

IMPACT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTIFICATION WITH ACADEMICS ON THE  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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Impact of Self-Esteem and Identification with Academics  
on the Academic Achievement of African American Students

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### Abstract

Ed Bell. IMPACT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTIFICATION WITH ACADEMICS ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS.

(Under the direction of Dr. Katie Johnson-Morgan) School of Education, November 2009. This study examined the impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the academic achievement of African American students in a charter school setting. Ninety-three students participated in this study. Using a pretest/posttest control group design, both the experimental group and the control group were administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory and the School Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) as pretest measures of self-esteem and identification with academics at the beginning of the experiment. The control and experimental groups were administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory and the School Perceptions Questionnaire (SPQ) at the end of the experiment. The control group received no intervention between the pretest and the posttest, while the experimental group was taught the Start Something curriculum. The grade point average (GPA) of each of the students in the control group and the experimental group were recorded at the beginning and of the experiment. African-American students who participated in the experimental group and were taught the Start Something curriculum had higher grade point averages than students in the control group who were not taught the curriculum. No differences were noted in self-esteem and identification with academics for the control group and experimental groups, as shown by pretest and posttest measures.

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Impact of Self-Esteem and Identification with Academics  
on the Academic Achievement of African American Students

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is a large body of research available investigating the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement in African American students due to the well-documented assumption that self-esteem is highly correlated with academic achievement and identification with academics (Osborne & Walker, 1997). A general assumption is that low self-esteem correlates positively with low academic achievement, and high self-esteem correlates positively with high academic achievement (Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995; Osborne, 1997; Hale, 2001). However, much of the research literature that examines whether positive self-esteem enhanced academic achievement, or vice versa, has been inconsistent (Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995).

In the fall of 1999, nearly 3.4 million students entered kindergarten in public schools in the United States (Johnston & Viadero, 2000). Current trends indicate that Caucasian children would be twice as likely as their African American classmates and three times as likely as Hispanics to have a college degree (Johnston & Viadero, 2000). One of the most pressing concerns in American public education today is the so-called race gap in student achievement. The academic gap defined the difference between African American and Caucasian students' achievement scores (Bell & Alvarez, 2004).

Improving the quality of public schooling in America has been a consuming issue over the last 30 years (Bell & Alvarez, 2004). For decades, the media and the public have criticized educational institutions for producing mediocre educational results. The government has been pouring astronomical amounts of money into education to improve student outcomes (Hwang, 1995).

The struggle to improve the education for poor students and particularly non-White students has existed for a long time (Hale, 2001; Asmen, 1989). After trying methods such as education vouchers, charter schools, increased testing, and school uniforms, educational leaders are concluding that schools are not the answer (Sampson, 2002). Sampson (2002) concluded that despite inconsistencies in race, income, and neighborhood, student performance varied across the board. Particularly, parental supervision and the provision to help with homework are critical factors in the academic success of students (Sampson, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Hale, 2001). Family played a crucial role in ensuring academic achievement (Sampson, 2002; Johnson, 2007).

Restricted opportunities, inequitable funding, segregation, and institutional racism add to the history of African American children's self-esteem (Bailey, 2004). As a result, African American students' academic achievement has been less than that of White students (Holliday, 1985). African American students' achievement is associated with various personal child attributes such as self-esteem and achievement motivation (Holliday).

A key tenet of the American dream is that all citizens are entitled to equality of educational opportunities (Hale, 2001; Asemen, 1989). Since the *Brown v. Board of*

*Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision in 1954, desegregation of public schools has remained an important component of federal and state policies designed to expand educational opportunities for racial minority youth (Mickelson, 1999). The educational rationale for school desegregation rests largely on claims that it improves the access of minority students to the higher quality of education generally made available to Caucasian Americans (Mickelson, 1999). Equal opportunity has improved both minority students' educational outcomes and academic goals (Mickelson, 1999).

The disparity in school performance tied to race and ethnicity, known as the achievement gap, has appeared in grades, test scores, course selection, and college graduation rates (Johnston & Viadero, 2000). After decades of desegregation efforts, during which the gap between Blacks and Whites closed substantially, progress has stalled. At the same time, the greater diversity of school populations and the rapid growth of minorities have reshaped the problem with a more complex set of issues (Johnston & Viadero, 2000).

#### *Self-esteem Relationship to Achievement*

Premature or unearned self-esteem can occur when adults build students up by overinflating their achievements (Kohn, 1994). This practice makes students feel good, but this exaggeration is a shortcoming to the natural process for motivation and self-esteem building (Kohn, 1994). Some students tend to think of themselves too highly, which can negatively affect their motivation by giving them a false sense of achievement.

Furthermore, many people with high self-esteem exaggerate their successes and positive traits (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). High self-esteem often

refers to people who accept their good qualities along with narcissistic, defensive, and conceited traits (Baumeister et al., 2003). The modest correlations between self-esteem and school performance do not indicate that high self-esteem leads to good performance (Baumeister et al.). Boosting self-esteem may not lead to improvement in academic performance. People with high self-esteem claim to be likable and attractive, to have better relationships, and to make better impressions on others than people with low self-esteem. Objective measures do not confirm most of these beliefs (Baumeister et al.).

High self-esteem makes people more willing to assert their opinions (Baumeister et al.; Cicirelli, 1997). Leadership opportunities promote the development of self-esteem by offering self-esteem building activities (Byrne, 1984). People with high self-esteem show stronger inclination to speak out and challenge the perceptions of others (Byrne, 1984). In view of high self-esteem, indiscriminate praise might just as easily promote narcissism, which is undesirable (Byrne, 1984). Despite popular beliefs that high self-esteem facilitates academic achievement, only a modest correlation exists between self-esteem and school performance (Byrne, 1984).

Self-esteem investigators would like to show that self-esteem is vital to social and academic development (Kohn, 1994; Byrne, 1984). They have embarked on a major effort to help students feel better about themselves. Researchers have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to demonstrate any of this through research. Kohn (1994) stated:

No one has shown that self-esteem does not matter. This is quite true, but it is generally impossible to prove the negative. Moreover, the burden of proof would seem to rest with those arguing that our education system

ought to be attending to a given factor . . . . Self-esteem is related to things other than academic achievement performance and social behavior. (p. 274)

Kohn also concluded:

Self-esteem may not be sufficient to produce achievement, but it may be a necessary component. It is entirely possible that children who feel very good about themselves are not necessarily high-achievers or caring people. If high self-esteem failed to guarantee desirable outcomes but low self-esteem actively interfered with them, the overall correlation might be less than impressive . . . . If the techniques for measurement are so problematic, how can we rely on studies using these measures to challenge the importance of self-esteem? (p. 275)

The relationship between self-esteem and higher achievement is not clear (Kohn, 1994). Some researchers say that self-esteem and achievement are causally related (Kohn, 1994). Students may feel good because they do well rather than do well because they feel good about themselves (Baumeister et al, 2003.). These possibilities are mutually exclusive. Still others, however, argue that neither is truly an independent variable. Something else may be driving self-esteem and achievement, giving the appearance of an intimate connection between the two (Kohn, 1994).

Academic achievement of minority students is hindered by low self-esteem in a White-dominated society (Bankston & Min, 2002). The relatively strong performance of children of immigrants in general and children of Asian immigrants in particular further

complicates the self-esteem academic issue (Bankston & Min, 2002). The literature review suggested that these children face insecurities and difficulties that are inconsistent with high self-esteem. Asians showed the lowest levels of reported self-esteem of the major racial/ethnic groups but also the highest grade point averages (GPAs). African American students, on the other hand, showed the highest levels of reported self-esteem but reported relatively low grade point averages (Bankston & Min, 2002). Moreover, the research literature reported that African American students have higher self-esteem than White children do, and that Black and White girls demonstrated lower self-esteem than boys did, with White girls showing the lowest self-esteem of all (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971).

One source of high self-esteem is the evaluation of one's success (Lipscomb, 1975; Bankston & Min, 2002). The segment of the Black population that has made the most progress in society feels a sense of achievement and motivation (Lipscomb, 1975). Middle-class African Americans have been more successful in maintaining high self-esteem (Lipscomb, 1975). In particular, according to Hale (2001), pro-Black orientation has incorporated the following elements in an effort to stress the positive characteristics of being Black. These included: refusal to disparage Blackness as related to Black people; self-acceptance and revaluation of Blackness; the doctrine of authenticity, or the proposition that experiences and ideas of Black people are genuine and human; defining the unique Black experience; growing attention paid to Black accomplishments in history, art, literature, and music; creation of the idea of Black power; and discovering

identity through these experiences and within the life of the Black community (Hale 2001).

In addition, the literature reported that African American children from broken families have lower self-esteem in desegregated than in segregated schools. This finding suggests that African American students surrounded by other African Americans experience reduced negative effects of societal prejudice and discrimination (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). In particular, the landmark Coleman Report of 1966, which contradicted expectations and has had a larger impact on education than any other piece of social science research, stated that student achievement was related more to family background than to either race or schooling (Bell & Alvarez, 2004).

Students are motivated to achieve success by promoting intrinsic motivation (Wilson & Corpus, 2001). Intrinsic motivation connoted doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2000) stated, “When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards” (p. 56). In humans, intrinsic motivation is not the only form of motivation, but it is pervasive and important (Deci & Ryan, 2000). From birth onward, humans, in their healthiest state, are active, inquisitive, curious, and playful creatures, displaying a readiness to learn and to explore (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### *Motivation and Achievement*

Intrinsic motivation concerns active engagement with tasks that people find interesting and meaningful (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This level of interest promoted

responsibility and accountability and drove people to succeed or fail (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When students have a sense of control and choice, their level of competence is the impetus for increased intrinsic motivation (Wilson & Corpus, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000). To improve academic achievement, intrinsic, motivated students seemed to incorporate the goal of wanting to succeed in an academic and social context (Wilson & Corpus, 2001).

People's commitment to become involved in activities that satisfy their curiosity moves them to a point of satisfaction and fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Competence and autonomy are essential for intrinsic motivation and interest, but the need for competence and autonomy does not provide a sufficient definition of intrinsic motivation (Dev, 1997). Intrinsically motivated behaviors produced engaging activities such as earning higher grades and persisting with difficult tasks (Dev, 1997). Good performance is not intrinsically rewarding. Poor performance is not intrinsically punishing (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Students work toward goals that are meaningful and valuable to them (Osborne & Walker, 2007). Anderman and Midgley (1997) provided strategies that promote intrinsic motivation: instilling and communicating to others that ability is malleable, delivering various teaching practices and strategies, and providing an environment for students to achieve (p. 42).

Furthermore, “extrinsic motivation is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 60). For example, students who do homework only due to fear of parental sanctions for not doing homework are extrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Similarly, if students

do work that is valuable for a career are doing so because it is of value rather than out of interest (Deci & Ryan, 2000). External regulation, which is evident when no internalization has occurred, represents the most controlled form of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). External rewards, while still popular, generally have only a short-term positive effect and possible long-term negative effects on learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Anderman and Midgley, 1997).

### *Domain Identification*

A strong sense of identification with academics is often incompatible with a positive self-image (Steele, 1997; Osborne, 1997; Voelkel, 1997). Steele (1997) asserted that the more a student of color invests in academics, the more likely that student is to experience stereotype threat. Beliefs about restricted opportunities in society may lead to misidentification (Steele, 1997).

