just felt like I learned so much about, um, being an artist and really learned how to, I learned what my passion really was...was the performing arts and why um, why I did what I did, honestly. I felt like it really gave me more of a backbone in terms of the performing arts. It really helped to shape me into the artist that I am turning…I'm still turning into, the artist that I am today.

It is clear from this statement that Jason's experiences at the school were very beneficial, and have had a lasting impact on his life and his post-high school experience. Jason touts the interdisciplinary learning experiences offered at PSOA as one of the most positive aspects of attending the school. He credits his academic and performing arts teachers with stimulating his curiosity and instilling in him the importance of being well versed academically and artistically. He realizes that dancers have relatively short careers. He feels having a broad, liberal arts oriented education will prepare him for life after his performing career has ended.

<div align="center">Part II: Themes</div>

Part two of this chapter reveals and examines the findings that emerged from data collection and analyses processes. The anecdotal data collected during interviews provided rich and thick descriptions which served as the primary sources from which

themes emerged. To be considered a theme, at least three of the five participants had to share that common experience. The responses to the research questions were used to arrange categories and themes during the data collection process. The research questions were designed to highlight the experiences and educational outcomes of African American males who graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts. Constant comparative analysis strategies were used to examine the most prominent themes shared by participants. The African American Male Academic Identity Development framework enabled me to use academic identity, race, and gender within the analysis. The themes which were identified represented participants' perspectives on the effects of attending a performing arts-based high school on their academic outcomes and school experiences. Three primary themes and subthemes emerged:

1. Experiencing a Positive School Climate
        Sub-themes: Safety; Student-Teacher Relationships; Collaboration; Peak
        Experiences

2. Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement
        Sub-themes: Skill Development; Academic Motivation; Postsecondary
        Attendance

3. African American Males, Arts Based Performance and Positive Racial Identity
        Sub-themes: Impact of Black male teachers; Black Arts for Black Artists; Black
        Males' School Experiences

        The primary goal of this study was to examine the school experiences and educational outcomes of African American males who attended a performing arts-based, urban high school. During interviews participants were given the opportunity to discuss and describe their experiences at a performing arts-based high school. Initially, participants were invited to discuss their engagement in the performing arts. They answered questions which examined how they became involved in the performing arts

and traced their paths to Piedmont School of the Arts. Participants were then encouraged to discuss their school experiences while attending PSOA. As the interviews progressed, participants had the opportunity to offer an analysis of the influence their participation in the performing arts had on their academic performance. A common motif which ran throughout the narratives offered by participants was school climate.

Theme One: Experiencing a Positive School Climate

School climate refers to the quality and character of daily school life, and is characterized by the quality of the experiences students, school personnel, and parents have on a daily basis in school settings (Kramer, Watson, & Hodges, 2013; National School Climate Center, 2015). Additionally, school climate reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures which govern schools (Kramer, Watson, & Hodges, 2013; National School Climate Center, 2015). Common factors which influence school climate include interactions between students, teachers, administrators and school staff, learning experiences students have in classrooms and other spaces within schools, social relationships between students, administrative practices and policies, and school safety (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). A positive school climate promotes academic achievement and pro-social youth development necessary for an individual to live a productive and satisfying life within a democratic society (Kramer et al., 2013; National Center for School Climate, 2015). The following features are indicative of a positive and sustainable school climate:

- Norms, values and expectations that support social, emotional, and physical safety
- Individuals feel engaged and respected in school settings

- Students, educators and families work together to develop, live, and contribute to a common school vision

- Educators exemplify and engender attitudes that exemplify the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning

- All stakeholders contribute to the operation of the school and care of the physical environment

(Kramer, Watson, & Hodges, 2013; National Center for School Climate, 2015).

Past and current research indicates four major areas that school climate assessments should include. These areas are safety, relationships, teaching and learning and external environments (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). School climate data provides important information for understanding student achievement patterns and school staff satisfaction indices. Research indicates that school climate affects academic achievement (Kramer et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate has a significant impact on students' passing percentages, and improvements in school climate are associated with gains in student performance across subject areas (Kramer et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2013). Additionally, school climate influences student behavioral outcomes. Improvements in school climate decrease discipline actions, decreases suspensions and expulsions, and lead to increases in student attendance (Kramer et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2013).

It is well documented in the literature that African American males often attend schools which are governed by policies and practices which thwart high student achievement and engender negative school experiences. Zero-tolerance disciplinary practices (Caton, 2012), discriminatory special education policies (Losen et al., 2014),

and daily interactions with poorly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2015) are school-based factors which are indicative of schools with poor climates. Narratives offered by participants provided important information on the effects of school climate on the academic outcomes and school experiences of African American males who attended and graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts.

During the first portion of the interview process, respondents provided important information on school climate at PSOA. Narratives provided by participants in this study addressed three of the four categories used to assess school climate: safety, relationships, and teaching and learning. An analysis of anecdotal data on school climate provided the researcher with important information on the connections between school climate and the outcomes experienced by African American males who attend arts-based high schools.

Physical Safety

All participants in this study addressed the issue of school safety, and the insights they shared indicated that they all had relatively similar experiences. All respondents reported that Piedmont School of the Arts was a physically safe learning environment, but that the surrounding neighborhood was not. Gary stated:

> For one thing, when I went there I didn't have a car, so I couldn't just get up and leave campus, but I do know the side of town you were on had an element to it. Quote unquote, Piedmont School of the Arts was in the hood, so there was just like, I mean it was very real like, I mean, if you went up the street from that school, I mean like, you know, there was a bad element to it, and I mean like, I'm not being any kind of way about it, I mean it was, people got shot around there all the time, I mean, not students, but I mean there were drugs around there, it was a bad element, but I never felt unsafe at that school, in that regard. I know we had police officers in that school, and you know, more of that security gets bumped up over time, but yes, I felt physically safe at the school.

Gary's statement acknowledges that the school was safe and the neighborhood was not. Once inside the school he felt safe and protected. The conditions outside of the school did not impinge upon his safety within the school, and did not have a negative influence on his social and academic experiences.

While participants reported similar perceptions of disparities in safety between the school and the surrounding community, respondents did not share the same level of concern over the nature of the neighborhood PSOA is located in. On the question of school safety, Paris responded:

> Um, yeah, I mean, I felt safe, um, I mean there were a few times, well, not even really, there was a few incidents where it was just like, because of the location of the school, is on like, it's on Beatties Ford Road, which is considered, um, sort of a dangerous compared to like other areas, compared to like South Park, like compared to those areas its considered dangerous, so like, I always felt safe because I was around, cuz it was mostly like Black people that we were around, I felt safe because I am Black, you know that's what I grew up around so I didn't feel like in danger at all, but I mean like for other students, they probably would have felt as such, but I was fine.

Paris' reaction to community safety concerns indicates that, as an African American male, he felt a level of kinship and connection with Black people who live in the surrounding community. In fact, Paris sees his race as a possible advantage, because it give him a relationship with people in the community that students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds did not share.

Participant responses indicated that their perceptions of school safety were an important determinant of the quality of their daily school experiences. Several offered details which helped illustrate the role school staff played in promoting a sense of safety for students. Cameron credited teachers and administrators with creating a safe

environment for students at the school. In response to the question of whether he felt safe or not safety, Cameron said:

> They (teachers and administrators) made sure that they protected us from any outside danger or any danger that was on the inside. They always protected us, they always let us know what was going on, you know. They didn't keep anything hidden from us, so yeah, they made sure we were protected.

Marcus stated that he felt safe at PSOA and gave important details concerning the importance of teacher involvement in creating a safe school environment:

> One of the things that probably made me feel so safe is the faculty. They always like, I really grew close to my teacher Cary Marshall (a pseudonym). He was always, um…he always understood what I was going through as a young African American male. With him being an African American teacher, there were things that we connected on, and like, things that we had in common, you know, and stuff that he'd see in me that he remembered being my age, you know. Being a Black male, you know, he always connected with us and tried to push us, you know, so we knew that there was something better out there than what we were surrounded by at home or in our families, or things like that, you know. He was like a sense of support and safety when you got to school. Even if you didn't feel it at home, you know.

Marcus description of Mr. Marshall's efforts to create a safe and nurturing environment for African American males at PSOA underscores the idea that creating a safe school environment is about more than protecting students from bodily harm. It is also involves making sure that teachers and administrators form healthy, positive, and caring relationships with students. Such relationships reinforce feelings of safety among students. When students feel like they have supportive, caring teachers who are committed to creating a safe and supportive environment, then they are more likely to have positive feelings about school and are more likely to experience academic success.

Social-Emotional Safety

Social-emotional safety is another sub-theme addressed by all participants. Students experience a sense of social-emotional safety when they feel like they are

protected from abuse, teasing, and exclusion from their peers and from school staff. Over

the last ten years, incidences of school based bullying and hazing have increased

markedly. It is estimated that one-in-four children in U.S. schools are bullied on a regular

basis, and that teens in grades 6 through 10 are the most likely to be involved in bullying

related activities (Bullying Statistics, 2015). Research indicates that 47 % of students are

hazed before entering college (Allan & Madden, 2008). Under such circumstances, it is,

at best, difficult for schools to guarantee social-emotional safety for students. Several

participants openly discussed experiences which highlight situations that threatened their

social-emotional safety. Gary stated:

> Yes, I got bullied a lot when I was in high school. I'm 5'7" now, so then I was like
> four-foot something, skinny, I didn't wear name-brand clothes, and so you had…
> there were a lot of kids; they weren't thinking about arts or nothing like that. They
> were worried about whether you had on Tommy Hilfiger, and I remember that
> they would look at the back of your tag to see if it was real, and Jordans were big
> then, I mean, they are big now, but they were huge then. I remember that every
> week it was a new trend. If you weren't wearing name brand stuff you got cheesed
> under the table, and bullied in essence, so, in that regard, I don't know if in that
> regard I felt safe, in that regard, I mean if such and such is walking down the
> hallway and he sees me, something's going to happen.

While Gary struggled to attain a level of social-emotional safety during his early

experiences at PSOA, he displayed resilience. Over time he adjusted to the environment

and to his peers and learned to protect and defend his social-emotional well-being.

Additionally, he was able to parlay his performing arts abilities to build his social status

among his peers:

> Oh yeah, I learned how to fight (laughter)...and I was a lot more confident. I
> think, bullying a lot of times happens because the other person is insecure or they
> find a chink in your chain, but when you're somebody who is more sure of
> himself somebody can say "Why are you wearing such and such?" or "You're a
> dweeb" or whatever they call you, you can say "OK, so that's your opinion" you
> can move on and it really doesn't escalate to bullying. I know that for me a lot of
> times when I gave in to (voice character) "Oh well you're right, is there something

wrong with me?" They'd be like "Yeah, somethings wrong with you, so come here and let me pick on you some more!" And um, that's the sort of thing that when you become more confident in yourself you, those things help. I mean the arts definitely helped that. I mean there's nothing like walking on stage and singing and everybody listens, or if you're talking in a quiet theater full of people and everybody listens. There's power in that.

Gary's experiences in the performing arts helped him stand out from the crowd. This statement indicates that his abilities and experiences as a performer at the school enabled him to gain credibility among his peers, thus shoring up his social-emotional well-being. Cameron attested to having a similar struggle with developing a positive level of social-emotional safety. Cameron offered:

> 9th grade was the hardest...because you had people going there who weren't really focused on their talent, or whatever major they were in. They were really focused on who's the cutest, and who's rocking this and whose doing that, and I wasn't rocking the hottest thing, I was wearing Phat Farm. I wore a pair of FuBu jeans one time and them things, hmmm, I never wore them again. People were focused more on what you were wearing and what you looked like, other than what you brought to the table, so that year was hard. I wasn't wearing designer and all of that stuff, I wasn't the Kim Kardashian or the Jay Z or Kanye, I was just Cameron, so that year was hard. In 10th, I began to gain confidence and I, was kind of learning my dos and don'ts, and how to, you know, just, just not be afraid to love people, and who cares if they, they don't love themselves, I'm just gonna love you anyway, you know, from a distance, but you know I'm going to love it. Um, and so yeah, and so 10th and 11th...10th was good, I met a lot of good people, a lot of good friends, and 11th I met, uh, like my real friends, like the people who I felt like were going to stick with me for the rest of my life.

Cameron also indicates that, over time, he learned the rules of engagement in a performing arts high school and was able to establish good relationships and find his niche at the school. As he reached 10th and 11th grades he experienced a greater sense of social-emotional safety than he had during his freshman year.

School safety is a factor that can affect student engagement. When students experience physical and social-emotional safety they are more likely to be invested in their school-based learning experiences, and are more apt to perform well academically

(NSCC, 2015). African American Male Academic Identity Development theory (AAMAID), the framework used to guide this study, maintains that increased academic engagement is needed to improve outcomes for African American male students. The narratives provided by participants in this study indicate that, for the most part, African American male graduates of PSOA experienced a safe environment while they attended the school. The physical and social emotional safety they felt at the school supported their success in their academic and performing arts classes.

Interpersonal Relationships

A second sub-theme that participants discussed as a contributing factor that affected the quality of their school experiences was relationships they had with teachers and with their peers. This is an important aspect of this study, because it illustrates the effects that interpersonal relationships may have on African American males' academic performance and school experiences in arts-based school environments. The quality of the relationships students have with their teachers and fellow students is an important indicator of school climate (NSCC, 2015). Research demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic achievement (Fan, 2012; Martin & Dowson, 2009). High quality interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and students and their peers contribute to academic motivation, engagement, and achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Moreover, students who have more positive relationships with their peers experience greater academic success than those who have difficult peer relationships (Chen, Chang, & He, 2003). Narratives shared by participants clearly demonstrate that the relationships they had with teachers and their peers influenced their academic performance and school experiences.

Jason Moore relates that his teachers formed relationships with him and other African American males that transcended what took place in classrooms and performance spaces. The guidance he received from his teachers supported the academic and artistic successes he experienced at PSOA. In addition, his teachers provided supports for students who were from low income backgrounds. He stated:

> Yes, I felt like I had a great relationship with my teachers. My teachers were very supportive from the very beginning. I had great teachers. Some of them have gone now, because of the, you know, the people there changed so much, but from the beginning they were very supportive of us, as young artists. They understood what we were there to do. They really wanted to not just train us to be young artists, but to be as intelligent and give us the tools we need to be as successful as we could be, in other avenues of our lives, so I think my teachers really would take the time and work with us when we needed it. Like, they weren't just there for us to talk to in class. Even outside of class or something they would be there to take some of us home from rehearsal sometimes, or they would buy us breakfast if we hadn't eaten for the day. They would do things like that for us. For a lot of the kids at the school, because of where the school is, there's a lot of kids there that are minorities and that don't have access to you know, a lot of resources and so the teachers became those resources for the students there.

In this statement, Jason clearly expresses his belief that his teachers at PSOA were an integral part of his support system, and that the relationships he had with them were key to his success. Jason credits his teachers for providing him with the information and guidance he needed to graduate from PSOA and attend college. He continued with this train of thought:

> They helped us, helped me, my teachers helped me for sure, in looking at a school and looking at scholarships, and even getting performance opportunities after I had graduated, and getting paid to do some performance stuff after graduation. My teachers helped with things like that as well, and to this day still are looking out for me in that way, and looking at, um, when there's an opportunity that we come, and they know that they can't count on somebody, they do call me or ask if I'm available to do certain things.

For Jason, the relationships he shared with his teachers had benefits that have lasted beyond his time at PSOA. He still seeks their advice on matters pertaining to his education and his career in the performing arts. His narrative provided a powerful example of the impact teacher-student relationships can have on the education and life outcomes of African American males.

In addition to fostering positive relationships with students, some teachers at PSOA actively encouraged positive and supportive relationships between students. Paris mentioned one experience which illustrates how effective performing arts teachers foster positive relationships between students:

> I remember this one particular event my senior year. Mr. Hilton (a pseudonym), our dance teacher, would have a dance day, usually on Fridays. We had a new student who like, who was in my class and he (Mr. Hilton) was like, um, he was like I need you to just go up there and like, see if they need help or like go and help them. I mean it was like, he (the student) didn't really want the help, you know but just the fact that Mr. Hinton wanted him to feel welcome enough, you know like, he had someone he could ask for help if he needed, so I was like dude, if you need help just like ask me like. I tried to help him out with something, he was like no I got it. I was like cool with that. Yeah, from what I remember they always encouraged you to talk to other people. I mean like with them it came to a point where they didn't have to encourage me. I would like try to help people, because I remember what it was like to be a freshman, and like sometimes it was hard to talk to upperclassmen, so I would just try to be very welcoming to the younger classes, and you know, at least I tried to be. I don't know if it came across that way.

In spite of the doubts Paris had about mentoring other students, he clearly embraced that role. The fact that Mr. Hilton thought highly of him and encouraged him to share his knowledge and experience with other students empowered Paris and made him feel that, as a student, he was a leader, and that his actions had a positive impact on what happened in the classroom. This is an important consideration. Research indicates that when students take on leadership roles in school settings they often experience improved

school performance, enhanced academic engagement, and demonstrate higher levels of persistence in completing challenging academic tasks (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In addition, student peer leadership can improve school climate (Sparks, 2013). Thus, Paris' experiences as a classroom leader may have had benefits for his academic performance, and contributed to creating more positive school experiences for himself and his classmates.

Marcus shared similar sentiments regarding his experiences with the teachers at PSOA. When discussing his relationships with his teachers, Marcus stated:

> It started with Mr. Marshall, but as I spent more and more time at the school and got more and more involved in not just doing musicals, but in doing straight plays too, I became more comfortable with meeting other teachers. I became close to Reggie Franklin (a pseudonym) who directs a straight play every fall, and Mark Wallman (a pseudonym) who is our music director on all of the musicals, and teaches voice and really helps me a lot with how to sing correctly and technically correct. Then there is the academic faculty who knew us from stage and they would see us and would be willing to work with us on getting our academics right, you know, and like making sure that our grades were just as great as our performances on the stage were. So the faculty really, generally I had a really good connection with all of them.

Marcus, Jason, and Paris reported having genuinely positive relationships with teachers, but not all of the relationships between participants and teachers were ideal. Cameron discussed his relationship with a teacher who taught math, a subject he struggled in. His lack of confidence and discomfort in this particular content area contributed to the difficulties he had in relating to his teacher:

> Her name was, um Ms. McDonogh (a pseudonym). She, and at first like when I walked into the classroom the first day, she, it was like, just cold. It was like a cold dark energy I felt when I walked in the room, it was just weird. First off, I'm just going to put this out there, I'm not good at math, and so when I first got there we started like immediately, and I'm looking like, ehhhh...really, you don't want to wait like a couple days until we get all of the syllabus and you know, get all our papers together? No, she started instantly, so I'm like ok, um but, just after awhile, I think she was actually mad because I quit her class, because I knew I wasn't

gonna pass, because I'm not good at math, and so I was like I need to be switched
out as soon as possible.

Cameron's relationship with his teacher was affected by his difficulties in
mathematics. Had Ms. McDonogh taught a subject Cameron excelled in, then Cameron
may have been willing to remain in her class. His initial impression of her, coupled with
his history of struggling in math, contributed to his decision to get transferred out of the
class.

Gary offers a more nuanced description of his relationships with his teachers. In
retrospect, he considers his own behavior as the determining factor in the relationships he
had with his teachers:

> My academic teachers were great, especially like my English teacher. I loved my
> science class. They were cool, um they were, most of my teachers were cool as
> long as I was cool. I think specifically about my chemistry teacher that I gave a
> hard time to. Tenth grade year was probably like my bad kid year, I was like
> acting up in class, getting sent out of class and stuff.

Gary's perspective demonstrates his understanding that students play a role in
cultivating positive relationships with their teachers as well. Teacher-student
relationships are not a one-way street. Student attitudes and behaviors are factors that can
influence the quality of the relationships teachers and students have in schools. Gary is
the oldest participant in the group, and has had more time to reflect on his experiences at
PSOA. His acknowledgement of his responsibility in creating and maintaining good
relationships with his teachers may be reflective of the level of maturity he brought to the
conversation.

The narratives offered by participants in this study highlight the importance of
teacher student relationships in promoting academic engagement and school
achievement. The AAMAID framework maintains that positive teacher-student

relationships may help promote high academic performance among African American males. Healthy and supportive relationships between teachers and Black male students may help reduce the risk factors which thwart high academic achievement for students in this population. Teachers who foster healthy and supportive relationships with Black males are more likely to develop strategies which promote high academic achievement and reduce disciplinary problems. Such practices reduce the likelihood of suspensions, expulsions, special education placements, and other practices that lead to poor academic outcomes for Black males. The anecdotal evidence presented here shows that positive teacher-student relationships helped create a positive school climate, and promoted achievement for most of the respondents.

Collaboration

A third sub-theme participants addressed at length was collaboration. Collaborative teaching and learning have been identified by researchers as culturally relevant instructional practices that significantly improve engagement and achievement among African American males (Boykin, 2004; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Participant narratives indicate that teachers at PSOA integrated collaborative teaching and learning techniques in both academic and performing arts classes. In the following narrative, Marcus discussed how collaboration enhanced student learning in performing arts classes:

> Being young and teenagers we would fight that, we would want to work with other people, but not all the time...and when we did the work that came out was greater than anything we could have achieved by ourselves. For instance, our senior year we had this project where we had to write our own musical in our musical theater class final, and our teacher just mixed up the groups so we wouldn't just choose our friends, because, in a way, if we would have had great ideas at one point but we wouldn't have done any work with our friends if we have just talked and laughed, so he put us with people we rarely talked to, and it

was about five musicals and they had to be like 10 or 20 minutes. It was really interesting to see what people came up with, and to collaborate and to write your own music, or to choreograph your own dances, come with your own story, write the script, all that kind of stuff, and as small as it is to do in your black box classroom, it still really put out a lot of great work, and you could see where a lot of people were in their lives, and things like that, and stories they got to tell, and now that they had the opportunity to, they came up with some great stuff.