Claude Steele (1992) developed the stereotype threat hypothesis. Steele argued that cultural stereotypes depict African American students as intellectually inferior. Steele concluded that this stigma of inferiority threatens African American students' self-esteem. According to Steele (1992), African American students, for fear of corroborating an existing stereotype, disengage or disconnect their self-esteem from the academic arena. Steele (1992) posited that African American students exhibit simultaneous low academic achievement and high self-esteem.

Identification with academics is a special case of domain recognition, the extent to which an individual defines the self through a role or performance in a domain (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Strong domain identification could lead to increased

motivation to achieve the academic needs of students. Academic motivation is an important dimension of student performance (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Research examining identification with a domain as an outcome measure has tended to assess whether identification with a domain increased or decreased based on the positive or negative outcomes in that domain (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Identification with academics is a construct that merits investigation (Osborne, 1997). Steele (1992) noted that discrepancies in academic performance between African American and Caucasian students are partly a result of differences in identification. Steele (1992) asserted that African American students experience anxiety over academic failure in educational environments. These students appear to confirm the negative group stereotypes of failure.

The achievement of African American students has continued to dominate educational discussions. However, Hale (2001) has suggested that teachers use various teaching styles to reach the needs of African American children such as cooperative learning and hands-on activities. Teachers of African American students must understand the role culture has on learning styles and adapt teaching styles to coincide with these learning styles (Wilson-Jones & Cashton, 2004).

### *Background*

Reading the newspaper, attending professional association conferences, and even watching television will quickly convey the impression that self-esteem is a major determinant of what people accomplish and how fulfilled and rewarding their lives are (Steinberg, Onrush, and Brown, 1991). This belief in the potency of self-esteem affected

how rewarding a life is for people. For many years, self-esteem has received a great deal of attention in research and theory (Siring & Siring, 2004).

The importance of self-esteem comes from a psychological developmental framework (Waltz, 1990). To cope adequately with life's challenges and decisions, people need to believe that they deserve happiness and joy (Lipscomb, 1975). Lacking a belief in either may lead to external productivity without internal creativity and the drive for a healthy self-esteem (Lip comb, 1975). The effects of self-esteem provided helpful strategies in making career decisions and in addressing challenging tasks (Waltz, 1990).

Although there is debate among researchers about the impact of self-esteem on adolescents' academic performance, self-esteem seems to influence a variety of developmental outcomes, such as making choices (Siring & Siring, 2004). Self-esteem is concerned with the value people place on themselves. Since this quality is the evaluative component of self-knowledge, self-esteem is perception rather than reality (Baumeister et al., 2003). Definitions of self-esteem vary considerably in their psychological sophistication (Waltz, 1991; Greenberg, 1972; Hutt, 2004). From an intuitive sense, high self-esteem means appreciating self and maintaining inherent worth (Waltz, 1991). More specifically, it means that a person has a positive attitude, evaluates self highly, and is convinced to do what is right in life (Waltz, 1991). In particular, the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility provided the following key findings in its efforts to educate the state's citizens about healthy social responsibility:

1. "Self-esteem empowers people to live responsibly."

2. "The lack of self-esteem may cause personal problems."
3. "The family begins the development of self-esteem. Self-esteem development has its origins in the formative stages of children's development."
4. "High self-esteem parents tend to instill a healthier self-concept in their children."
5. "Since children spend so much of their time in school, the environment of the school also plays a major role in the development of self-esteem. Schools that feature self-esteem as a clearly stated component of their goals, policies, and practices are more successful academically as well as in developing healthy self-esteem."
6. "People with high self-esteem reduce the likelihood of destructive and self-destructive behaviors such as child abuse, crime, and violence."
7. "Regardless of age, race, creed, or sex, an affirming environment in the home, school, and workplace is crucial for nurturing self-esteem."
8. "Healthier self-esteem comes at any age." (California State Department, 1990, p. 83)

Self-esteem education has provided educators with pedagogical techniques in addressing the needs of students (Koror, 2008; Hale, 2001). To help develop a positive self-concept in children, teachers can encourage students to ask probing questions and validate their responses. Self-esteem building activities and opportunities for personal skill-building development can promote student growth (Lee, 2003). Feeling good is an important part of our society and a critical phase of self-development (Koror, 2008). The way people look and feel tends to shape their interactions with others (Koror, 2008).

High levels of self-esteem and positive school, peer, and family connections may prove to be protective factors against youth involvement in risky behavior (King, 2002). Students who receive support from the community tend to overcome negative perceptions and begin on a positive path toward making the right choices (Hale, 2001). The encouragement of teachers provides the strength that many students need to succeed (Kohn, 1994). Past research questioned whether or not schools should help students feel better. The tone of this coverage has generally ranged from harshly critical to derogatory (Kohn, 1994). Some educators worry about how children feel while others concentrate on spending time on academics. Lane, Andrew, and Kyprianou, 2004). There is debate that an attempt to help students feel better would be an effective means to increase student performance (Kohn, 1994). The resulting high correlation between the measures of self-esteem and performance would reflect nothing more than the fact that the same question seems to measure different constructs (Baumeister et al., 2003).

People often determine their own self-esteem by indicating their responses on a self-reporting scale (Baumeister et al., 2003). People score high in self-esteem because they respond to a questionnaire by endorsing favorable statements about themselves (Baumeister et al., 2003). People who speak well of themselves do not respond negatively when filling out a self-esteem scale to address their behavior (Baumeister et al., 2003). People who like to describe themselves in glowing terms will be inclined to report that they get along well with others, are physically attractive, do well in school and work, and refrain from undesirable actions (Baumeister et al., 2003).

For many years, one of the most firmly entrenched sociological truisms was that Blacks have lower self-esteem than Caucasians (Heiss & Owens, 1972). For one thing, it appeared so reasonable on theoretical grounds. The general societal evaluation of Blacks was negative, and the accomplishments of the average Black were doomed to be lower because of the barriers faced in employment and leadership opportunities (Heiss & Owens, 1972; Deno and Beaulieu, 2002). Self-esteem includes healthy identity formation because students with high self-esteem function effectively in a variety of situations, including school contexts (Sirin & Sirin, 2004).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the impact and the relationship of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American students. The secondary purpose is to clarify this relationship and determine motivational interventions and strategies that might promote academic achievement among these students. A tertiary purpose is to discern interventions and practices that may be effective in the classroom.

#### *Hypotheses*

This study is an expansion of the literature and research surrounding the education of African American students. This study aims to provide clearer insights into the interaction of self-esteem and identification with academics among African American students. Specifically, this study seeks to test the following three hypotheses:

- (a) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum will perform better academically compared to those not exposed to the curriculum as shown by

grade point averages.

(b) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum will improve their self-esteem as shown by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

(c) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum will increase identification with academics as shown by the School Perceptions Questionnaire.

The results of this study will permit the implementation and utilization of more effective classroom strategies and interventions for raising achievement among young African American students. This research will pave the way for other relevant research for this often-neglected population.

The Start Something curriculum contains six units that guide students through activities and lessons that generate measurable improvements in self-esteem, academics, and attitudes toward learning and school. The Tiger Woods Foundation created the curriculum. Teachers, curriculum writers, and a consulting team from Minneapolis Public Schools and the University of Minnesota developed this curriculum in 2000. All of the curriculum materials are free and contain age-appropriate activities. Over 5 million students have taken part in the Start Something curriculum.

(<http://www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org/actionplan/who.php>)

The curriculum serves upper elementary, middle, and high school students. Quality Education Data Survey conducted a study in 2003 made of three phases: an online survey, qualitative research, and a pre- and post-outcome study with 333 students. The study's key findings were: (a) Students showed positive improvement in self-esteem after

participating in the curriculum, (b) students exhibited improved attitudes toward learning and school after exposure to the curriculum, and (c) students showed improvement in academic performance after exposure to the curriculum.

(<http://www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org/actionplan/who.php>)

Educators have reported positive comments in the fidelity of the Start Something curriculum. The curriculum was a key ingredient to students' success. Academic achievement improved as a result of the Start Something curriculum.

(<http://www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org/actionplan.php>) Since 2000, Girls Clubs of America, Communities in Schools, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, and schools in New York and California have all implemented the Start Something curriculum. (<http://www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org/actionplan.php>)

#### *Defining and Measuring Self-Esteem*

A major problem in attaining high, consistent correlations between self-esteem and academic achievement has been the lack of a common definition for self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; Enger, 1993). The absence of a common definition makes it difficult to cross-reference reliable data for replicating and expanding upon past research (Enger, 1993). Research literature provides a myriad of definitions of self-esteem. However, for the purposes of this study, the operational definition of self-esteem is the positive or negative value placed on one's own attributes (Enger, 1993), or the relative degree of worthiness, or acceptability, which people perceive their self-concept to possess (Rosenberg, 1965; Enger).

Other researchers have defined self-esteem as the subset of self-descriptive behaviors that involve self-evaluations (Ford, Obiakor, & Patton, 1997). Some research studies that examined the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement did not define the term (Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978). Another related problem is the use of a variety of instruments to measure self-esteem throughout the literature. The difficulty is determining if the different instruments are measuring the same construct. This study assessed self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory based on 5,024 high school juniors and seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York.

#### *Definitions of Related Terms*

- *Global self-esteem* refers to overall self-esteem and is roughly equivalent to personal self-esteem (Porter & Washington, 1979).
- *Middle school student* refers to a student in grades six through eight.
- *Personal self-esteem* refers to how one values one's individuality regardless of racial group and how people see themselves (Porter & Washington, 1979).
- *Racial self-esteem* refers to how the individual feels about the self as Black person (Porter & Washington, 1979). This term is used in various racial settings; however, for the purpose of this study it refers to African American students.
- *Self-concept* and *self-esteem* can be used interchangeably (Henry, 2005). These two words can define a person's total thoughts and feelings.

- *Self-efficacy* refers to a person's belief in his or her ability to organize and execute a course of action required to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1997; Johnston-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005).

In summary, self-esteem, in common usage, means a high opinion or respect of oneself (Reich, 1960). This positive evaluation of the self is a precondition for well-being. Human beings attempt to keep up a positive evaluation of themselves (Reich, 1960). Self-esteem is the affective or emotional aspect of self and generally refers to how people feel or how they see themselves (Huitt, 2004). The purpose of this study is to promote knowledge and understanding regarding the academic performance of African American students by addressing how self-esteem and identification with academics affects their achievement. The subsequent chapter outlines the research and practice of studying the impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American students.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The writer completed a review of the literature based on current and past research, past postulations from key researchers, and early self-esteem theorists. The writer examined the literature as it relates to understanding self-esteem and its implications to human growth and potential. In addition, the literature review provides a compendium and synthesis of information, introducing current research on self-esteem and identification with academics. The research in this section looks specifically at African American students. The writer outlines the debate regarding the impact of self-esteem on student achievement. Moreover, the literature review provides a deeper understanding of how the conversation has developed over the years concerning self-esteem and student achievement, particularly for African American children.

Steele (1992) postulated that African American students face a stereotype threat that weakens their academic prowess and ultimately causes them to withdraw from the academic domain as a way to protect their self-esteem. Steele (1992) wrote candidly about the concept of the stereotype threat, highlighting the notion that African American students disengage from the academic arena for fear of corroborating academic challenges or failures. Steele's (1992) hypothesis posited that when there are negative perceptions about the intellectual capacity of certain groups, members of that group suffer aversive consequences as a function of being the target of that negative stereotype. This theory concluded that members of a stigmatized domain are most likely to suffer the effects of stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Researchers continue to study and discuss root causes for African American students' school failure (Hale, 2001; Collins-Eaglin and Karabenick, 1993). While African American students continue to seek academic parity, researchers are uncertain about the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement (Enger, 1993; Ford, 1995). There is some debate about whether self-esteem improves academic achievement; the literature review is a mix of opinions as self-esteem proponents tie positive self-esteem to higher academic achievement (Baumeister et al., 2003; Hale, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995). Yet Baumeister et al. (2003) stated that a feel-good education does not necessarily lead to academic achievement.

Past research that centered on the achievement of African American students failed to address the variations among the African American communities that conducted race-comparative studies (Hill, 1997). This research compared African Americans as a whole to Caucasians as a group or studied only low-income African American students (Hill, 1997). Sirin & Jackson, (2001) reported that a paucity of research exist regarding the diversity of academic experiences among African American students. However, Wilson-Jones and Caston (2004) investigated how cooperative learning promoted academic success in African American males in grades three through six. The study included 16 students and used qualitative analyzed interviews. The study showed that cooperative learning was a factor in promoting academic success and was most conducive for academic achievement for this group of African American students.

### *Historical Context of Self-Esteem Research*

Harper (1970) listed esteem among the basic needs of all human beings. Harper suggested that the need for esteem must be satisfied before the individual can move comfortably toward gratifying his need to actualize a common, unique potential for learning and growth. To differentiate between the two, self-esteem connotes a high regard and respect, closely relating to a belief in self-pride (Harper, 1970). Self-esteem, conceptualized as an outcome, motive, and buffer, suggested no overall theory of a self-concept (Cast & Burke, 2002).

Self-esteem is an academic construct and “popular phenomenon, vigorously researched and debated, and sometimes imbued with magical qualities” (Owens & Stryker, 2001, p. 45). Self-esteem is one of the most important parts of the self-concept. In particular, there are several different components of self-concept: physical, academic, social, and interpersonal (Huitt, 2004). The social self-concept describes how individuals relate to others, and the transpersonal self-concept describes how individuals relate to unknowns (Huitt, 2004). Self-esteem has been one of the more researched aspects of personality over the past century (Cast & Burke, 2002). Self-esteem is an extremely popular construct within psychology, addressing virtually every other psychological concept or domain, including personality (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Self-esteem is also a widely used concept both in popular language and in psychology; it refers to an individual’s sense of his or her value of worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). While self-esteem refers to global evaluations of one’s

self-concept, it includes both evaluation of and knowledge about oneself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Further, self-concept clarity reflects the degree to which an individual's self-concept is consistent and stable (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007).

Self-esteem is among the most widely used studied constructs in psychology (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). A psychological database search for "self-esteem" resulted in more than 4,000 articles written in the last two decades (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). Yet a paucity of articles addresses the self-esteem concerns of African American males (Hale, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995). A central mental health component shaped the development of African American males from adolescence to adulthood (Franklin & Mizell, 1995).

The self-esteem movement has gone through a psychological transformation and deserves of celebration and recognition (Baumeister et al., 2003; Franklin & Mizell, 1995). The American public has begun to align itself with psychologists in altering the trajectory of the societal perception of what self-esteem means (Baumeister et al., 2003). It would not be in psychology's best interest to chastise the American public for accepting the advice of psychologists (Baumeister et al., 2003). Perhaps psychologists should reduce their own self-esteem and humbly resolve that next time "they will wait for a more thorough and solid empirical basis before making policy recommendations to the American public" (Baumeister et. al, 2003.).

Self-esteem centers on the objective self (Rosenberg, 1965). People tend to remain indifferent to information regarding their self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003). Self-esteem centers on how much value people place on themselves (Enger, 19930). The evaluative component of self-knowledge promotes self-esteem (Baumeister et al, 2003).

Self-esteem is perception rather than reality (Baumeister et al, 2003). A healthy self-esteem has been shown to produce a positive self-concept and self-confidence in social and academic settings (King, 2002). Self-esteem includes evaluation of a person's perspective in life in the following major areas: (Holliday, 2002, p. 73)

- (a) “inherited endowments”
- (b) “intelligence”
- (c) “physical characteristics”
- (d) “natural abilities”
- (e) “feeling likable”
- (f) “feeling lovable”

The scientific study of self-esteem appears to have its roots in the writings of William James. James believed that self-esteem is an affective phenomenon (Snuffer, 2004). Self-esteem is a dynamic process affected by successes and failures, so it is open to enhancement (Mruk, 1995).

Early theorists postulated various definitions and root meanings for self-esteem. Robert White had a psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approach to self-esteem (Kavussanu, Harnisch, 2000; Kohn, 1994). White concluded that self-esteem formed over a person's developmental lifespan. Individuals face choices and encounter decisions that shape their attitudes and beliefs. Rosenberg (1965) looked at self-esteem from a sociocultural approach, which states self-esteem is an attitude and a product of influences of culture, family, and interpersonal relationships.

On the contrary, Nathaniel Braden viewed self-esteem from a humanistic view and was the first person to define self-esteem in terms of worthiness and competence (Mruk, 1995). Braden believed that self-esteem is a basic human need and a lack of it would produce serious negative consequences (Mruk, 1995). Braden concluded that building self-esteem encouraged people to live in such a way that honors self (Mruk). Moreover, Seymour Epstein viewed self-esteem from a cognitive-experiential view. Self-esteem, according to Epstein, addressed a basic human need that motivates us consciously and unconsciously (Mruk, 1995).

There is undoubtedly no shortage of ways to define self-esteem. Psychologists define self-esteem in two distinct ways: earned self-esteem and global self-esteem (Mruk, 1995; Owens, Goodman, Stryker, 2001). Earned self-esteem characterizes people based on earning their own accomplishments, such as scoring well on a test (Mruk, 1995). A sense of pride and accomplishment tend to provide the impetus for success and pride (Mruk, 1995; Owens, Goodman, Stryker, 2001). Earned self-esteem produces encouragement and resilience in people, prompting the desire to live a meaningful and productive life (Mruk, 1995; Owens, Goodman, Stryker, 2001).

Furthermore, earned self-esteem depended upon positive work habits and adherence to standards and life goals (Lerner, 1985). Hard work seems to produce respect and accountability in earning self-esteem (Lerner, 1985). People want to feel valued and respected in what they do (Lerner, 1985). Underachieving students can still bask in the warmth of global self-esteem, even if the door to earned self-esteem remained closed (Sirin & Sirin, 2004; Lerner, 1985).

Accomplishments, positive character traits, and work habits are the basis for earned self-esteem; therefore, students should be encouraged and applauded for their efforts (Sirin & Sirin, 2004).

Global self-esteem is a comprehensive sense of self-concept that encompasses personal judgment (Mizzell, 1999). High levels of self-esteem characterize people who have an internal locus of control (Mizzell, 1999; Lerner, 1995). Low levels of self-esteem characterize people who are less in control of their environment and who have experienced lower levels of satisfaction and happiness (Mizzell, 1999).

In earlier research, self-esteem included two components: racial and personal. Racial self-esteem referred to how an individual feels about his or her group identity (e.g., as an African American) (Porter, 1971). Personal self-esteem referred to how people feel about self in a global perspective (Mizzell, 1999; Porter, 1971). The definition of personal self-esteem was more akin to the modern definition of global self-esteem (Mizzell, 1999). Porter (1971) regarded racial self-esteem and personal self-esteem as distinct though interrelated concepts. Studies of personal self-esteem have yielded inconsistent results. Studies by Long and Henderson (1969), Porter (1971), Samuels (1973), and Ratusnik and Koenigsnecht (1975) found lower self-esteem among African American preschoolers. McClain (1967), Peterson and Ramirez (1971), Hauser (1971), and Lefebvre (1973) reported similar findings among adolescents.

Other studies of preschoolers (Davids, 1973), elementary school children (Carpenter & Busse, 1969; Henderson, Geoffrey, & Butler, 1969; White & Richmond, 1970; Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974), adolescents (Rosenberg, 1965; Hodgkins &

Stakenas, 1969; Kuhlman & Bieliauskas, 1976), and adults (Flanagan & Lewis, 1969) reported equal self-esteem in African Americans and Whites. Self-esteem was greater for African Americans than for Whites in elementary school children (Baughman & Dahlstrom, 1968; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971; Trowbridge, Trowbridge, & Trowbridge, 1972; Cicirelli, 1977) and adolescents (Hartnagel, 1970; Baughman, 1971; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971; Dales & Keller, 1972; Greenberg, 1972; Hurtsfeld, 1978).

*The Truth about Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem has polarized the vast majority of people who fall under the designation of the “pro-self-esteemers.” (Kohn, 1994). This group of educators questions the importance of trying to improve children’s perceptions of their own worth as a means of addressing academic performance (Kohn, 1994). The associations between self-esteem and academic performance are often mixed (Kohn, 1994).

Self-esteem refers to a global sense of self-worth. Self-confidence implies a sense of self-esteem in more specific domains (Kohn, 1994). To show that self-esteem is vital to social and academic development, educators ought to embark on major efforts to help students feel better about themselves, such as validating their responses and encouraging creativity (Kohn, 1994). Some researchers have failed to show conclusively that there is a clear link between self-esteem and academic achievement (Kohn, 1994). Self-esteem might not be sufficient to produce achievement or serve as a panacea for all educational problems (Kohn, 1994; Owens et al.).

Self-esteem, as a construct, has undergone debate and vast consideration for its usefulness in forging positive academic milestones (Kohn, 1994). It is plausible to

believe that children who feel good about themselves are not necessarily high achievers or caring people (Kohn, 1994). For many years, research and theory have given a great deal of attention to self-esteem (Sirin & Sirin, 2004; Kohn, 1994). Although domain-specific, self-esteem seems to influence a variety of developmental outcomes; however, there is a debate about the importance of self-esteem in adolescents' academic performance (Sirin & Sirin, 2004).

The level of empirical support for self-esteem's significance challenges the desirability of focusing on the issue in academic settings (Sirin & Sirin, 2004). This focus is nothing new in American education. Individual achievement and self-actualization provide opportunities for building self-worth and confidence in others (Sirin & Sirin, 2004; Kohn, 1994). A discussion about generosity and caring dovetails with the assertion that people must love themselves to be able to love others.

### *The Appeal of Self-Esteem*

As self-aware and self-reflective creatures, many people intuitively recognize the importance of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003; Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). A great deal of psychological theorizing has focused on the motivation to protect and, if possible, to enhance self-esteem (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). The desire to feel good about oneself is certainly not the only self-related motive at play (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). Over the past few decades, the need for high self-esteem has risen from an individual to a societal concern (Baumeister et al., 2003; Spurgeon & Myers, 2003).

North America in particular embraces the idea that high self-esteem is not only desirable in its own right, but that it is also the central psychological source of all manner

of positive behaviors and outcomes (Baumeister et al., 2003). This strong psychological claim now permeates popular beliefs. A key assumption of the self-esteem movement is that too many people have low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003; Enger, 1993). Under this assumption, raising self-esteem becomes a meaningful goal. Self-esteem scales capture valid individual differences that exist in a population. Thus, a good measure will yield a distribution of scores from low to high (Baumeister et al., 2003). The fact that most people score toward the high end of self-esteem casts serious doubt on the notion that American society suffers from a widespread shortage of self-esteem (Baumeister et al, 2003). If anything, self-esteem in America is high. Most people regard themselves as above average (Baumeister et al, 2003).