Cameron Stone, a student who admittedly struggled academically at the school, discussed having positive experiences collaborating with other students at the school. Opportunities to collaborate with his peers were one of the highlights of his experience at PSOA. Cameron recounted:

Yes, yes, they always encouraged us to work together and to be a team. Like, in chorus, we would always get together in groups, and um because we have different parts, and we would all get together in sections and work on our notes and you know, the verses and everything, and that was always really helpful, because, like I said, I couldn't read music, but I could always, I had the ear, you know, so I would always listen, and I could get it that way, and I would always get help from the seniors who were there. It was always a collaboration thing, and that was really nice. In musical theater, we would always have someone there who you could ask, "Can you listen to my song that I'm about to do?" Or, "Can you listen to me do this monologue?" They were always there to listen, you know. Yeah it was nice, and there was one time where my musical theater director got me and two other students to do this project for a business outside of school, and we all got together and we rehearsed it, one night at school, and then the next day we went in to record it, and then the next day we went to perform it. And we all just got together, it was like out of the blue, and we got together and we did it! That was really nice.

Cameron's collaborative experience at the school had benefits that transcended his school experiences. He had an important opportunity to work with his peers and apply his artistic talents in the community. In addition, being able to work collaboratively in his choral music class enabled him to be successful in spite of his inability to read music, and it gave him a chance to use one of his strengths, his ear for music, to help other students as well. Being able to collaborate with his classmates in choral music was a win-win

situation for Cameron. It gave him the opportunity to share his talents with his peers and to get assistance and support from them as well.

In responding to questions concerning collaborative learning opportunities, all respondents selected experiences from their performing arts classes. That is not to suggest that they did not collaborate in their academic classes, but it does highlight the fact that collaboration is an integral aspect of learning in and through the performing arts. As Gary stated:

> Oh yeah, all the time. Most of the arts stuff that we do is collaborative. Um, you're rarely afforded an opportunity to just, solo it out, and so we're going to choreograph a show together, we're going to light a show together. Yeah, choir, just yeah.

Gary's statement underscores the centrality of collaboration in the performing arts. In theater, dance, and music, participants have to work with other artists. They have to collaborate with performers and with artists who work in other disciplines. To rehearse and perform a musical, actors, singers and dancers must share the space and work together continuously to produce a show that has an impact on the audience. This is an important consideration when examining the effects of performing arts education on African American male academic achievement. Research demonstrates that collaboration is an integral aspect of culturally relevant teaching, particularly for African American males (Kunjufu, 2005; Moore & Lewis, 2014). AAMAID argues that culturally relevant teaching should be a central tenant of school based efforts designed to improve performance among African American males. The centrality of collaboration to the performing arts may indicate that arts-based learning programs are ideally suited for boosting academic identity development and improving school experiences for African American males.

Peak Experiences

One of the most salient sub-themes that emerged from the narratives offered by respondents was the occurrence of educational peak experiences. Every participant in this study reported having at least one peak experience while they attended PSOA. Peak experiences are situations in which an individual is completely engaged in a challenging, yet deeply satisfying task (Croft, 2008; Maslow, 1994). In school settings, peak experiences occur when students are involved in difficult, yet extremely enjoyable activities which require skill and concentration to complete (Csikzentmihaly, 1990). Such experiences are deeply inspirational and often produce feelings of euphoria. People who have peak experiences feel an enhanced sense of control, are less self-conscious, and are less fearful of failure. Additionally, peak experiences leave participants with the feeling that time has transformed and has either sped up or slowed down (Csikzentmihaly, 1990). Peak experiences are critical elements of school engagement. They promote passionate engagement in tasks that require concentration, and induce optimal states of involvement in learning, are empowering and extremely enjoyable (Csikzentmihaly, 1990). Research demonstrates that peak experiences encourage student attendance and improve academic performance (Croft, 2008).

The participants in this study provided details which demonstrated how peak experiences enhanced their learning opportunities at PSOA. Jason described one of his peak experiences. He stated:

> One of the best experiences I had at the school was my performance in *West Side Story*, which was the last show that we did my senior year. That was one of my favorites. That was one of my most memorable experiences from the school, because at that point in time I really knew that I wanted to be a dancer. *West Side Story* was a great show for that opportunity. I got cast as one of the Jets, which was really fun (laughs) and yeah, and I really just enjoyed the rehearsal process. I

enjoyed learning the choreography. I enjoyed all of what we were learning from our directors and I just enjoyed the collaborative process very much. It was one of my favorite performances I've ever done. Looking back on it now, you know probably watching a video I probably think it was one of the most horrible performances I've ever done, but that's just me being critical of myself as an artist. It was extremely memorable for me because I really felt like at that point in time I really got to engage in something I really wanted to do. It really just…it was a moment for me, especially because I was a senior I guess. It was a moment for me of really being…of realizing that I was going on in my life and I was going to continue to move on in the performing arts and I was really excited about the opportunity, and I was excited about where I was going. It was just really memorable in that way. It was, it was just a fun show overall. I think it was one of the most exciting moments just to be on stage. For the first performance, we performed at what's called the Bailey Awards (a pseudonym), which is the high school theater awards ceremony for the city and surrounding area. We were at the inaugural awards ceremony. Our school won the award for best choreography execution. We did a piece of a part of *West Side Story*. I just remember when we got on the stage to do our dance number. The only thing I remember about that moment is coming on stage and walking off stage. I was just so in the moment and it was just such an amazing experience that I don't remember exactly what I did on stage, so I hope it was great, but um…I…the adrenaline was so high I think it was…that's all I remember was walking on and walking off.

In many respects, Jason described a classic peak experience. His description demonstrated that he was passionate about dancing and deeply invested in his role as a principal dancer in *West Side Story*. For Jason, this experience was so euphoric that he lost track of time. During the performance at the awards ceremony he could only remember walking on and off-stage. This experience had an additional benefit: it helped solidify Jason's identity as a dancer. His involvement in this performance reinforced his decision to pursue dance as a profession.

Marcus also recounted an experience performing a lead role in a musical theater production:

We did a production of *The Color Purple*, and it was a special production. It was so crazy because it was such a powerful musical. It was unlike any musical we had ever done. It was very grown up. Usually musicals we did were very high school friendly. This really opened the door, to show that we could handle mature situations that were shown in *The Color Purple*. It got such outstanding feedback.

Everybody loved it! We, I mean Piedmont, was on the map, you know. It became such a good memory that the school had, and not only did we do it there, we also got to perform it at the International Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Nebraska. There were college auditions, and some people got into colleges just based off of that trip alone. There were multiple opportunities to like take workshops with people who were working in the industry currently, working with Disney, working on Broadway. We had the chance to perform it and kind of be in touch internationally. Schools from all over the country and out of the country, schools from London, and schools from Brazil were in the audience and they all watched people their age do *The Color Purple*. There were seven shows and we were the honored show of the week, the show everybody was most excited for. It was really great to be a part of that.

Marcus' discussion of his peak experience is noteworthy because he discusses it as a collaborative peak experience. He emphasizes the fact that this show was an intensely gratifying experience for the entire ensemble and that it enhanced the reputation of Piedmont School of the Arts. This experience was not only good for him. It was a positive experience for the collective body of student artists who participated. Additionally, Marcus noted the importance of the additional opportunities he and his fellow performers received as a result of this experience. Some of his classmates were able to get into college and have ancillary learning opportunities which enhanced their understanding of the performing arts as a business.

Peak learning and creative experiences are deeply engaging and gratifying learning experiences which have a profound impact on students. They improve attendance, engender positive attitudes about school, and have the potential to improve academic and artistic performance for students at an arts based school. For the African American males in this study, peak experiences deepened their academic identities, and heightened their aspirations to attend college upon graduation. AAMAID maintains that increasing engagement and enhancing academic identity development are important processes for improving school outcomes for African American males. Experiencing

peak performing arts experiences may be a key factor in improving academic achievement and identity development for Black males who participate in high school performing arts programs.

Theme Two: Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement

A second theme that emerged from this study was the impact performing arts engagement had on academic achievement among African American males who attended and graduated from Piedmont School of the Arts. Research on the effects of performing arts education on student achievement has expanded over the last thirty years. A variety of research has been conducted which suggests positive correlations between performing arts participation and student achievement. Studies have been conducted which suggest that students who have sustained opportunities to participate in the performing arts perform better on standardized tests (College Board, 2013; Phillips et al., 2011; Rupert, 2006; Whisman & Hixson, 2012). Research has shown there are correlations between performing arts participation and improved performance in the traditional content areas (Bradley et al., 2013; Moore & Linder, 2012), and enhanced cognitive development (Hetland & Winner, 2004). Additional studies have been conducted which indicate that ongoing and organized participation in the arts enhances academic outcomes for students in underserved populations (Dobb, 2012; Engdahl, 2012).

Studies which examines the influence arts education has on African American males is an area of research which deserves greater scrutiny. Few studies have been conducted which explore the effects of performing arts education on academic achievement among African American males. Researchers Walton and Wiggan (2010,

2014) have written speculative literature which proposes potential connections between performing arts engagement and improved academic outcomes for African American males, but more research is necessary to determine the impact of performing arts education on Black males' academic achievement.

The narratives provided by the participants in this study provide detailed and nuanced anecdotal information on the connections between performing arts participation and the academic achievement of African American males. In their discussions, three sub-themes emerged concerning the connections between performing arts engagement and academic achievement for Black males: academic skill development, achievement motivation, and postsecondary attendance.

Academic Skill Development

Academic skill development was a prominent sub-theme which emerged from interview data which connected performing arts education and academic achievement. During interviews, respondents were asked detailed questions about the relationship between their participation in the performing arts and their academic skill development. Participants discussed how their performing arts and academic experiences influenced their academic skill development. The young men in the study discussed their academic strengths and weaknesses, and addressed the relationship between their experiences in the performing arts and their reading, writing and math achievement.

All participants discussed the connections between their participation in the performing arts and their reading and writing skill development. Jason drew a fascinating connection between his dance studies and his writing abilities. He stated:

> Composition and writing in English is not too different from composition in
> dance, and I think, that was a huge one for me, that in terms of drawing a

connection because, I really love to choreograph, and I love to compose, um different things, like create composition studies and things like that. I really love working with movement and with dance and I think having a really strong background in English really helped me understand the two are not that different. Honestly, the only difference really is process and how you go about getting to your product, but I think it was...they're very instrumental in drawing connections between the liberal arts and academic classes.

Jason's experiences in his English and dance classes enabled him to make a connection between two seemingly disparate disciplines, and conclude that there are similarities between dance composition and written composition. Jason adamantly expressed his belief that the work he did in his performing arts classes helped make him a better writer. When asked whether his performing arts classes helped build his skill level in writing, he responded:

> Yes. Yes, yes, very much so. Um, I, again, I gotta think (laughs). See, I know my teachers are just very adamant about us not just being good at one thing. And they've always been, and um, we would have to type papers in our dance classes and things, sure, we had to do research for our papers and we'd have to type, and they would, mark our papers up with grammatical errors and make us go back and correct those things and really work on those things.