Every child in the school setting regardless of race or social class has a need for high esteem (Harper, 1970). Children need strength, a sense of achievement, a feeling of adequacy and confidence, and a feeling of independence and control (Harper, 1970). Children, similar to their parents, search for status, prestige, attention, and recognition for personal achievement (Harper, 1970). Due to the double hardship of being African American and poor, many Black children find it difficult to meet their need for esteem (Lee, 2003; Lay and Wakestein, 1985). The implication here is that if the Black child is to learn and if he is to have a positive self-concept, then the school setting must provide curricular experiences that will foster self-esteem in the Black child or, in other words, help him or her meet the need for esteem (Harper, 1970).

### *Self-Compassion and Academic Goals*

Self-compassion relates to the more general meaning of compassion (Neff, 2008). When individuals feel compassion for others, they allow themselves to feel the experiences of suffering (Neff, 2008). To understand better the definition of self-compassion, people must know what compassionate people feel or experience (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005). Self-compassionate people recognize that pain and imperfection are an inevitable part of the human experience and human development (Neff, 2008). When this occurred, feelings of kindness and caring for a person's welfare caused emotions of compassion to surface (Neff et al., 2005).

There are several reasons to believe that feelings of compassion towards self may affect the learning process (Neff et al., 2005). In addition to showing that self-compassion correlates with psychological well-being, researchers have begun to examine the moderating effects of self-compassion on people's reactions to negative events (Neff et al., 2005). Neff et al. (2005) examined the relationship between self-compassion and academic failure. They concluded that self-compassion moderates reactions to real and potential failure by reducing events that threaten self-esteem (Neff et al., 2005).

Compassion surfaces when others make a mistake or perform a misdeed. Compassion entails an open-minded, nonjudgmental attitude projected toward people (Neff et al., 2005). Self-compassionate people experience positive emotions without having to protect or bolster their self-concept (Neff et al., 2005). In fact, one of the advantages of self-compassion over self-esteem is that self-compassion aligns itself with the performance evaluations of self and others (Neff et al., 2005). Because self-

compassionate individuals have an emotionally positive self-attitude, they should be freer to engage in activities out of interest rather than from a desire to protect or enhance their self-esteem (Neff et al, 2005.).

Neff and Vonk (2008) examined self-compassion and self-esteem as they related to aspects of psychological functioning. They found that self-compassion meant treating people with respect and humanity, and it held a stronger negative association with social comparison and public self-consciousness (Neff and Vonk 2008). Results from their study suggested that self-compassion may be a useful alternative to global self-esteem (Neff and Vonk (2008).

#### *Self-Perceptions of African-Americans: Self-Esteem and Personal Efficacy*

Hughes and Demo (1989) surveyed 2,107 African Americans, examining personal self-esteem, racial self-esteem, and personal efficacy. The findings concluded that the three dimensions are interrelated and anchored in interpersonal relations with family and friends. Fundamentally, different processes produced the three dimensions of self-esteem, racial self-esteem, and personal efficacy. Relations with family, friends, and community most strongly influenced personal self-esteem, while personal efficacy was generated through social status experiences (Hughes and Demo, 1989). The belief that racial discrimination, rather than individual failure, accounted for low achievement among African Americans is irrelevant to personal self-esteem and personal efficacy (Hughes and Demo (1989). In contrast, a combination of education, interracial contact, and ideological processes produced racial self-esteem (Hughes and Demo (1989).

Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, and Williams (2005) studied 262 African American students by administering questionnaires to an urban high school population. The study looked at the relationship between self-esteem and academic self-efficacy, which referred to the ability to achieve a goal. School performance among African American youth continues to be a national concern (Reid et al., 2005). Self-esteem remains a major focus of school-based intervention programs to improve students' academic performance (Reid, et al., 2005). The findings from the study suggested that solutions to increase a belief in getting an education may do more to increase academic performance than merely focusing on self-esteem building strategies. Empirical data suggested that academic self-efficacy rather than self-esteem is the critical factor for school success, but few studies have examined self-efficacy and self-esteem with an African American population (Reid et al., 2005).

#### *Ethnic Identity in Adolescents*

Ethnic identity is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups (Phinney, 1990; Plummer, 1995). Research on the topic is fragmentary and inconclusive. Ethnic identity is defined in many ways in the literature research, such as how people see themselves as a group relative to others in society (Plummer, 1995). The fact that there is no unified definition of ethnic identity indicates confusion about the topic. A surprising number of articles reviewed provided no explicit definition of the construct (Phinney, 1990).

The growth of minority groups in the United States and other Western countries has resulted in an increasing concern about issues of pluralism, discrimination, and

racism (Phinney, 1990). However, psychological research on the impact of these issues on the individual is uneven (Phinney, 1990). Most of the research dealing with psychological aspects of contact between racial or ethnic groups has focused on attitudes toward those groups other than the researcher's own and particularly on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Phinney, 1990; Plummer, 1995). The emphasis has been on attitudes of members of the majority or dominant group toward minority group members (Phinney, 1990).

Self-identification refers to the ethnic label people use to describe themselves (Abound, 1987). Research has focused mainly on the extent to which children correctly label themselves (Abound, 1987). In studies, adolescents had difficulty choosing which label to use. Although this appears to be a simple issue, it is actually quite complex, inasmuch as one's ethnicity as determined by parental background may differ from how one sees oneself ethnically (Phinney, 1990). Regardless of whether an ethnic label is chosen or imposed, people may feel that a single label is inaccurate (Phinney, 1990).

Research on ethnic identity shifted from European immigrants to African Americans during the 1960s (Kardiner & Ovesy, 1962). A major focus of this period seemed characteristic as the mark of oppression (Kardiner & Ovesy, 1962). According to mark of oppression theorists, African Americans internalize negative racial images of themselves with a debilitating effect on their global self-esteem (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Pouissant (1970) proposed that racial discrimination led to the idealization of Whites and to a White ideal. This resulted in inner-directed rage and self-hatred among African Americans (Pouissant 1970).

Ethnic group members, such as African Americans, may identify themselves as partly ethnic and partly mainstream (Phinney, 1990). People may use an ethnic label when specifically asked for one, yet they may not have a strong sense of belonging to the chosen group (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Pouissant (1970)). Many ethnic minority adolescents around the world face prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Pouissant (1970)). These conditions have repercussions on the way these adolescents feel about themselves (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). For instance, Verkuyten and Thijs (2004) studied minority students in the Netherlands. Participants completed two questionnaires related to perceived academic performance, academic self-esteem, global self-worth, and perceived discrimination in school. In both studies, academic self-esteem mediated the relationship between perceived educational performance and feelings of global self-worth (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). More importantly, perceived discrimination in school moderated the relationship between academic self-esteem and global self-worth (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). Discrimination did not moderate the relationship between academic performance and academic self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004).

Involvement in social life and cultural practices dictate ethnic group identification (Kardiner & Ovesy, 1962). As long as measures provide specific practices that distinguish an ethnic group, it is impossible to generalize across groups (Kardiner & Ovesy, 1962). In particular, language is the most widely assessed cultural practice associated with ethnic identity. Language is the single most important component of ethnic self-identification (Phinney, 1990).

African American students face the challenge of balancing identity constructs (Harper & Tuckman, 2006). This practice is a discriminative force that addresses how African Americans view themselves (Harper & Tuckman, 2006). High-achieving African Americans reflect a measure of cultural pride while successfully navigating a contradictory structure—one that simultaneously advocates academic success while restricting access to opportunities and accolades for high levels of achievement (Harper & Tuckman, 2006). Often those African Americans who face discriminatory barriers tend to preserve and achieve academically (O'Connor, 1999).

The current research on racial and ethnic identity development is one of the most relevant areas of research integrating culture into the mental health and development of the individual (Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995). The development of racial and ethnic identification seems an integral part of minority children's total development. In a review of the ethnic identity research with adolescents, Phinney (1990) indicated that empirical investigations have yielded conflicting results regarding the relationship between self-concept measures and identity. Phinney (1992) suggested that to understand the complex process of identity formation, researchers should examine racial identity and self-esteem.

#### *African American Self-Esteem Development*

Many American ethnic groups have been victims of prejudice (Hale, 2001; Phinney, 1992; Porter, 1971). Bailey (2004) reported that low self-esteem resulted from minority status. The social science literature of the 1920s-1940s linked minority status and low self-esteem. Ideas pertaining to classifying African American self-esteem took form early in the 1960s (Bailey, 2004).

By the 1940s, researchers established an emphasis on social research and racial integration (Denbo and Beaulieu, 2002; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). During this period, the study of the African American self-image gained momentum and culminated with the addition of the social science brief to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which emphasized that racial segregation had the potential to damage the self-esteem of African American children (Hale, 2001; Greenberg, 1972).

There can be no doubt about the importance of educating all students. The *Brown* case produced two key decisions. The first was the Supreme Court's decision not to simply overturn its ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a case that concluded that separate but equal facilities for two races were constitutionally permissible (Gordon, Piana and Kelcher, 2000). The second key decision was to issue a ruling regarding racial inequality in education. The Supreme Court accepted that school segregation caused an inferiority status in African American children (Hale, 2001; Piana and Kelcher, 2000).

When research focuses on African American students, it primarily has centered on their experiences as a whole and has depicted the ethnic group as being at risk (Graham, 1992). African American students attempt to separate themselves from the mainstream society (Gordon, Piana and Kelcher, 2000; Sirin & Jackson, 2001). African Americans often receive mixed reviews about their racial images and distortions in the media, which present challenging perceptions for students to overcome (Gordon, Piana and Kelcher, 2000). Research on African American students, nevertheless, has successfully illustrated the impact of contextual factors such as family structure, parental involvement, and school factors on academic achievement (Sirin & Jackson, 2001). Research on individual

factors, however, has largely focused on students' cognitive functioning, using factors like IQ, cognitive skills, and values and beliefs about education (Sirin & Jackson, 2001).

Research done by Clark and Clark as early as 1939 documented the negative and confused racial attitudes frequently expressed by African Americans (Kunjufu, 1995). The Clarks' study concluded that by age 5, Black children felt that to be Black was an indication of an inferior status (Kunjufu, 1995). In addition, the *Brown v. Board of Education* case looked at the esteem of African American students, seriously considering how African American children saw themselves in comparison to others (Kunjufu, 1995; Hale, 2001). Racial identity became paramount in assessing the esteem of African American children (Hale, 2001).

By the mid-1960s, a new theoretical trend emerged with an increase in African American militancy and radicalism (Gordon, Piana and Kelcher, 2000). This new orientation, which has continued into the present, explores the determination of coping strategies. In the 1970s, self-esteem had a casual effect on every aspect of human life (Gordon, et al., 2000). A battle that started as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> century tried to bring equality to segregated Black schools in the South. By the 1960s, an attack on the entire structure of racially separate schools permeated America (Orfield, 2001).