Jason's comment highlights the fact that his performing arts teachers reinforced writing skills in their curricular areas as well. Jason provided more details of how his teachers taught and reinforced writing skills in the performing arts curriculum:

> A writing assignment we had to do was to pick a famous dancer of some sort or choreographer of some sort, from whatever genre of dance we chose, and to research their career, their training…there was all kinds of things, but we also had to research the genre of dance that we were studying that they came from in general. We had to write about what we learned, to write about what we discovered and how this history applies to us, and how we can learn from it. We always had assignments like that in dance, and musical theater too. We had to do our own research and find out our own information, and really educate ourselves on what we do. My music teacher, she really emphasized that too. She really wanted us to know about the classics…I mean, the best, the famous composers and their work and how they composed and what they composed and when they composed it and where it started. She wanted us to really understand the structure

of music and the structure of composition and those kinds of things. We had to write papers on that kind of stuff all the time.

In addition to teaching writing skills, Jason's teachers used writing and research as tools for encouraging students to attain a greater depth of understanding of the history of the performing arts. These types of assignments helped Jason perfect his writing skills, but also gave him opportunities to explore the lives and experiences of individuals who have made important contributions in the fields of dance, musical theater and music. Jason's dance, music, and musical theater teachers used their classes to teach their specific performing arts disciplines and taught and reinforced writing skills as well.

Participants also highlighted the impact their performing arts learning experiences had on their reading and vocabulary development skills. To a person, each participant in this study maintained that, on some level, participating in school-based performing arts classes enhanced their reading skills and their vocabulary skills. Respondents most commonly drew connections between training in theater and vocabulary skill improvement. Paris shared this reflection:

> Yeah, it (theater) has expanded my vocabulary, first of all. When you do shows and you have to say lines or particular words, you may be saying something that you would never say. You have to find out what it means, because you don't want people to think you don't know what you're saying so then eventually you find out more things that like, expand your vocabulary. Then there is reading. You have to be able to understand the text when you're reading something. You find out different ways to understand text. You use theories to help you understand the text, and you find different ways to get into what the writer is saying and what the writer's intention was, so like, yeah, it has definitely helped, definitely.

In addition to enhancing his reading and vocabulary skills, Paris's narrative suggested that his experiences in his theater arts classes strengthened his reading comprehension skills as well. He indicated that it is very important for actors to be able to understand the text, or the meaning, of the words on the page. He also indicated that his

acting experiences have helped him understand a writer's intentions, or the underlying meaning of the dialog the playwright has written in the play.

The narratives provided by the respondents in this study suggested positive correlations between performing arts learning experiences and reading and writing skill development. Anecdotal evidence provided by the participants indicated that their performing arts learning experiences did not have the same effect on their skill development in mathematics and the sciences. Several participants reveal that mathematics and science were difficult subjects for them to master while they were students at PSOA. Marcus stated:

> I thought, until I got to high school, like in 10th grade, that I was really good in math and science, but that stuff started getting hard, like once I started doing calculus, and chemistry, and all that kinda really tricky science, that's when it really started to mess me up. I realize that those were my academic weaknesses… trying to figure out how to do this new type of math, you know, like it was nothing like I had done before, so when that became hard then I had to spend more and more nights studying, because I never been the person to study before, I always just remembered it, took the test, and I was good, but I started to have to study, and then had to try to find the time to study between rehearsals.

Marcus' statement indicates that mathematics and science became more difficult for him in high school, and that he had to put in the work to keep pace and pass those classes.

In this statement, Gary saw very little connection between his performing arts experiences and his skill development in mathematics. He admitted that mathematics was his worst subject. When asked to explain why, he offered:

> It just was unnecessary steps...unnecessary. I know that's biased but I just felt like, I mean I was good, I mean I'm better at math now than I was then, but it's all in who teachers you. I had a teacher that taught it (mathematics) so well I could teach it to somebody. Then there were some people who were just like "What, why don't you get it? It's the Pythagorean theorem, why?" So it just depends on

who was teaching it to me. I could get it, when it was taught well to me. Algebra and things like that, pretty simple. Don't ask me to do calculus, get out of my face, like now...stop!

For Gary, his skill development in mathematics had no correlation with his educational experiences in the performing arts. His comfort level and ability to succeed in mathematics was a function of the quality of instruction he received in that specific content area. If he had what he considered a good teacher he did well. If not, he had difficulty understanding concepts and achieving in class. Most of the respondents shared similar stories about mathematics. They did not see a clear correlation between performing arts participation and skill development in mathematics. Hard work and good teaching were the keys to their skill development in this content area.

The African American males who participated in this study reported that learning in and through the performing arts contributed to their academic skill development. Respondents indicated that coursework done in their performing arts classes strengthened their reading and writing skills. Few benefits, if any, were noted between performing arts and mathematics and science skill development. Participants reported that the quality of the instruction and individual effort were more important factors to academic skill development in mathematics and science. The presence of potential connections between performing arts learning and academic skill development among African American males is promising. This suggests that performing arts education may be a valuable tool for improving academic achievement for Black male students in U.S. schools. More research needs to be conducted to obtain additional evidence of this phenomenon.

Achievement Motivation

The second sub-theme which linked performing arts education and academic

performance was achievement motivation. Participants spoke at length about how their engagement in the performing arts at PSOA influenced their motivation to perform well academically. Achievement motivation refers to an individual's need and drive to achieve excellence and success in a distinct domain or on a particular task (Fletcher & Neumeister, 2012; Rabideau, 2005; Stipek, 2002). Achievement motivation is influenced by implicit and explicit motives. Implicit motives are spontaneous impulses to perform a task that are activated through incentives inherent within the task itself (Fletcher & Neumeister, 2012; Rabideau, 2005). Explicit motives are deliberate choices that are activated by extrinsic reasons (Fletcher & Neumeister, 2012; Rabideau, 2005). In terms of school performance, achievement motivation is considered to be conscious beliefs and values influenced by recent experiences in academic achievement situations, and can be influenced by the amount of success or failure students experience (Stipek, 2002).

Participants stated repeatedly that the structure of the relationship between academic achievement and performing arts participation was an important factor which motivated them to strive for academic excellence. At PSOA, one seemingly basic statute was instituted to challenge students to strive for academic excellence. The administration instituted a school-wide rule which stated that students must maintain at least a "C" average in all classes in order to perform in concerts, plays, dance recitals, showcases, and musicals. This rule had a profound effect on the Black males who participated in this study. Their educational experiences at PSOA were designed to help them develop as performing artists, and perfect their craft. A key component of this learning experience involved preparing for and participating in live performances. In order for them to become good actors, singers, and dancers they needed to have as many opportunities to

perform as possible, so they worked hard to maintain good grades in all of their classes.

This refrain was repeated throughout all interviews. Gary clearly stated:

> If your grades weren't good you couldn't do a show, so that was an incentive, at the school. You had to make at least a "C", like at least a 2.0, which I feel like you could sneeze and make lots of times, but your grades had to be good. That's one thing about that school, your grades had to be decent to be able to do extracurricular activities, so it wasn't like they said, "Oh who cares about English, just make sure you're a good actor!" No, it was like make sure you're doing your stuff, so do your schoolwork, and do your homework.

Marcus made similar statements during his discussion of the relationship between

performing arts participation and academic performance at PSOA. In part of this

discussion, Marcus couched his remark as advice he would give to incoming students. He

offered:

> That's really important for new students to know, that they think that even, as smart as you can be coming into this school you really will have to study if you want keep up with your academics because, if you don't have good academics you're not allowed to be in the shows, so you have to keep up. You're not allowed perform at all, you have to really keep up with your academics.

Paris discussed how the rule regarding academic performance and participation in

performing arts-related extracurricular activities motivated him to improve his grades.

When asked about the impact his performing arts participation had on his academic

performance, Paris stated:

> My first few years at the school it was pretty negative. I was so focused on doing shows and like becoming a better performer that I like sort of like disregarded my academics. There was a point in my 9th grade year, in my freshman year, my mom was about to pull me from a show. It was like the spring musical. I had like a bad grade in class or something like that, and Mr. Marshall had to convince my mom to let me be in the show. She had to come to rehearsal, pick me up, and he had to go and talk to her. My mom had one of her children in her arms, so my mom was like mad. She was like already mad at me. She had already decided that she was taking me out of the show. Eventually I found a balance and I was able to do what I had to do to pass my classes.

Paris' mother eventually relented and allowed him to perform in the spring

musical. This situation illustrates how the school's policy on academic performance and

extracurricular participation, and Paris' mother's commitment to academic excellence,

raised his academic achievement motivation.

Cameron indicated that the opportunity to perform was his primary motivation to

strive to perform well academically. He recounted:

> Having the opportunity to perform...it just made me want to do better for myself,
> so like if I can't perform, then I don't have much, so that really made me work
> hard to, uh, get better, to get better grades and you know to just do better
> academically, because, if I can't perform, what am I here for?

The rule governing student participation in public performances clearly served as

an explicit factor which stimulated achievement motivation for the Black males in this

study. Additionally, several participants identified implicit factors as sources for

improving achievement motivation as well. Implicit elements which affect achievement

motivation refer to the personal satisfaction an individual receives from applying

increased effort to improve performance and accelerate achievement (Rabideau, 2005).

As an example, several participants took Advanced Placement Psychology in

order to enhance the character development skills needed by actors and musical theater

performers. Good actors must have a strong foundation in psychology, because it

strengthens their understanding of human behavior. Actors who understand human

behavior are able to create realistic and natural characters on stage. The process of

creating a realistic and natural character is an important element of method acting

(Stanislavsky, 1936), the technique used by theater teachers and directors to help actors

create more believable characters. AP Psychology is a rigorous, college preparatory

course which is designed to provide students with an introduction to the scientific study

of the behavior and mental processes used by human beings and other animals (College

Board, 2013). In order to take AP Psychology, a student must demonstrate a high level of

academic achievement by maintaining a high grade point average in top-level classes.

Additionally, students must receive recommendations from teachers and guidance

counselors. AP Psychology was not a required course for acting and musical theater

majors at PSOA, thus there were no apparent explicit factors to motivate students to take

this class. Implicit factors helped motivate Marcus and Paris to take the class. The

personal pleasure they derived from the effort needed to become great actors served as

the source of inspiration for taking AP Psychology. Marcus recounted:

> And then the material that touched the work, as we got older at school, got harder,
> so we had to keep up with stuff that was going on in academics, to be able to
> understand what we were doing in rehearsal, you know. Plays weren't as easy to
> understand. They weren't like hunky dory comedies. They started to become
> dramatic, and we had to think about these people's minds and the way they
> thought, and then obviously, being an actor in one of the plays at my school made
> me want to take the class AP Psychology, you know, and I really ended up really
> loving that class, and I would not have taken it if I had not been involved in the
> performing arts. Psychology taught you about behavioral ways and developmental
> ways people develop and stuff like that, and that was interesting to me as an actor,
> and then the craft became interesting to me as a student.

Marcus' narrative indicates that his desire to take AP Psychology was motivated

by an internal desire to become a better actor. As he got older and progressed through the

musical theater program at PSOA, he realized that he needed an additional edge for

mastering the craft of acting. AP Psychology provided him with insights into human

behavior that helped him become a better actor.

Paris reported that AP Psychology turned out to be one of his favorite academic

classes. He said his teacher was excellent, and the class gave him an opportunity to learn

some important aspects of human behavior.

In my senior year AP psychology class, we did learn about the brain a little bit, but that was something really related to like real life. My teacher was the type of teacher that I needed. He was nonchalant, funny, and very informative. He knew what he was talking about, but he didn't force anything on you either. He had an opinion, we had our opinions, and that's how life is supposed to be. I ended up learning some very important things about human behavior and motivation. That has helped me become a better actor.

The anecdotal evidence provided by participants in this study suggests that participation in performing arts learning may improve academic achievement motivation for African American male high school students. Both explicit and implicit motivation factors appear to work together to improve academic achievement for respondents. The AAMAID framework contends that strategies which strengthen academic engagement levels for African American males are needed to improve their academic performance levels. Incorporating performing arts education experiences may be an effective method for bolstering achievement motivation, enhancing student engagement, and improving school performance for Black male high school students.

Postsecondary Attendance

High school completion and postsecondary attendance was the third sub-theme which emerged from the information provided by respondents in this study. Participant narratives drew clear connections between performing arts education participation and postsecondary attendance. Four of the five participants in this study have attended four-year colleges and universities, and three of the five participants are currently pursuing performing arts degrees at arts-based colleges and universities.

Several studies have identified correlations between performing arts education participation, college enrollment, and degree attainment (Catterall et al., 2012; Elpus, 2014; PCAH, 2011). In a longitudinal study which examined the relationship between

arts participation and academic outcomes for teens and young adults, Catterall and his associates (2012) revealed three important findings: a) middle and high school students with high levels of arts engagement were more likely to have college aspirations than their peers with lower levels of arts engagement, b) arts-engaged high school students enrolled in four-year colleges at higher rates than did low arts-engaged high schoolers, and c) students who had intensive arts experiences in high school were more likely than students who did not receive those opportunities to earn a bachelor's degree. In a second longitudinal study conducted under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts (Elpus, 2014), similar findings emerged. Arts students were more likely to apply to, attend, and complete postsecondary education programs than were non-arts students.

Several participants in this study drew clear connections between their performing arts education experiences at PSOA and their college attendance. In his discussion, Jason clearly stated that the academic and performing arts experiences provided by Piedmont School of the Arts was the sole reason why he and other Black male graduates attended college in the first place. Jason explained:

> For young African American men, I think it's a great place for them to be. I also have friends who came there (Piedmont School of the Arts) and didn't come from the best neighborhoods but they are now pursuing higher education. They're in college, they're going to college, they're going to four-year universities and pursuing careers in drama, and music, and dance, and things like that. One of my best friends I grew up with at the school is also here with me at CSUA right now. He's a first year contemporary dance major, and he's here on full scholarship. He and I went to Piedmont School of the Arts, ... he's African American (laughs), I think that it's true that it is a great place to be. It takes young African American men out of that mentality that they can't do anything for themselves, and they have to kind of live a life that is set in stone, that has already been made up for them.

Jason's commentary is revealing, because he is speaking not just for himself, but

for the collective group of young Black males who attended PSOA. He clearly articulates

that there are other African American males whom he had attended high school with who

are now in college. His statement implies that the education and performing arts

experiences he and his peers received while attending the school were transformational.

For Jason, attending PSOA gave a group of young Black males, some of whom came

from difficult circumstances, the academic skills and the confidence needed to complete

high school, attend college, and continue pursuing careers in the performing arts. He

envisioned a very clear connection between attending an arts-based high school and his

current postsecondary experience at a highly rated arts-oriented university.

Marcus shared a similar perspective. His comments indicate that attending PSOA

was a life-changing experience for him and for students from similar backgrounds.

> The environment there is so supportive of the arts and the artistic community of it all. The school is all about giving back and allowing other students to feel excited to go, and other people in the community feel a part of it. It (PSOA) has done a really great job of turning people's lives around. For children or high schoolers, adolescents…whatever you want to call them…people who don't feel like they have a purpose or place. These kids, they find that at that school, you know. At least I know that I did and I know that all of my peers did, and that, we probably wouldn't even have gone to college had it not been for us attending Piedmont.

For Marcus, Piedmont School of the Arts was more than just a school. It was a

transformational learning experience that afforded him and other creative Black males the

opportunity to understand what their calling, or purpose is, and to pursue higher

education experiences that align with how they see themselves as students, artists, and

individuals. He made it clear that he might not be in college if he had attended a different

school.

For Marcus, Jason, and Paris, Piedmont School of the Arts served as a gateway to

college. The academic and artistic successes they experienced at the school strengthened

their academic and artistic identities. In their narratives, they indicated that high levels of arts engagement and positive school experiences helped them become more confident students, and solidified their performing arts identities. Such experiences made continuing their educations at highly rated, arts oriented colleges and universities a much more viable and attractive option. All three stated that the academic and artistic experiences they received at PSOA motivated them to attend college. Narrative data obtained on this sub-theme suggests that a combination of high arts engagement, effective classroom instruction and positive school experiences may improve higher education attendance and completion rates for some Black males.

Theme Three: African American Males, Arts Based Performance and Positive Racial

Identity

The third primary theme which emerged from this study was the experience of being an African American male at an arts-oriented high school. Narrative descriptions of their experiences demonstrated that the participants in this study shared common concerns which highlighted the effects race and gender had on their daily experiences at PSOA.

The body of literature on African American males in U.S. schools clearly demonstrates that Black males experience school differently than their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups. As discussed throughout this study, Black males are systematically denied access to a high quality education. Black males are suspended and expelled from school at higher rates than their peers, experience higher special education placement rates, and are often taught by underqualified teachers. Such risk factors contribute significantly to the reduced levels of academic performance many African

American males experience. Black males perform less well on standardized assessments than their peers from other racial and ethnic groups, graduate at lower rates, and have lower levels of post-secondary attendance than their peers from other racial and ethnic groups as well.

While a considerable portion of research highlights academic underperformance and poor school outcomes experienced by African American males, a growing body of research is being produced which targets high academic achievement for Black males. Such studies seek to identify populations of Black males who perform well academically, graduate from high school and attain post-secondary degrees. Additionally, such studies identify the factors which contribute to high achievement for Black male students.

The narratives provided by the participants in this study reveal that Black males who attend an arts-based high school have shared experiences which affected their academic outcomes and influenced the quality of their school experiences. This information is important, because it may provide an understanding of how to maximize the potentially positive benefits of performing arts education for African American male students. Under the theme African American males at an Arts-Based School, the following sub-themes emerged: the impact of Black male teachers; Black arts for Black students; and Black males' school experiences.

Impact of Black Male Teachers

The impact Black male teachers at PSOA had on their Black male students was a very common sub-theme that emerged from this study. A growing body of literature suggests that African American male teachers have a decidedly positive impact on Black students. African American male teachers have a strong commitment to urban youth

(Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, Walker, Parks, & Davis, 2013), and often see themselves in their students (Lynn, 2002). African American male teachers express a desire to help humanity (Lewis, 2006), and are committed to social change (Lynn, 2006). Additionally, studies show that many African American male teachers are invested in helping Black students understand and navigate their way through a racist society.

Gary's experiences at PSOA were markedly different from those of the other participants in this study. Gary attended the school from 1996 to 2003. He graduated from the school at least 9 years earlier than any other participant involved in this study. Additionally, he was the only student who attended PSOA for both middle and high school. His experiences at the school occurred almost a full decade before any of the other participants'. Within that time period, PSOA underwent significant changes. The differences noted between Gary's school experiences and those of the other participants may be a manifestation of the changes that were implemented at the school during this nine-year period. The teaching staff at PSOA was less diverse when Gary attended the school. The arrival of two highly committed and qualified African American male teachers improved the quality of Gary's experiences at the school. Gary stated:

> During my tenth grade year these two teachers came to the school: Mr. Wilson and Mr. Marshall (both pseudonyms). They were two Black teachers, and there's a...not saying anything, but I got a lot of chances because of them...chances to actually emote and express, and I got along with them both. Mr. Wilson, particularly was…I thought he was being hard on me, but he really was like a father figure to me. And he really took a lot of men of color under his wing, because he was the choir teacher and he taught men's ensemble, and so mainly a lot of the boys at the school were Black boys and his class would be pretty much half choir class and half life lessons class. He would tell us about standing up straight, speaking right, and there would be like, and sometimes he would be at the piano playing notes and sometimes he would just stop and then say "Do you know how the world views you?" Sometimes we would wonder why is he trying to preach to us now? Some people in class would try to jump raw and say "I ain't really trying to hear all of that right now..." but I was listening. He'd be like "Do

you know how the world views you? Pull your pants up...stop..." He'd always say "Stop shucking and jiving, stop signifying..." He'd say that all the time, and I love that, I mean I didn't like him at the time, but he would like tie in the way we were approaching music to how we were approaching our lives. He'd say "Tenors I need more of you" if it was too quiet. We'd go (mimics loud, over-wrought singing), and he's like "Stop overdoing it! See, you're being a cartoon, that's your problem right now you're being a cartoon. You don't need to overdo it."...and I thought he was being mad, I thought he was like being mean, but he was like you don't need to cartoon it and overdo it. You don't need to like…he's like you know the direction I'm giving you. He's like actively listening, and he would pull me aside and tell me um, he would pull me aside and tell me how important it was to carry yourself in a manner that not only represented you, but in some ways you have to be aware of how people view you...and he, you know preached hard work, hard work, work and like learn your lines learn your notes, like real work doesn't begin in the classroom, it begins at home, and I appreciated him so much for that.

This anecdote reveals important information concerning the impact African American male teachers had on Gary. He said that they were like father figures to him. Mr. Wilson, in particular, infused the choir class with information that was designed to help Black males improve their performance and understand how they were judged and viewed within a racist society. His messages, which encouraged the males to stand up straight, speak articulately and to keep their pants pulled up, were designed to inspire his Black male students to understand and challenge the popular and negative images of African American males that were, and are, portrayed in the media, and to defy the stereotypical views held of Black males by many people in American society. The private conversations he initiated with Gary helped Gary understand that it is necessary for a young Black man to carry himself with pride and dignity. Mr. Wilson strategically placed messages about the importance of hard work and avoiding "cartoonish" behavior in order to impart the message to his Black male students that Black males are scrutinized more heavily than White males, and that their behavior and performance, beyond what took place in the school setting, can affect their life outcomes. For Gary, Mr. Wilson was

much more than a choir teacher. The life lessons Mr. Wilson imparted served as a hidden

curriculum for Black male students which helped them understand how they are regarded

in a racist society, and how they have the power to behave and comport themselves in

ways that will enable them to challenge stereotypes and navigate successfully through a

racist society.