The 1954 *Brown* decision was a key cause of the Civil Rights Movement (Gordon, et al., 2000; Garibaldi, 1992). There were hundreds of protests against unequal conditions and opportunities in segregated schools (Orfield, 2001). This struggle was never just for desegregated schools; it was part of a comprehensive movement for racial and economic justice (Orfield, 2001). Almost a half-century after the Supreme Court

concluded that school segregation was unconstitutional, data from the 1998-1999 school year demonstrated that segregation increased throughout the 1990s (Orfield, 2001). For African American students, this trajectory was most apparent in the South (Orfield, 2001).

Osborne (1995) concluded that gaps exist between African American achievement and that of their Caucasian counterparts. African American students are less likely to feel that performing well in school will lead to opportunities (Mickelson, 1990). Mickelson (1990) labeled this as the achievement-attitude paradox. While African Americans value education, they may not necessarily see the connection between identifying with school and goal-setting (Lee, 2003; Lerner, 1985). Bailey (2004) found that African American males must work through self-esteem issues and educational challenges. The factors associated with lower academic achievement among African American students include inappropriate teaching strategies, a lack of student responsibility and choice, and a lack of validation of cultural heritage (Ford, 1992; Teel, Debruin-Parecki, & Covington, 1998).

Given the magnitude and persistence of the White-Black achievement gap, specific factors such as poverty, teaching strategies, and low expectations have contributed to the decline of the educational failure of African American students (Singham, 1998). Singham concluded that the root causes of the minority achievement gap appeared to be built on challenging and complex factors, such as poverty, that are rooted in historical ethnic relationships. Fordham (1996) suggested that underachievement among African American youth is attributed partially to their feelings

as the stigmatized and subdominant minority group. This researcher concluded that African American adolescents needed to cultivate a sense of identity that recognizes the importance of academic achievement and goal setting (Fordham (1996).

The consequences of unequal and poor education for African Americans are evident in student performance (Orfield, 2001). High school graduates with no college training have faced difficult times as educational requirements have increased Orfield, 2001). Academic competition is by far the strongest in schools with populations including many races and ethnicities. These schools draw competent teachers that offer more advanced classes than remedial classes (Orfield, 2001).

#### *The Impact of Family on Student Achievement*

There is a shortage of research regarding student achievement (Ford, 1993). However, the research that exists is clear. Parental involvement in student achievement does make a difference in student performance (Hale, 2001). Parents do affect student achievement. Parents have a role in the schooling of their children (Hale, 2001; Lee, 2003; Kunjufu, 1995). Even before students enter schools, parents teach their children various moral and educational concepts (Kunjufu, 1995).

One way to address this important factor is to explore the contributions parents make to student achievement and understand how parents impact education (Kunjufu, 1995). The American family structure is going through a rapid change (Hale, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995; Lee, 2003). The diversity of families is evident in society (Lipscomb, 1995; Marks, 2005; Miller, 1999; Slaughter, 1987). Parents must intervene and present a healthy learning environment for children. Many times parents choose charter schools or

expensive tutors to provide their children a competitive edge in the academic process (Slaughter, 1987). Parents faced instructional practices and standards that may retard their children's educational preparation and reduce the likelihood of academic parity of African American students (Slaughter, 1987). Structurally unequal and biased learning environments are a challenge to academic achievement in African American students (Slaughter, 1987).

*Race and the Schooling of Black Americans*

The educational arena must develop processes and strategies for addressing the vulnerabilities that African American students face in schools today (Steele, 1992; Hale, 2001). Steele (1992) listed the following fundamental factors as a corrective approach addressing race and schooling for Black Americans: (Steele 1992, p. 76).

- a. "The student must feel valued by the teacher. Building a positive relationship with students is the critical"
- b. "The challenge and the promise of personal fulfillment should guide the education of African American students. Present skills should be taken into account. Ambitions should never be scaled down but instead be guided to inspire."
- c. "Racial integration is a useful. Segregation draws out group differences and makes people feel more vulnerable when they inevitably cross group lines to compete in the larger society."
- d. "The particulars of black life and culture must be presented in the mainstream curriculum of American schooling not consigned to special days".

Educators know all too well the issues that plagued the education of African American students such as stigma (Hale, 2001; Steele, 1994). Erasing stigma improves black student achievement (Steele, 1994). Poverty, social isolation, and poor preparation may be overcome in a schooling atmosphere that reduces racial and other vulnerabilities (Steele, 1994). Nonetheless, many educators are introducing strategies for addressing the needs of African American students such as linkage to an Afrocentric curriculum (Ascher, 1991). The Afrocentric curriculum provides people and history that is often left out of the mainstream curriculum and gives African American students a sense of pride and accomplishments (Ascher, 1991). The components for an effective Afrocentric curriculum are based on the following (Ascher, 1991, p. 24):

- a. “Appropriate male bonding is needed. African American males suffer from a lack of appropriate male models in their neighborhoods, at home, and in school. Therefore, curriculum must offer African American male models in schools.”
- b. “African American students are viewed in the media negatively. Programs must show positive images of black American in the curriculum. Poor images can distort the abilities of African American students.”
- c. “Because values and discipline necessary for achievement are absent in many African American lives, programs must attempt to combat the fear of acting white that hinders school achievement by developing an alternative system of African American values that facilitate success such as provide assistance with homework and nonviolent conflict resolution skills.”

*The Impact of African American Role Models on Self-Esteem*

The impact of African American role models on self-esteem is a compelling discussion. Research has assessed the efficacy of such relationships (Keating & Tomishima, 2002). African American students lack involvement in positive and meaningful activities that might increase their self-esteem (Hale, 2001). African American males, by virtue of having attained the status of adults, possess the gender and cultural perspectives to accurately assess and address the social, economic, and educational challenges facing African American boys (Lee, 1999).

African American role models provide a significant foundation for building self-esteem in African American students (Bailey, 2004). However, due to a history of social emasculation, building self-esteem in African American students can be a formidable task (Barnes, 1997). Public school integration and the associated demolition of the Black schools produced a devastating impact on the self-esteem, motivation to succeed, and the academic performance of African American children (Barnes, 1997). African American students need opportunities to engage in an array of activities with community role models who demonstrate the skills and dispositions to affect change and increase self-esteem (Hal, 2001). African American students who assume more responsibility for what happens in their lives tend to feel better about themselves (Enger, 1993).

Over the years, the American educational system has been fraught with separate and unequal opportunities for historically underrepresented and underserved populations (Enger, 1993; Mickelson, 1990; Miller, 1999). However, unlike the 1950s when race was the single most important predictor of educational disparity, contemporary scholars agree

that multiple factors have shaped the circumstances of America's neediest students (Strayhorn, 2008). African American role models in the classroom present a valuable and beneficial entity. Irvine (1989) posited that increasing alienation and school failure of minorities, particularly the growing number of at-risk African American students, tended to increase school apathy and hamper the learning process for African American students (Irvine, 1989). The decline of minority teachers bring to the classroom unique culturally based pedagogical approaches that are often more compatible with the learning needs of their minority students (Hale; 2001; Hwang, 1995).

The limited number of African American teachers is a current challenge in the educational system (King, 2002). The scarcity of talented African Americans in the teaching profession continues to be a serious problem confronting the education profession and the African American community (King, 2002; Kunjufu, 1995). The need to consider the complex issues related to African American teachers remains a prevailing factor in educating Black students (King 2002,; Kunjufu, 1995). Teachers with appropriate skills and competency provide the strength for promoting student achievement (Kunjufu, 1995).

Despite the dismal academic outlook for Black students, some teachers are capable of helping Black students attain academic and cultural success (Johnston, 2007; Jackson, 2001). Successful teachers possess the belief that all students can learn (Hale, 2001). They believe in more than standardized tests as the measure for student success. They engage in culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Hale, 2001). Having successful teachers talk about and analyze their teaching may provide insight into the

kinds of models that need development in order to assist other teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1990).

Dee (2006) postulated that models of student achievement indicate that assignment to an own-race teacher significantly increased math and reading achievement in Black and White students by 3 to 4 percentage points. This research studied 79 schools and roughly 11,600 students. In addition, Weiher's (2000) research indicated that the academic performance of minority students improved when school faculties included minority teachers. Weiher's research used data from 540 school districts and 668 campuses in Texas. The study found the greater the shortfall between the district/campus percentage of minority teachers and the district/campus percentage of minority students, the lower the percentage of district/campus minority students who passed the state achievement test. This association disappeared for Hispanic students but not for African American students (Weiher's (2000).

There is little information available about the protective mechanisms that foster resilience and success among African American youth (Harvey & Hill, 2004). The self-esteem of African American students has characterized the pervasive negative images of Blacks in the media (Ascher, 1995). The benefits of an African American self-esteem structure have focused only on the Black experience (Bailey, 2004). The concept of self-esteem comprises several constructs such as self-image, self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-determination, self-perception, self-denial, self-empowerment, and self-responsibility. Often, self-esteem is a rather mysterious and indefinable entity (Rosenberg, 1965).

*Educators on Self-Esteem*

Today's educational leaders must have skills that go far beyond management and budgeting (Kunjufu, 1995; Kohn, 1994; Holly, 1987). School systems seem very likely to have accountability without authority. Today's leaders must have the skills to make connections with a broad cross-section of education stakeholders, build a thriving school community, and facilitate effective communication and collaboration (Kunjufu, 1995). A school leader must not only be knowledgeable about curricular and instructional choices but they must be an advocate for students (Kunjufu, 1995; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). At the school level, this means that school leaders must be able to create and maintain relationships between the schools and the community, between children and learning, between teachers and children and parents, between parents and the school and children, between teachers and other teachers, and between students and other students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

Teacher accountability is at the forefront of the educational system (Peck, Fox, & Marston, 1997). Low test scores and the high number of students dropping out of school have pushed educational policymakers to assess teacher competency and practice (Peck, Fox, & Marston, 1997). Measures such as enhancing teacher evaluations and staff development provide additional tools in meeting schools' educational goals (Peck, Fox, & Marston, 1997). Teachers across America feel a sense of urgency in addressing student needs within the instructional process (Peck, Fox, & Marston, 1997). To gain a higher level of academic results for African American and other students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds, educational leaders must be prepared to teach all

children. The school culture and structure is a foundation of respect for diversity and support for the high achievement of all students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

The institutional structures of schools must provide a variety of organizational options designed to support the high achievement of all students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). The most effective educational leaders are collaborators who work with their staff, their students, and their students' families to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to establish educational climates that ensure the high achievement of African American students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

The disparity between the demographic profiles of teachers has been a source of considerable concern (Latham, 1989). Despite the legal, political, and economic changes America has made since the Civil Rights Era, racial disparity in academic achievement continues to persist (Williams, 2003). In an educational system designed to celebrate diversity and inculcate democratic values, both minority and majority children need minority role models. The United States population is growing more diverse (Hale, 2001). Calls to increase the proportion of minority teachers have coincided with a strong push to increase the teaching force and hire diverse teachers (Latham, 1989).

There is no doubt that the educational reform movement has helped uncover the contradictions between the desire to improve the overall quality of public education and our ability to do so for all groups of students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Kunjufu, 1995; Henry, 2005). Changing the institutional culture of schools so that it focuses on achievement and other related outcomes is a good idea. With many years of school

reform, most schools serving African American students and families still fail to provide them with a high-quality educational experience (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

### *Correlation Research between Academic Achievement and Self-Esteem*

Traditionally, public schools have thought that students' satisfaction will follow on the heels of their academic success (Shokraii, 1996). Beyond the rhetoric and beliefs surrounding self-esteem, this is a construct with a mixed record causing a discussion among some academics regarding the importance, if not relevance, of the concept (Owens, Stryker, & Goodman 2001). Owens et al. (2001) commonly studied self-esteem in their research as a control or an explanatory variable and then found it coming up short. The problems may be rooted in a misunderstanding of the concept that leads to the naïve misapplication of self-esteem theories and methods.