Gary benefitted from his relationship with Mr. Marshall as well. Mr. Marshall

served as Chair of the Musical Theater program at PSOA and taught acting and musical

theater courses. He was instrumental in helping Gary gain confidence in his acting

abilities. Gary said:

> Mr. Marshall was somebody who told me I could act, not just "Oh, you're a funny
> guy." He was like, "I like what you did with that monologue, do it again this way.
> When you say that line, I want you to think of this instead of that. Say it this way,
> and punch it up here." He is the first person who told me about this book, *Respect
> for Acting* by Uta Hagen. Actually, I already kind of read it because my dad had it
> and he had taken a couple of acting classes but, that was the textbook from the
> class...and nobody in class read it. They were like man that's bogus, they were
> like, the words are too small. I remember that the first couple of chapters were on
> presentational and representational acting, and she, the author, was just talking
> about these two types of acting, where, one is more of an internal act and one is
> more of an external act, and he, Mr. Marshall, was telling us that in school. And it
> was just going over people's heads. He was somebody I appreciated because he
> was a Black teacher but he never brought up my Blackness. So he said "You're a
> good actor, you can play anything, just believe it." I believed it and I would do it.

Gary's interactions with his African American male teachers helped him grow

academically and artistically. In addition, he developed a mentoring relationship with

Black males who were able to support him and share insider information with him that

helped him understand the challenges of being an African American male. That is an

experience that he would not have received from teachers from any other ethnic or racial

background.

Black Arts for Black Students

The respondents in this study expressed the importance of being able to perform in productions which reflected their African American culture and heritage. PSOA is a school that operates from a traditional, European and middle-American cultural framework. Many of the plays and performances students participated in reflected White, mainstream cultural norms. Participants stated that having opportunities to perform in Black productions made their performing arts experiences at the school much more positive and engaging. Four respondents talked at length about the importance of having opportunities to perform in Black plays and musicals. Paris, Cameron, and Marcus discussed the impact that performing in a nationally recognized production of *The Color Purple* had on their performing arts experiences at the school. Doing that show was a departure for them and for the school. Being involved in such an important and well recognized production based on the Black cultural experience helped them feel like they had a greater stake in their performing arts experiences at the school. Paris had a leading role in The Color Purple, and this experience had a very special meaning for him. He stated:

> I think that was my first lead at the school, and so, it was such a special event. It was an all-Black show. There was one white person in the show, but it was mainly all Black. It was a great show that we did and then we went to the International Thespian Festival, so we did an encore performance of it that summer. Yeah, we did it basically a whole year later, and it was a sold out show. It was like basically like sold out every night, and so we did it on Father's Day in 2013, and it was like packed in the Owens Auditorium (a pseudonym) and then we packed and we went to Nebraska the next day to go to the festival and it was crazy. Of all the people, we were the main stage production. Everyone loved us. We were the only group that got to perform twice, and it was just ridiculous. We got lots of love and appreciation for our art. That was like one of the best weeks I've had in my life, just all-in-all, and that, I think that show really is what gave me confidence to be like wow, I think I'm good at this. This is something I can do,

Gary spoke at length about the impact performing the lead role in *Purlie* had on him. This was an important experience for him because this production was one of the first all-Black shows produced at Piedmont School of the Arts. Gary stated:

Yeah, *Purlie* is a predominantly Black show. They had never probably done that at Piedmont…an all-Black show like that. But the other three characters were Black, I think the only other White character in the show was a character named Ol' Cap'n and this other character that I can't remember. Everybody else was Black: dancers Black, singers Black, everybody. And the show was supposed to be that. Like that's what it called for, people of color, so there was probably this whole little underlying uproar about "Why does it have to be people of color?" So, when we did the show it was so good, and we did it at McGahan Theater (a pseudonym), people were like "Wow, people come to see you in these type of shows?" and "These kids are doing good at it?" These kids are...these are the kids that people wrote off.

Gary appreciated this experience because previously he had limited opportunities to do Black productions and had only been allowed to perform in ensemble roles. As the lead character Purlie, he got the opportunity to showcase his acting, singing and dancing skills. This opportunity was special for Gary, because it gave Black students at PSOA a chance to prove that Black productions were viable, and should be produced more often. His statement suggested that there were staff members and other people who questioned whether PSOA should produce any Black productions. The successful run of this show gave Black students and staff members an opportunity to prove to the school and the wider community that African American culture matters, and should be a part of the curriculum at the school.

Black Males' School Experiences

Black males' school experiences was the third and final sub-theme to emerge from the data on the topic of African American males at a performing arts oriented high school. Respondents had the opportunity to directly address the question "Overall, do you

think Piedmont School of the Arts is a good school for African American males to

attend? Why or why not?" Four of the five participants responded affirmatively. They

expressed the feeling that PSOA is an excellent school for Black males to attend. Marcus

stated:

> I think it's a great school for African American males, because, like I said earlier, it gives us purpose. There are enough faculty there that Black males can relate to, and connect to, and kind of build a circle, you know, so it's great to have that around you. Sometimes Black males only go to predominantly Black schools, and still feel kind of lost. They feel like there isn't anything for them to do, or they don't have a purpose, you know. They feel like they always have to compensate for something or keep up with the latest crazes, and stuff like that. When you are at the school of the arts you're not even thinking about all that because you are thinking about the work that you have to do to keep yourself in the running to make sure that you're able to achieve greatness. There's still time to keep up with the crazes and fashion and stuff like that but while you're doing that you're also on your work, and you're discovering your passion, and discovering why you're on earth and what you're born to do. It's not always going to be the arts, sometimes the arts opens up another medium for somebody to discover their purpose, or what they're good at. I was having so much fun doing my theater that going to class every day was fun, and then I realized how much fun it was to do math or to do science, or to choreograph or to sing, you know. We had such a love for what we were doing after school that going to school no longer became a chore.

Marcus overall school experiences at PSOA were very positive. In his statement

he compares and contrasts his school experiences with those of his peers who attend

traditional, predominantly Black urban high schools. For Marcus, attending PSOA gave

him purpose: it bolstered his academic identity, solidified his artistic identity and gave

him the confidence and direction needed to attend a respected arts-based university. His

school experiences were clearly positive. Paris, Cameron, and Jason all shared similar

sentiments. Their overall school experiences were positive and they expressed the

viewpoint that PSOA is a good school for Black males to attend. In response to the same

question, Cameron responded:

Piedmont School of the Arts was a great school for African American males to attend because it is very diverse. I feel like our African American males don't have a lot of diversity, at least the ones that I come in contact with, not all, but they don't have a lot experiences with different cultures. At Piedmont School of the Arts you had African American, Asian American, everyone, Caucasian American, everyone. You had different people from all different walks of life, and so I think that it's a really, really good for them to see the different people and learn some different things.

For Cameron, the diversity he experienced at PSOA made the school a more

attractive and engaging school environment for him and other Black males. The academic

and performing arts programs offered by the school, and the relationships he developed

with people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds provided him with a positive

experience at the school.

Gary was the only participant who did not have a positive experience at Piedmont

School of the Arts. Gary responded to the question of whether PSOA was a good school

for Black males in the following manner:

That's a loaded question. I'm going to say no, because, your question is "Was it a good school for African American males?" This is very specific and supposes to me that you would have to have things that nurture and embrace being an African American male, and I don't know that we got that. As a matter of fact, those things aren't celebrated too much. You're taught everything else, and not to hate that, but not necessarily to embrace it either. African American males, especially, more so than a lot of demographics, need to be embraced and celebrated.

Gary attended PSOA about a decade before the other participants. He felt that

during the time he attended the school he was denied opportunities and experiences that

affirmed his identity as an African American male. He felt strongly that the school should

have done more to create a positive environment and positive experiences for African

American males. His difference of opinion may be due to the time frame in which he

attended the school. Over time, the school may have implemented changes which have

made PSOA a more positive environment for African American male students. This may

account for the difference between Gary's school experience and those of the other participants.

Summary

This study examined the influence of performing arts engagement on the academic identity development and school experiences of African American males who attended an arts-based high school. The data was analyzed and categorized into three themes which corresponded with the research questions that guided the study: 1) Experiencing a Positive School Environment; 2) Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement; 3) African American Males, Arts-Based Performance, and Racial Identity. The next chapter includes a discussion of themes, examines the implications of the findings, and provides recommendations for policy development and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study began with an analysis of the complex, multifaceted problem of African American male underperformance in the U.S., within a global context in which students from the U.S., regardless of race or ethnicity, underperform in relationship to their counterparts in other developed nations. Chapter 1 identified the school-based factors which contribute to significant differences in academic performance between Black males and their counterparts from other racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, chapter one proposed African American Male Academic Identity Development theory (AAMAID) as a framework for understanding the structural and psychosocial factors which influence how Black male students formulate their academic identities. Chapter 2 contained a review of relevant literature which examines academic identity development, academic achievement for African American males, and the potential benefits of performing arts education. Chapter 3 outlined the framework for the research method employed to address the two critical research questions. Chapter 4 presented a detailed presentation of the research findings. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the key themes which emerged from the data analysis, examines the implications of the findings and gives recommendations for future policy, practice and research.

This study was designed to examine the links between performing arts participation and academic achievement among African American male high school students. To explore this phenomenon, interview questions were developed which

examined the school experiences of African American males who attended a performing arts-based high school, and analyzed the effects of performing arts education on their academic achievement. This study hinges on research findings which demonstrate that sustained and active engagement in the performing arts improves academic performance and enhances cognitive development (Hetland & Winner, 2004; Rupert, 2006; Whisman & Hixson, 2012). The majority of studies which link performing arts participation and academic achievement have been conducted on the general population of students who attend schools in the U.S., and in other nations. Given the disparities in academic outcomes between African American males and their counterparts in other groups, this study presents the performing arts as a possible mitigating factor for improving academic achievement for African American male students. The following research questions were used to examine the potential benefits of performing arts education on African American males' academic identity development: 1). What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in standards-driven performing arts education programs at an urban high school?; 2). How do performing arts education experiences influence the academic identity development of African American male high school students?

The three themes which emanated from the data analysis were: 1). Experiencing a Positive School Climate; 2). Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement; and 3). African American Males, Arts Based Performance and Positive Racial Identity. Each of the themes yielded at least three sub-themes which provided additional details and information on the relationship between school-based performing arts, school experiences, and academic achievement among African

American male graduates of a performing arts-based high school. Table 2 below lists the themes and corresponding sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis.

Table 2: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Experiencing a Positive School Climate	Theme 2: Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement	Theme 3: African American Males, Arts-Based Performance and Positive Racial Identity
Sub-Theme 1: Safety	Sub-Theme 1: Academic Skill Development	Sub-Theme 1: Impact of Black Male Teachers
Sub-Theme 2: Student-Teacher Relationships	Sub-Theme 2: Academic Motivation	Sub-Theme 2: Black Arts for Black Artists
Sub-Theme 3: Collaboration	Sub-Theme 3: Postsecondary Attendance	Sub-Theme 3: Black Males' School Experiences
Sub-Theme 4: Peak Experiences		

African American Male Academic Identity Development theory (AAMAID) was the theoretical framework used to guide my analysis. AAMAID is a proposed framework, designed by the researcher, as a tool for examining the relationship between school-based performing arts engagement and academic achievement for Black males. AAMAID is a model which blends components of Academic Self-Concept theory (Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988) and Critical Race theory (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to build a more effective framework for understanding how African American males formulate their academic identities. AAMAID contends that, for African American males, academic identity development is an individually developed psychological process that is also affected by racially biased educational practices. The data analysis process enabled me to develop themes which reflected the academic outcomes and school

experiences of African American males who graduated from an arts-oriented high school. The themes and sub-themes identified through the data analysis process provided insights into how psychological and structural factors intersect to influence the academic and life outcomes experienced by the participants in this study.

Theme I: Experiencing a Positive School Climate

The narrative data obtained from the participants in this study clearly demonstrated that school climate had an important influence on participants' academic performance and school experiences. School climate refers to the nature of daily school experiences students, school personnel, and parents have on a daily basis (NSCC, 2015), and is influenced by interpersonal relationships, instructional practices and administrative policies used to operate schools (Kramer et al., 2013). School climate is an important measure for understanding how well schools support academic success and positive school experiences for students. Positive school climates promote school achievement among students and have been associated with gains in performance across subject areas. Additionally, improvements in school climates correlate with decreased suspension and expulsion rates (Thapa & Cohen, 2013).

The AAMAID framework highlights prescriptions for improving academic outcomes for African American males, and identifies culturally relevant instructional and administrative practices as strategies which can potentially improve school performance and enhance academic identity development for students in this population. Practices which promote a positive school climate are designed to increase academic engagement and enhance school belonging. Participants in this study indicated that, overall, Piedmont School of the Arts developed and maintained a positive school environment that was

conducive to learning. Many of the strategies noted by participants which enhanced school climate are identified within AAMAID as strategies which contributed to the academic success of African American males.

All of the participants in the study indicated that Piedmont School of the Arts was a safe environment for learning. School safety is a central element of positive school climate. Respondents drew contrasts between the school environment and the community the school was located in. They all indicated that the neighborhood was rough but that once they were on school grounds and inside the school they experienced a sense of physical safety and felt well protected from harm. Cameron stated that teachers and administrators were open with students about safety concerns and worked to make sure students felt well protected. Marcus indicated that positive teacher-student relationships contributed to the safety and security he experienced at PSOA.

Several participants admitted that bullying presented a challenge to their social-emotional safety, particularly during the 9th grade. Gary and Cameron cited instances in which they were bullied, but also discussed how they developed strategies for dealing with bullying as they matured. While individual students experienced some bullying, respondents indicated that it was not a pervasive problem and did not hamper their ability to learn.

Participants also indicated that, for the most part, they experienced positive relationships with their teachers. The quality of teacher-student relationships is an important gauge of school climate (NSCC, 2015), and plays an influential role in determining student achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). All participants shared anecdotes which demonstrated that they had experienced positive relationships with their

academic and performing arts teachers, and that these relationships supported their growth and development as students and as performing artists. Jason and Marcus recounted having positive relationships with teachers which continued to exist until the time they were interviewed for this study.

The AAMAID framework identifies positive teacher-student relationships as a strategy that improves academic engagement among African American males (Crosnoe, 2002; Lynn et al., 2010). Strong and healthy teacher-student relationships promote academic achievement and help create positive school experiences (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Lynn et al., 2010). Teachers serve as important resources for helping African American males improve academic performance and become successful students (Toldson et al., 2013). Narrative data provided by participants indicated that the overall quality of teacher-student relationships at PSOA supported African American males' academic success.

While most of the narratives participants shared about their teachers were positive, there were instances which demonstrated unhealthy teacher-student relationships which affected student performance and classroom experiences. Gary recalled having a negative relationship with Mr. Delaney (a pseudonym), one of his acting instructors. Gary felt Mr. Delaney underestimated his African American students and practiced racist casting policies. African American students were never cast in featured roles in any of the shows Mr. Delaney directed. Gary felt like he was one of the strongest actors in the school, but Mr. Delaney's discriminatory casting practices were a source of resentment for Gary. His disdain for Mr. Delaney's instructional practices negatively affected his classroom experiences and overall performance in the class.

Respondents also reported that students were actively encouraged to collaborate in performing arts and academic settings. All participants offered narratives which indicated that collaboration was an instructional practice that was used widely by teachers at PSOA. Participants indicated that collaborative learning enhanced academic and performing arts engagement, and provided students with new and unexpected learning opportunities. Jason, Cameron and Marcus all mentioned situations in which a challenging collaborative learning experience led them to acquire new and relevant information. The AAMAID framework contends that providing collaborative learning experiences will improve engagement and boost academic achievement for African American males. Collaborative learning is a body of culturally relevant instructional practices which require students to interact, build knowledge together and take responsibility for each other's learning. Students who engage in collaborative learning activities are more highly engaged, demonstrate enhanced critical thinking skills, and retain information longer than students who work individually (Dooly, 2008; Totten et al., 1989). Collaborative learning practices are beneficial for African American males. Black males who have access to collaborative learning experiences have more supportive classroom relationships with peers, and exhibit lower levels of learning anxiety (Boykin et al., 2004; Wood & Jocius, 2013). Evidence derived from this study suggests that the collaborative learning practices experienced by the participants in this study enhanced their academic engagement, improved their academic and performing arts learning experiences, and supported their academic success.

All participants in this study reported having a peak experience while attending PSOA. Peak experiences involve engagement in a difficult yet gratifying task which

takes a great deal of skill to complete (Croft, 2008; Csikzentmihaly, 1990; Maslow, 1994). Peak experiences in academic settings promote positive school climate. Such experiences enhance student engagement, encourage school attendance and improve academic performance (Croft, 2008). For participants in this study, peak experiences were transformational learning opportunities for them. Participants reported that peak experiences improved self-confidence, enhanced artistic and academic identity development, and encouraged greater appreciation for the academic and performing arts experiences afforded to them at PSOA.

Overall, participant narratives highlighted the existence of a positive school climate at PSOA. Many of the elements cited by participants as factors which promoted a positive school climate were culturally relevant practices which are identified within the AAMAID framework as factors which can improve academic engagement, enhance school belonging, and boost school performance (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Providing a safe learning environment, creating positive teacher-student relationships, utilizing collaborative learning strategies, and providing students with peak experiences are all practices which support the AAMAID framework's aim of improving outcomes and enhancing school experiences for African American males, and were effectively being implemented at PSOA.

Theme 2: Performing Arts Education had a Positive Impact on Academic Achievement

Performing arts education and academic achievement was a second theme which emanated from interviews and conversations with participants. Respondents reported that their performing arts experiences promoted academic skill development, improved academic motivation and encouraged higher education attainment. While there is a

substantial body of literature which links performing arts learning with academic achievement and cognitive development among students in the general population, much less is known about the specific benefits of performing arts education on the academic identity development and school achievement of African American males. The participants in this study provided important information on the effects performing arts education has on Black male high school students' academic performance.

All participants in this study drew connections between their participation in the performing arts and their academic skill development. Respondents commonly drew connections between theater arts training and reading skill development. They identified links between their theater arts classroom, rehearsal and performing experiences and the enhancement of their reading comprehension and vocabulary development skills. Paris indicated that his experiences reading and interpreting theatrical scripts allowed him to expand his vocabulary. When he read scripts from plays that were written about people from other cultures or who lived during different eras, he invariably encountered words he was unfamiliar with. In order to truthfully deliver his lines he had to make sure he studied the meanings of these new words. His theatrical training expanded his vocabulary, because he had to continually learn the meanings of new words and phrases. Additionally, Paris indicated that his experiences reading and analyzing plays helped him learn to read for subtext, or the deeper, hidden meaning that can be found in theatrical dialog. Reading for subtext is a higher order reading comprehension skill. Jason stated that his experiences in his dance classes enhanced his writing skills. His dance teachers integrated writing into the curriculum, which challenged him to improve his grammar, syntax, and narrative writing skills.

One of the primary prescriptions of AAMAID is to improve Black males' academic performance by enhancing academic engagement. The anecdotal evidence provided by participants suggests that performing arts learning experiences improve academic engagement by providing Black males with opportunities to use hands-on, interactive learning methods. Hands-on, or kinesthetic learning has been identified as a culturally relevant practice which boosts academic engagement and improves academic skill development (Howard, 2014; Kunjufu, 2005). Participant reports which link performing arts learning with academic skill development demonstrate that the culturally relevant instructional practices outlined within the AAMAID framework have been used to improve academic skill development among Black males who have attended PSOA.

Performing arts education and academic motivation was another sub-theme identified by participants. PSOA had a straightforward administrative policy which motivated students to strive for high levels of academic achievement. The school's administration had a longstanding school-wide policy which stipulated that students must maintain at least a "C" average to participate in performances and other extracurricular activities. All respondents discussed this policy as an administrative practice which challenged them to work hard in all of their academic and performing arts classes. They all had a passion for performing, so they worked hard to make sure they had the grades needed to participate in performances. AAMAID stresses the application of administrative practices that motivate high academic performance among African American males. Based on participant reports, this administrative practice motivated Black males who attended PSOA to strive for high performance across content areas.

Three of the five participants identified their performing arts education

experiences at PSOA as the primary reason why they attended college. Marcus, Jason, and Paris stated that receiving a college preparatory academic education, combined with training and experience in the performing arts provided them with the foundation they needed to gain admittance into highly rated collegiate performing arts programs. Marcus and Jason stated that they each had several Black male peers who credited PSOA with providing them with the academic and artistic preparation necessary to gain admittance to arts-based colleges and universities. College going respondents stated that attending Piedmont School of the Arts improved their academic skills, bolstered their self-confidence and solidified their artistic identities. As a result of their experiences, they began to see the performing arts as a viable career choice, and actively sought higher education opportunities which would prepare them to pursue professional opportunities in their chosen artistic disciplines.

The fact that the majority of participants in this study attended college level performing arts programs supports the literature on arts participation and college enrollment. Research findings demonstrate that arts-engaged high school students are more likely to attend college than their peers with lower levels of arts engagement (Catterall et al., 2012; Elpus, 2014). The data derived from this study has added significance because it provides a lens for examining performing arts education and college attendance for African American males. AAMAID contends that strategies which improve academic outcomes for African American males should be explored and instituted widely. A challenging curriculum which combined college preparatory academics with high levels of performing arts engagement provided three of the five participants in this study with the foundation necessary to attend and persist through

college. Thus, performing arts education may be a strategy that should be included more thoroughly in high schools that serve African American males.

Theme 3: African American Males, Arts Based Performance and Positive Racial Identity

The experience of being an African American male in an arts-based school was a third prominent theme drawn from the interviews and conversations conducted with participants. Respondents provided important insights into the experience of being a Black male at a diverse, urban public arts-oriented high school. Participants spoke in depth about the importance of having highly qualified, caring and committed African American male teachers who supported their academic success at PSOA. AAMAID targets specific strategies which are proven to enhance school achievement and academic identity development among Black males. Increasing the number of African American male teachers in schools that serve Black male students is a culturally relevant strategy that is in keeping with the AAMAID framework. African American male teachers provide critical academic and social-emotional supports for Black students. Additionally, African American male teachers improve academic outcomes for Black students. African American students who spend at least a year with an African American teacher demonstrate gains in standardized test scores (Lewis, 2006). African American male teachers serve as role models for Black male students as well.