Research findings on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement differed in the literature (Steele, 1997; Osborne, 1997; Pottebaum, Keith and Ehly, 1986). The relationship between self-concept and achievement suggested that a causal relation between these two constructs is still unclear (Pottebaum, et al., 1986). However, Ross and Broh (2000) proposed that academic achievement increased self-esteem. Several studies have reported moderate correlations between self-esteem and academic achievement (Bear, Minke, Griffin, & Deemer, 1998; Osborne, Walker, & Rausch, 2002; Renick & Harter, 1989).

Midgett, Ryan, Adams, and Corville-Smith (2002) found a modest but significant positive correlation between self-esteem and achievement. Positive correlations discovered between self-esteem and achievement in the past led educators to implement

programs to enhance self-esteem in order to increase achievement (Midgett, Ryan, Adams, and Corville-Smith (2002). The wisdom of interpreting this association in a causal manner seems questionable. This study widened the scope of the discussion by examining the relationship between self-esteem and achievement with student characteristics and parental variables in a sample of 164 fourth-grade and 152 seventh-grade children and their parents (Midgett et al., 2002). The results of the study showed that the children's academic effectiveness mediated the relationships between family, processes, and child achievement. When the researchers examined child and family variables in combination, the significant association between self-esteem and achievement disappeared (Midgett, 2002).

While research has shown that low self-esteem is associated with low achievement (Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998; Holly, 1987; Kloomok & Cosden, 1994), some of the intervention research has indicated that high self-esteem alone does not improve academic achievement (Gaskin-Butler & Tucker, 1995; Holly, 1997). The idea that people who regard themselves favorably ought to be able to learn and work more effectively seems not so much a plausible hypothesis as a matter of plain common sense (Kohn, 1994). The link between self-esteem and student achievement is that students who are not confident in their academic abilities do poorly in academics, because they have convinced themselves that they cannot achieve academically (Kohn, 1994; Steele, 1997).

Someone with high self-esteem would presumably expect to do well (Kohn, 1994). People with a positive outlook on life tend to think positively and to react in a

healthy way (Kohn, 1994). They seemed delighted to please others and to please self (Kohn, 1994). Brantley-Thomas (1988) found a positive correlation between self-esteem and achievement. The answer depends on the researchers who answered the question (Kohn, 1994).

Forsyth, Lawrence, Burnette, and Baumeister (2007) studied 85 students from a psychology class. They hypothesized that the students who received self-esteem bolstering emails and exhortations would improve their failing grades. These students had received a C, a D, or an F on a psychology exam. The study tracked two groups: those who received a C, and those who received a D or an F. The study concluded that D and F students did worse after receiving self-esteem bolstering emails and positive comments, and students who received a C did not change their grades. This finding suggested that self-esteem boosting activities did not improve the academic performance of these students.

The self-esteem movement has been especially influential in American schools (Huitt, 2004; Cast and Burke, 2002; Baumeister et al., 2003). Part of the reason for this is the assumption that raising self-esteem will lead to improvements in children's academic performance. There are plausible reasons for thinking that high self-esteem will lead to good schoolwork (Baumeister et al., 2003). People with high self-esteem may set higher aspirations than people with low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003). Every child needs strength, a sense of achievement, a feeling of adequacy, confidence, a feeling of independence, and control in physical and mental tasks in the school curriculum (Harper, 1977). Children search for status, prestige, attention, and recognition for personal

achievement. A child's self-esteem is commensurate to a strong positive self-concept (Harper, 1970).

A number of researchers have investigated the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement in African American students (Ford et al., 1995; Lay & Wakstein, 1985; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978). Although academic achievement is a major factor in developing a positive view of self (Osborne, 1995), African American children maintain high levels of global self-esteem with low academic achievement (Collins-Eaglin & Karabenick, 1993; Frisby & Tucker, 1993; Mickelson, 1990; Osborne).

Steele (1997) postulated the stereotype threat factor, explaining that African American students with high self-esteem withdraw from the academic domain for fear of failure. Steele (1992) reported that African American adolescents view academic achievement as a "separate activity" that does not influence global feelings of self. Lay and Wakestein (1985) and Osborne (1995) suggested that African Americans diminish the value of academic achievement on their global self-esteem as a self-worth protection agent. Thus, one could argue that African American students tend to lower their expectations of complex tasks as a protective factor against academic failure (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Self-esteem may not be sufficient to produce achievement or to serve as a means of eradicating all educational issues (Greene and Way, 2005; Greenberg, 1972; Baumeister et al., 2003). Children who feel very good about themselves are not necessarily high achievers or caring people, yet at the same time, those who doubt their

own worth are even less likely to be high achievers or caring people (Kohn, 1994; Baumeister et al., 2003). If high self-esteem fails to guarantee desirable outcomes but low self-esteem actively interferes with them, the overall correlation might be less than impressive. Self-esteem could nevertheless be a relevant and important factor (Kohn, 1994).

Simmons, Brown, Bush, and Blyth (1978) studied 798 Black and White adolescents as they moved from sixth to seventh grade in a large Midwestern city. Their findings did not fit widespread preconceptions. The findings supported other recent large-scale quantitative studies. The basic findings were:

- (a) African American children appeared to have higher rather than lower self-esteem than whites.
- (b) Girls of both races demonstrated lower self-esteem than boys, with white girls exhibiting the lowest self-esteem of all.
- (c) African American children from broken families fared worst in terms of self-esteem in desegregated than in segregated schools.

In terms of academic achievement, school desegregation related to the grades African American children received in school and their achievement on standardized tests (Simmons et al., 1978). African American children in segregated schools received higher marks than their desegregated peers, but they scored significantly lower on standardized tests even when parental occupation, parental education, family structure, and the child's educational aspirations were held constant (Simmons et al., 1978). The relationship of school desegregation to the self-image of these youngsters was a mixed one. Aside from

the subgroup of children from broken homes, the degree of desegregation in the schools had no effect upon the self-image of African American students (Simmons et al., 1978).

The education of African American students continues to be the subject of research and investigation (Marks, 2005). Because of historical practices such as racism and ineffective teaching practices, African American students faced academic hurdles (Marks, 2005). Major discrepancies appear in academic achievement between African American and Caucasian students (Marks, 2005). Marks' study compared the achievement motivation of African American students who received an African-centered education using African-centered pedagogy and African-centered curriculum with that of their peers. The sample included 250 students in four middle schools; two of the schools offered an Afrocentric curriculum and the other two schools provided a traditional curriculum. The findings suggested that a statistical difference occurred for performance, with students in African-centered middle schools receiving higher scores than students in traditional middle schools (Marks, 2005).

The extent of concern for academic achievement clearly varies among students. Some high achievers lose few opportunities to call attention to their successes while other high achievers appear to treat success with indifference (Faunce, 1984). Some low achievers respond to failure with distress while others appear to fail with impunity (Faunce, 1984). The process producing this variation is one instance of the general process through which activities become more or less consequential for the maintenance of self-esteem (Faunce, 1984).

*Self-Determination, Self-Efficacy, Self-Handicapping, and Academic Achievement*

The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated (Wehmeyer, 1996; Deci & Ryan, 2000). They are inspiring, striving to learn, extending themselves, mastering new skills, and applying their talents responsibly. Self-determination refers to “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions in one’s life from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24). The self-determination theory maintains that an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Most contemporary theories of motivation assume that people initiate and persist at behaviors to the extent that they believe those behaviors will lead to desired outcomes or goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Self-determined people face choices and options. Humans are born with a need to pursue activities because they are interesting or fun, not because of external compulsion or pressure (Poulsen, Rodger, & Ziviani, 2006). Palmer and Wehmeyer (2002) postulated that self-determination is the ability to achieve self-determined goals. Self-determination promotes self-direction and purpose in the lives of others. The self-determination theory focused primarily on two innate needs: competence and relatedness (Deci et al., 1991). Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions (Deci et al., 1991). Relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social milieu (Deci et al., 1991).

Individuals judge their own capabilities according to their own actions, such as making a decision about a certain task, exerting an effort to accomplish a task, or dealing with difficulties (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). All of these play an important role in understanding one's self-efficacy beliefs (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). The sense of self-efficacy not only affects expectations of success or failure, but it also influences motivation (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). If people have a high sense of self-efficacy in any given arena, they tend to set higher goals, be less afraid of failure, and persist longer when we encounter difficulties (Erdem & Demirel). However, if a sense of efficacy is low, people may avoid a task altogether or give up easily when problems or challenges arise (Erdem & Demirel). Bandura (1997) maintained that those who possess self-efficacy skills have the ability to complete tasks and forge ahead in completing challenging tasks and reaching goals.

Self-efficacy developed around the issues of human agency, mastery, and control (Gecas, 1989). Focusing on perceptions and assessments of self with regard to competence, effectiveness, and causal agency is a basic measure of self-efficacy (Erdem and Decirel, 2007). Self-efficacy has become an important variable within social psychological research because of its association with various favorable consequences, especially in the areas of physical and mental health (Gecas, 1989).

Students tend to acquire efficacy information through persuasion (Schunk, 1982). Teachers occasionally attempt to persuade students to work more diligently by stating that they have the capability to do well and to achieve academically (Schunk, 1982). If students increased efforts to do well do not produce success, any gains in self-efficacy

will be ephemeral (Schunk, 1982). A difficult task may raise self-efficacy and urge students to achieve success (Erdem and Decirel, 2007 Schunk, 1982). A task that is easy to achieve may reduce a degree of self-efficacy. Failure at a task that students believe is difficult should have less of a negative impact on self-efficacy than failure at a task thought to be easier (Schunk, 1982). Students receive task difficulty information from various sources. Teachers often convey it directly by stating that a task is easy or hard (Schunk, 1982). The relationship of effort expenditure to self-efficacy is complex and depends upon on task outcome and perceived task difficulty (Schunk, 1982).

In terms of education, self-determination leads to outcomes that benefit individuals and society (Deci et al., 1991). Self-determined people engage in opportunities for their own sake and in activities provide meaningful interest (Deci et al., 1991). They do so freely with a full sense of interest and without the necessity of material rewards or constraints (Deci & Ryan, 1991). The child who reads a book for the inherent pleasure of doing so is intrinsically motivated for that activity (Wilson & Corpus, 2001). The challenge for educators is to provide appropriate balance as students develop motivation (Wilson & Corpus, 2001). Educators can supply optimal challenges and problem-solving skills for academic success by providing support, leadership, and compassion to students (Wilson & Corpus, 2001).

Steele (1997) concluded that African American students tend to give up easily when confronted with academic challenges. These students lack the resolve to master difficult opportunities for fear of subscribing to a sense of failure (Bandura (1997). This complements the work of Bandura (1997) as it relates to completing challenging tasks.

More specifically, Fortier, Valerian, and Gay (1995) suggested that perceived academic competence and perceived academic self-determination positively influenced autonomous academic motivation in the 263 students they studied.

Arsenate and Tibet (1995) studied 1,428 students from an inner-city school in Canada. Their results demonstrated that academic motivation significantly related to GPA. Similarly, if students feel self-determined in the school context, they perceive choices at school as an opportunity to make decisions. Academic motivation drives students to greater enhancement and skill building (Fortier et al., 1995). Thus, schools represent a primary socializing influence that can have enormous impact on the course of people's lives and, in turn, on society. Ideal school systems succeed in promoting a genuine enthusiasm for learning, accomplishment, and a sense of volitional involvement in the educational enterprise (Deci et al., 1991).

Documentation has supported that students with high-incident disabilities, such as ADHD, nonverbal learning disabilities, and behavior challenges, typically lack self-determination, which correlates with lower levels of achievement academically, socially, and professionally (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2003). Self-determination emerges across the lifespan; children and adolescents acquire and learn skills by developing attitudes and practices that enable them to become in control of their own lives (Ackerman, 2006). Special education classes have a disproportionate number of African American students; therefore, these students represent those who feel less focused, less determined, and who often do not acquire the skills for self-determination (Steele, 1997). In addition, for fear

of failure (Steele, 1997), African American students give up on challenging work, thus negating the ability to persist towards goals and options (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Although motivation seems to be a singular construct, even superficial reflection has suggested that people feel compelled to act because of very different types of factors with highly varied experiences and consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People can be motivated because they value an activity or because they experience strong external coercion to perform a task (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the self-determination theory, satisfaction with and pursuit of goals in supportive environments enhance active engagement in activities that are of interest (Poulsen, Rodger, & Ziviani, 2006).

Some students use self-handicapping strategies such as procrastination and getting involved in activities as a justification for failure (Midgley and Anderman (1998). Midgley and Anderman (1998) studied 645 students, surveying their use of self-handicapping strategies. The findings from their study suggested that boys use self-handicapping strategies and those students' GPAs and perceived academic performance seem negatively related to self-handicapping strategies.

Self-handicapping has a direct link with students' personal motivation, classroom goal structure, academic outcomes, global self-esteem, and certainty of self-esteem (Midgley and Anderman, 1998. In particular, Thomas and Gadbois (2007) conducted a study of 161 students. Participants completed a series of questionnaires that measured their self-esteem, self-concept clarity, approaches to learning, self-regulation, and reflections on performance. The results of the study showed that self-handicapping negatively correlated with self-concept clarity, deep learning, self-regulated learning, and

exam grades. Regression analyses showed that self-concept clarity, self-regulation, and test anxiety scores predicted self-handicapping scores (Thomas and Gadbois (2007

*Lack of Academic Identification and the Stereotype Threat*

African American students view high levels of academic achievement as disidentifying with their cultural or ethnic group (Steele, 1997). Steele (1997) defined disidentifying as the absence of identifying with a domain. Steele's concept of disidentification is the lack of any connection or relationship between the academic domain and self-esteem. Students who have not connected or engaged in the learning process have disidentified with that academic domain. Steele (1997) also called this the stereotype threat. When African American students withdraw from the academic domain for fear of corroborating academic failure or not feeling connected to learning, the stereotype threat is in play (Steele (1997). The stereotype threat encompasses sociocultural factors that negatively influence the ability of minority students to develop and maintain relationships within academic society (Steele (1997). Minorities have added feelings of anxiety because of the perception of underachievement (Steele; Osborne, 1995). According to Steele's research, African American students disidentified with school to protect their self-esteem. In his disidentification research, Osborne (1997) found that high academic achievement did not present the same rewards for a student not identified with school as compared to those who did identify with school.

Identification with the academic domain is the extent to which students define themselves in a particular domain (Osborne, 1995). Osborne (1995) further observed, "African-American students begin to identify with school and remain that way until

sometime after eighth grade” (p. 453). Identification with academics is a special case of domain identification, the extent to which an individual defines the self through performance in a particular domain (Osborne & Walker, 2007).

African American students must protect themselves from environments that promote an awareness of stereotypes about their ability and suppress their achievement gaps (McMillian, 2007). In their research, Arroyo and Zigler (1995) reported a loss of identity by African American students in mainstream schools and stated that “balancing group identity needs with desires for positive relations with the dominant culture can result in feelings of alienation, anxiety, and loss of identity” (p. 3).

Osborne (1997) reported that students who identified with academics were more motivated to do well since their self-esteem related to academic performance. However, educators must continue to present challenging lessons that lead to student success because of a student sense of competence and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Voelkl (1997) concluded that identification with academics related to strong academic outcomes such as academic achievement. Deci and Ryan (2000) postulated that such responses could lead to enhanced enjoyment in the learning experience.

Some studies showed that African American students who achieve academically see themselves as “acting White” (Collins-Eaglin & Karabenick, 1993; Sirin & Jackson, 2001). Many academically oriented African Americans must choose between being alienated by their own ethnic group and pursuing their individual life goals through education (Sirin & Jackson, 2001). Among African Americans, academic achievement may interfere with their values while assimilating into White culture (Collins-Eaglin &

Karabenick, 1993). Low-income African American students may interpret the differences they perceive between themselves and school culture as evidence that academic success is undesirable and direct their energies elsewhere (Ogbu, 1987; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Ward (1990) argued that African American adolescents must reject White society's negative evaluation of Blackness and construct an identity that includes seeing Blackness as a positively valued and desired condition. Steele (1992) reported that African American students perceive that in order to be valued and rewarded in school and society, people must first master the culture and ways of the American mainstream. Since the mainstream is essentially White, many African American students believe they must give up many particulars of being African American, such as styles of speech, appearance, priorities, and preferences (Steele, 1997).

Osborne (1997) examined data from a nationally longitudinal sample of students to determine if:

- (a) African American males remained disidentified through 12th grade,
- (b) African American females remained disidentified.
- (c) Other disadvantaged minority groups showed evidence of disidentification.

In general, African American males remained disidentified (Steele, 1997).

According to the data, no other group demonstrated significant disidentification (Steele, 1997; Osborne, 1997). Identification or disidentification did not appear to vary across content areas. Osborne's (1997) study suggested that African American males appeared to be the only group that experienced serious, significant disidentification with academics.

In addition, Osborne and Walker (2006) initiated a study of 113 ninth grade students at a high school. Over a 2-year period, these students completed questionnaires concerning identification with academics. The sample consisted of Caucasians (33%), African Americans (39%), Asians (3%), Hispanics (18%), and Native Americans (6%). The study aimed to assess the importance of the links between identification with academics, stereotype threat, and academic outcomes, and to ascertain the impact these variables would play in student performance. Students who most strongly identified with academics had higher GPAs, lower levels of absenteeism, and fewer behavioral issues (Osborne and Walker, 2006). These findings highlight the importance of providing a supportive environment that diffuses stereotype threat for all students, even those who appeared to be academically successful.

#### *Academic Performance, Self-Esteem, and Gender*

Mickelson (1990) reported a high positive correlation between academic achievement and gender. In this study, females showed a higher correlation with academic achievement than males. Similarly, Voelkel's (1997) research concluded that females exhibited greater academic attainment than males. African American females identified with academic achievement more than males (Voelkel (1997). Hence, African American females normally perform higher academically. African American boys lagged behind other groups in the study (Voelkel's (1997).

In Sirin and Jackson's (2001) research, females did better academically, participated in more school-related activities, and had higher school attendance rates than males. However, African American males had higher self-esteem. Research has also

shown that males spend more time out of school than females due to disciplinary punishments such as suspensions or expulsions (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Sirin & Jackson). Many suspended or expelled students eventually drop out (Voelkel, 1997) and become incarcerated (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Kleinfeld's research (1999, p.8) suggested the following in regards to self-esteem in males and females:

- (a) Girls appeared to have an advantage over boys in terms of their future plans
- (b) Minority girls held the most optimistic views of the future and were the group most likely to focus on educational goals.
- (c) Minority boys were likely to feel discouraged about the future and were the least interested in getting a good education.
- (d) Teachers nationwide viewed girls as higher achievers who would be more likely to succeed than boys.

Kleinfeld also found that girls in this study had lower self-esteem than boys and suffered a severe drop in self-esteem at adolescence. She observed that boys gained self-assurance as they get older, while girls lost vitality and a sense of self.

#### *Racial Identity, Attitude, and Self-Esteem*

Although there is a rich body of research on racial identity, much of the literature fails to include minority youth (Phinney, 1992; Plummer, 1995). The research does not account for distinctive racial and environmental circumstances. The lack of attention given to the minority population means the protective factors that are unique to

population seems neglected (Miller, 1999). African American children and their parents face many challenges that are unique to their specific ethnic group and shared across all racial or cultural groups (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). For African American parents, preparing children to function in the United States necessitates a special consideration of the unique social position of African Americans in this country (Caugh et al, 2002.).

Mickelson (1990) reported that African American students “generally earn lower grades, drop out more often, and attain less education than Whites” (p. 44). While researchers have shown ethnic and racial differences in school performance, the causes of these differences are unclear (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1991). Several researchers have reported that negative racial or ethnic identity is associated with problem behaviors (Rotherman-Borus, 1989), decreased self-esteem, mental health issues (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Munford, 1994; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Small, 1998) and lower academic achievement (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997).

#### *Summary of Research Studies*

1. Many African American students maintain high levels of global self-esteem despite lower levels of academic achievement when compared to their peers.
2. High self-esteem does not directly correlate with high academic achievement, so strategies seeking to raise academic achievement by improving self-esteem have brought about inconsistent results.
3. One of the major problems for correlated research of academic achievement and self-esteem has been the lack of common definitions of terms. Instruments

used to measure the concepts vary widely across studies and yield contradictory results.

4. Recent research employs a multidimensional model to examine the self-esteem construct, which implies that individuals apply different levels of importance to different categories of self-esteem.
5. Research shows that African American students disidentify with the school culture to preserve global self-esteem, with males disidentifying more than females.
6. The major influences in academic achievement among African American students are: student engagement, future educational expectations by students, teacher expectations, and parental involvement.
7. Research shows that African Americans engage in self-esteem protection strategies in order to maintain perceptions of self-worth.
8. Increasing identification with academics tends to reduce the odds of withdrawal for White students, but increasing identification with academics increases the odds of withdrawal for African American students.
9. African American students detach their self-esteem from academic outcomes, insulating themselves from failure.

In summary, self-esteem represents a challenging construct. The importance of self-esteem continues the discussion regarding the relationship between self and student achievement (Coopersmith, 1967). A positive self-concept produces a sense of self-worth and self-confidence in youth (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). A feature of many self-theorists

is that identification with a domain not only varies across individuals, but it varies within individuals over time (Spurgeon & Myers, 2003). Individuals seem to be extremely facile in their ability to alter which domains they perceive as central in order to maintain a certain positivity of self-esteem (Osborne et al., 2002).

Although global and domain-specific, evidence shows that self-esteem influences a variety of developmental outcomes, such as making decisions and performing challenging task (Sirin & Jackson, 2001). There is debate about the importance of global self-esteem to adolescents' academic performance (Sirin & Jackson, 2001). Walz and Bleuer (1992) have concluded that competent students who perform well seem to have higher self-esteem than those with lower self-esteem who may perform below academic expectations.