All participants in this study identified Black male teachers as essential to their academic and artistic success at the school. For Gary, the addition of two African American male teachers changed the quality of his overall school experience. Prior to their arrival, Gary was denied opportunities to land leading or featured roles in theatrical productions at the school. During his 10th grade year the school hired an African

American male choir teacher and an African American male musical theater instructor. These teachers collaborated and began producing Black plays and musicals. As a result, Gary was able to earn featured and lead parts in productions put on at the school. This made his performing arts experiences more positive and improved his outlook on the school. Cameron, Jason, Marcus and Paris all spoke at length about Mr. Marshall, an African American male who served as Director of the school's musical theater program. All participants in the study cited Mr. Marshall as the teacher who challenged them to do their best work on stage and in class. He was widely regarded by participants as a school staff member who changed the tenor of the environment at PSOA and made it a safe space for African American males.

Respondents also addressed the sub-theme of Black arts for Black artists. Each participant discussed the importance of producing works by Black artists which featured Black performers. AAMAID specifically promotes the use of culturally relevant learning experiences to improve academic engagement among Black male students. Producing and directing performances written by and about Black people would be an ideal way to promote cultural relevancy because it provides African American male performing arts students with opportunities to perform works which draw on their own cultural and linguistic experiences.

All participants discussed their involvement in Black productions at PSOA. For four of the five participants, their peak experiences involved performing in Black productions. Gary cited playing the lead in the musical *Purlie* as his peak experience, and Cameron, Marcus, and Paris discussed their experiences performing in *The Color Purple* as their peak experience.

Black males' school experiences at PSOA was the third and final sub-theme which evolved under the theme of African American males in an arts-based school. When asked directly, four of the five respondents stated that Piedmont School of the Arts was a good school for Black males to attend. Jason said it was a "great" school for African American males to attend because teachers at the school challenged them academically and artistically. Paris said PSOA was a great school for African American males because Mr. Marshall created a diversity of opportunities for Black males to be cast in Black productions and in diverse roles that Black performers generally did not get to play. Cameron discussed cultural diversity as his reason for why PSOA was a good option for African American males. He expressed the concern that African American males are often denied exposure to people from other cultures and that having opportunities to form relationships with people from different backgrounds is an important experience for Black males to have. Marcus also said PSOA was a "great" school for African American males. He felt that the faculty at the school was very supportive of Black males, and that attending the school gave him a purpose in life.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

This study's findings have implications for researchers, policy makers, and educators who are committed to improving academic outcomes for African American males in U.S. schools. The goal of this study was to examine the utilization of school-based performing arts as a strategy for stimulating academic identity development and improving school performance for African American male high school students. The body of literature is replete with studies which explore school inequities and examine disparities in academic performance and school outcomes experienced by African

American males, as compared with their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Lynn et al., 2010; Schott Foundation, 2010, 2012, 2015; Tatum, 2012). Rather than rehashing the problem, this study connected academic identity development to school achievement, and analyzed the potential role that school-based performing arts may have on academic outcomes for African American male high school students.

The existing literature indicates that performing arts learning opportunities can improve cognitive development, bolster academic achievement and enhance school outcomes for students (Caterall et al., 2012; College Board, 2009; Rupert, 2006; Scheuler, 2010), but few studies directly explore the impact that learning in and through the arts has on school achievement and academic identity development among African American males.

The results from this study indicate that educators, policy makers and community members must be open to curricular approaches which may improve performance for African American male students. Findings from this study suggest that learning in and through the performing arts may be an effective strategy for improving school performance and academic identity development for African American males. According to their self-reports, all participants in this study experienced benefits from participating in a school program which offered students a challenging academic curriculum and highly engaged, daily classroom experiences in the performing arts. The majority of participants noted that their performing arts experiences improved academic skill development, contributed heavily to positive school experiences, encouraged positive teacher-student relationships and created opportunities for them all to have peak experiences, which encourage school attendance and enhance academic engagement.

Additionally, the combined experiences of participating in school-based performing arts and solid, college prep level classroom instruction provided the foundation necessary for most participants to attend college. This raises questions about access to school-based performing arts instruction. If performing arts participation has such a positive effect on African American males, then maybe performing arts education programs should not be confined to arts-based schools and should be offered more widely, so that a larger number of African American males get opportunities to reap the benefits of performing arts education.

The AAMAID framework contends that academic identity development is a two-fold process for African American males. Academic identity development and academic achievement are reciprocal processes; academic achievement influences academic identity development, and academic identity development influences future academic performance. Additionally, African American males face risk factors which make it more difficult for them to perform well academically. In addition to describing academic identity development processes for African American males, AAMAID is also prescriptive, and suggests strategies for improving academic identity development and school achievement for African American males. Findings from this study suggest that school-based performing arts programs may be ideal for enhancing academic identity development and improving school experiences for Black male high school students.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

Several limitations to this study are noted here. This study was limited by the sample size. A larger sample may have provided a greater variety of responses between participants. This study was also limited by the researcher's decision to focus primarily

on the performing arts. It is possible that visual arts students should have been incorporated into this study. Involving students who studied the visual arts at PSOA may have widened the scope of the study and provided the researcher with richer and more varied data concerning the connection between school-based arts immersion and academic identity development among African American male high school students.

Another potential limitation concerns my role as the researcher. As the only researcher working on this project, there was a risk of researcher bias. To mitigate potential researcher bias I used triangulation, member checks, peer reviews and debriefing.

Recommendations

Findings from this study reveal the need for researchers, policy makers and educators to consider performing arts education as a potential strategy for improving academic outcomes for African American males. This study was conducted in order to fill a noticeable gap in the literature on performing arts education and academic performance among African American male students. Thus far, very few research studies have been conducted which specifically target performing arts education and school performance for Black male students (Thomas, 2011). Several speculative explorations of the potential benefits of performing arts education for African American males have been written (Kazembe, 2014; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014), but few, if any, quantitative or qualitative studies have been conducted which specifically address the effects of sustained, school-based performing arts learning experiences for African American males.

Future research should include well structured, quantitative studies which capture

potential correlations between performing arts engagement, cognitive development and

academic achievement for African American male students. Such studies would reveal

valuable information about how dance, theater, and instrumental and vocal music affect

academic skills development, influence performance in academic content areas, and

impact achievement on standardized tests. Additionally, longitudinal studies should be

conducted which examine the impact of long term performing arts engagement on

African American males' school and post-school outcomes. More qualitative research

should also be conducted. Future qualitative studies will provide additional details for

understanding the effects of performing arts education on African American males.

    The results of this study necessitate the inclusion of recommendations for

education policy makers as well. The findings from this report challenge national, state,

and local education policymakers to review the existing literature on performing arts

education and academic achievement. In addition, State and local policy makers should

also conduct assessments to determine the levels of access African American males and

students from other underserved groups have to school-based performing arts learning

experiences. Federal, state, and district leaders should combine resources and develop

school-based performing arts pilot programs which integrate the performing arts into

schools that serve students of color and students from low income backgrounds. The

expectation should be to increase access to school-based performing arts programs for

African American males and students from other underserved populations.

    The findings from this study suggest that educators who work with and support

African American males familiarize themselves with the literature on performing arts

education and student achievement. This will provide them with a foundational level of

understanding concerning the effects of performing arts learning on academic achievement and school experiences. Interested educators should form learning communities and work together to find meaningful ways in which to integrate research-based performing arts education into daily instruction. In schools that lack access to performing arts programs, teachers and administrators should work with district leaders, businesses, and political leaders to find ways to begin including instruction in music, dance, and theater into the school curriculum.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This study examined the relationship between school-based performing arts participation and the academic identity development and school experiences of African American males who attended an arts-based high school. Narrative data from interviews revealed that, while attending Piedmont School of the Arts, participants experienced a positive school climate. The environment fostered within the school afforded respondents a sense of safety, engendered positive relationships with teachers and peers, provided opportunities to learn collaboratively, and generated peak experiences. Additionally, participants reported that their performing arts education experiences had a positive impact on their academic achievement. The combination of performing arts engagement and college prep academics fostered academic skill development, enhanced achievement motivation, and encouraged college enrollment. Finally, data derived from this study suggests that attending PSOA helped participants develop more positive racial identities. They benefitted from positive interactions with Black male teachers and gained greater appreciation for African American culture by performing in works that were written by Black artists. Overall, the participants in this study stated that Piedmont School of the

Arts was a positive academic and creative experience for them and for their African American male peers. Such findings indicate that performing arts education warrants greater attention from researchers, educators and policymakers who are committed to improving academic outcomes and school experiences for African American males in U.S. schools.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background

1. What is your name? What are you doing in life now (working, going to college, performing professionally, etc.)?

2. When and where did you start participating in the performing arts? (church, school, community center, etc.)

3. What is your performing arts specialty? Music, dance, theatre, or a combination?

4. When did you begin studying and/or participating in the performing arts in a school setting?

5. When did you attend Piedmont School of the Arts? What was your performing arts focus while you attended Piedmont School of the Arts?

School Experiences

6. Did you enjoy attending Piedmont School of the Arts? Why or why not?

7. Did you feel safe at Piedmont School of the Arts? Why or why not?

8. Did you feel like you fit in socially at school? Why or why not?

9. Did you feel like you have good relationships with your teachers? Please explain why you felt these relationships were good or bad.

10. Did teachers and administrators challenge you to excel in your performing arts and academic classes? Please feel free to discuss this in detail.

11. On a daily basis, would you describe attending Piedmont School of the Arts as a positive or negative experience? Please explain your answer.

12. Did teachers encourage you to collaborate, or work together with other students on assignments, performances and extracurricular activities?

13. What was the best experience that you had when you attended Piedmont School of the Arts? Please describe what you were involved in, where the experience took place, and why it was such a positive experience. How did this experience influence your feelings about the school?

14. What was the worst, or most difficult experience you had when you attended Piedmont School of the Arts? Please describe what you were involved in, where the experience took place and why it was such a negative experience. How did it affect your feelings about the school?

15. What kinds of situations and experiences would have made being a student at Piedmont School of the Arts a better experience?

16. Overall, do you think Piedmont School of the Arts is a good school for African American males to attend? Why or why not?

Academic Identity

17. Describe yourself when you were a student at Piedmont School of the Arts. How did you learn best (seeing, hearing doing, etc.)?

18. In general, what were your academic strengths (reading, writing, mathematics, etc.)? Identify and describe them.

19. What would you consider your academic weaknesses (reading, writing, mathematics, etc.)? Identify and describe them.

20. What was your favorite academic subject when you attended Piedmont School of the Arts (English, math, science, social studies)?

21. What was your favorite performing arts class or subject while attending Piedmont School of the Arts (music theory, scene study, modern dance, etc.)?

22. How did your involvement in the performing arts influence your performance in your academic classes? Was it been positive, negative or did it have no affect?

23. Do you consider yourself a good reader? Do you consider yourself a good writer? Have your performing arts experiences affected your reading and writing skills? Please explain and provide examples.

24. What kind of reading and writing assignments did you have to do in your performing arts classes? Please give some examples.

25. Which experiences have had the greatest impact on your academic success? Home and community experiences? School experiences? Performing arts experiences? Please give examples.

26. What kinds of additional opportunities and experiences would help you become a better student or perform better academically at Piedmont School of the Arts?

27. In closing, what would you like to share with the current teachers and administrators at Piedmont School of the arts that may help African American male students improve their performance in the classroom and in performing arts situations?