While there may be a myriad of factors that influence academic achievement, self-esteem and identification with academics present as two constructs investigated in the study by Justice, Lindsey, and Morrow, 1999. High self-esteem is a factor in student achievement. (Justice et al., 1999). Justice, et al., (1999) concluded that self-esteem, self-concept, racial preference, and academic achievement are important precursors to African American students' achievement. Steele (1997) concluded that the stereotype threat and withdrawing from the academic domain could play a role in African American students not identifying with academics, causing a debilitating effect on student achievement. To analyze the above two constructs and provide guidance and support to educators, there must be additional research (Justice, et al., (1999). Although some studies reported a link between academic achievement and self-esteem, there is a lack of research on the impact

of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American students (Osborne. 2001). This research studied self-esteem and identification with academics with the aim of adding to the breadth and depth of research relating to African American students. The subsequent chapter includes data and analysis of this study.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to determine whether or not self-esteem and identification with academics would affect the academic achievement of African American students. Many studies in past research have examined correlations between self-esteem and Academic achievement, but few have explored the impact of self-esteem and identification on academic achievement (Osborne, 1997). Similarly, Osborne and Walker (2006) suggested that higher grades related to academic identification. The researcher hypothesized that:

- (a) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically compared with those students not exposed to the curriculum.
- (b) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would improve their self-esteem after exposure to the treatment.
- (c) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase identification with academics.

Karsenti and Thibert (1995) studied 1,428 students, and their results demonstrated that academic motivation significantly correlated with GPA. Researchers have also shown that if students feel self-determined in the school context, their autonomous academic motivation generates consistency in their performance (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995).

The first aim of this study was to determine to what extent grades of students would increase after exposure to the Start Something curriculum. Therefore, the investigator formed the first hypothesis based on the previously mentioned studies:

Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically compared to those who are not exposed to the curriculum.

The second aim was to determine to what extent the self-esteem of participants would affect academic achievement after exposure to the Start Something curriculum. Ross and Broh (2000) suggested that academic achievement boosts self-esteem. Baumeister et al. (2003) suggested a lower correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement, meaning that a feel-good education does not necessarily lead to higher grades. In addition, the findings of Forsyth et al. (2007) suggested that self-esteem bolstering activities did not increase academic achievement. However, empirical data has stated that academic self-efficacy rather than self-esteem was the critical factor for school success (Forsyth et al. 2007). Few studies have examined self-efficacy and self-esteem with an African American population (Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005). The second hypothesis related to the aforementioned studies: Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would improve their self-esteem after exposure to the treatment.

The third aim of this study was to explore the relationship between identification with academics and the achievement of African American students. Osborne and Walker (2006) suggested in their research that most identified students received higher grades. In addition, Voelkel (1997) postulated that identification with academics correlated with strong academic outcomes. Students who have not connected or engaged in the academic learning process have disidentified with that academic domain (Steele, 1997; Osborne, 1997). African American students withdraw from the academic domain out of fear of

failure or fear that they will display a lack of knowledge (Steele, 1997). Steele called this phenomenon the stereotype threat. The third hypothesis arose from this research:

Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase identification with academics.

### *Participants*

Ninety-three African American middle school students participated in this study. All were between the ages of 11 and 15 in grades six through eight at Love School. Love School is a charter school in its 10th year of operation with a staff of 30 faculty members. Currently, the school is in school improvement, which means that students in this school are below grade-level proficiency for the third consecutive year. The school is designated “low performing” by North Carolina accountability’s standards. Less than 50% of the students scored at grade level on North Carolina End of Grade Test. This school did not meet Average Yearly Progress (AYP) goals; however, the school made 7 out of 13 performance targets. Love School is located in downtown Durham, NC. Love School has 314 students enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade, and 85% of students receive free and reduced lunches.

### *Procedures*

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965) and the School Perceptions Questionnaire (Osborne, 1997) were used to collect data. Students’ report cards provided the necessary academic data.

*Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)*. The RSE, designed by Rosenberg in 1965, is a 10-item scale designed to measure overall self-esteem using statements of acceptance

and self-worth. The scale attempts to achieve a unidimensional measure of self-esteem and has Likert-type items with which subjects rate their disapproval (1 indicating strongly disagree) or approval (4 indicating strongly agree). The RSE is a Guttman scale, which means that its items represent a continuum of self-worth statements ranging from statements that are endorsed by individuals with low self-esteem to statements endorsed only by a person with high self-esteem (Goldman 1986). The self-esteem total may range from 10 to 40, with higher scores representing self-esteem that is more positive. The sample means range between 26.00 and 34.00 with standard deviations ranging between 3.45 and 4.80.

Some studies have shown that the scale is a valid and reliable unidimensional measure of self-esteem. Investigations that used high school or college students supported the scale's unidimensionality (Silbert & Tippett, 1965; Crandal, 1973; McCarthy & Hoge, 1982). Goldman (1986) suggested that the RSE factor structure depended on age and other sample characteristics. Reliability and validity coefficients produced results varying between 0.61 and 0.87. The computed Cronbach alpha for this sample was 0.84.

*School Perceptions Questionnaire (SPQ)*. The SPQ (Osborne, 1997) assesses identification with academics and includes measures from Voelkl's instrument called the Identification with School Questionnaire (ISQ). Osborne combined the SPQ and ISQ. The SPQ claims to measure the centrality of academics to the self (e.g., "Being a good student is important to me"; "I feel good about myself when I get good grades"; "I want my friends to think of me as a good student"). The SPQ is a 32-item questionnaire designed to measure identification with academics, particularly in secondary and

postsecondary populations. The SPQ has demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

There are also indications that this scale has good validity. SPQ scores predicted several academic outcomes over a 2-year period, including GPA, withdrawing from school because of academic causes, placement on academic probation, and receiving academic accolades (Osborne, 2007). The ISQ (Voelkl, 1997) assesses identification with academics and claims to measure the facets of identification, including belonging (e.g., "I feel comfortable when I am in school, like I belong there"; "Teachers don't care about me") and valuing school (e.g., "School is important in life"; "The things we do in class are useless") (Osborne & Walker, 2006). All items were measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ISQ has been found reliable with an alpha of .78 (Osborne and Walker, 2006). Osborne combined the Voelkl's scale into his SPQ scale to produce the School Perceptions Questionnaire.

The duration of the questionnaires was approximately 15 minutes each. The investigator administered each instrument in separate settings to minimize interference of responses on one questionnaire with responses on another. With each instrument, students had to read each item carefully and respond appropriately.

A pretest-posttest design best suited this study. This design ensured a high level of efficacy for internal and external validity control. This design used two groups of subjects: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group consisted of 45 African American students. The control group consisted of 48 African American students.

Using a random number generator for selecting the experimental and control groups, students who participated in the study possessed the demographic features required for this investigation. Eligible students for this study were African American middle school students at Love School. The combination of random assignment and the use of a pretest and a control group allowed the maximization of internal validity. Random assignment controlled for regression and selection factors; the pretest controlled for mortality; randomization and the control group controlled for maturation; and the control group controlled for history, testing, and instrumentation. To identify the students who would participate in the study, the investigator obtained administrative approval and parental consent.

The researcher informed the subjects of the purpose of the study and of a surprise they would receive for participating. The subjects received pizza and drinks as the surprise. Their excitement showed in their laughter. Each participant received a written description detailing the study expectations. The investigator informed the principal that the study would take place over the course of 3 months. Each student elected to participate in the study was required to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix A) that detailed the study and provided assurance about confidentiality of responses. Parents were also required to sign the consent form. This form identified the principal investigator and indicated the purpose, procedure, risks, anonymity clause, freedom of withdrawal, participant's responsibilities, and participant's permission. The parental and subject's permission allowed the investigator to access information regarding age, gender, classification, GPA, and parental education level.

The experimental group received the Start Something curriculum. The participants received the curriculum in the school's boardroom. The school secretary called students to the boardroom. After the end of each session, which could last up to 30 minutes, subjects returned to their respective classes. Curriculum writers, teachers, and Englund Consulting firm developed this curriculum in 2000. Teams from the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis Public Schools helped to develop the Start Something curriculum.

The Start Something curriculum includes six units: Unit 1: Let's Start Something; Unit 2: Heroes, Mentors, and Role Models; Unit 3: Discovering Who We Are; Unit 4: You've Got the Power; Unit 5: Discovering Who We Can Become; and Unit 6: Take a Look Back and a Look Ahead.

The Start Something curriculum generated measurable improvements in students' self-esteem, attitudes toward school, and overall behavior relating to achievement as researched in 2003 by Quality Education Data. That study involved 333 students ages 8-17. The research concluded the following: (a) Youth showed positive improvement in self-esteem after participating in the curriculum, (b) youth exhibited improved academic performance after exposure to the curriculum, (c) youth exhibited improved attitudes toward learning, (d) youth showed an overall measure of positive towards school, attitudes, and behaviors related to achievement, and (e) program participants had a more positive overall attitude.

The total time commitment of the curriculum was 3 months, from October 2007 through December 2007. The program took 25 hours to implement. The curriculum

recommended 15-20 hours for completion. Sessions normally occurred between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., depending on the school's prior commitments or the principal investigator's work schedule. The researcher implemented unit activities and lesson plans at least twice a week, but no more than four times per week. The researcher notified the principal prior to any schedule change.

The units included lesson plans and procedures for implementation. During each session, the subjects learned the lesson's objectives and goals. Lesson plans also included activity sheets that explained lesson content and objectives. The control group participated in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the School Perceptions Questionnaire as pretests/posttests only, but they did not participate in treatment. The control group continued with its regular instructional day. Posttest scores from both groups were compared to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

In summary, the aim of this study was to determine if self-esteem and identification with academics would affect the academic achievement of African American students after exposure to the Start Something curriculum. The investigator used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the School Perceptions Questionnaire to analyze pre- and posttest scores after the use of the curriculum. Chapter Four describes and analyzes the differences in the experimental group and the control group.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The education of African American students is a major concern (Hale, 2001; Steele, 1997; Kunjufu, 1995). Raising student achievement deserves greater attention as educators and stakeholders wrestle with solutions and practices for student achievement across all demographic indicators (Osborne, 2006; Hale, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995). Research literature is replete with information debating the importance of self-esteem and student performance and whether or not a feel-good education leads to academic (Baumeister et al., Denbo and Beaulieu, 2002; Forsyth et al, 2007).

### *Hypotheses*

This study contributed to the research of African American students. The researcher hypothesized that:

- (d) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically compared with those students not exposed to the curriculum as shown by grade point averages.
- (e) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would improve their self-esteem after exposure to the treatment as shown by pretest and posttest measure on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.
- (f) Students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase identification with academics as show by pretest and posttest scores on the School Perceptions Questionnaire.

### *Data Organization*

To effectively account for the appropriate concomitant variables in the pretest-posttest control design, the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine the effect of the Start Something curriculum on academic performance and nonacademic performance variables.

The first hypothesis was that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically compared to those students not exposed to the curriculum. ANCOVAs were conducted on GPAs to explore the hypothesized relationship between the Start Something curriculum and academic performance. Table 1 presents a summary for ANCOVA results. Comparisons of adjusted group means (see Table 2) revealed that those students who participated in Start Something had higher GPAs,  $F(1, 91) = 130.94, p < .001$ , than their contemporaries who did not participate in the program. The research hypothesis was supported.

Table 1

#### *ANCOVA Summary Table for Academic Performance*

| Variable and Source | Df | SS      | MS      | F       |
|---------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|
| GPA-Post            |    |         |         |         |
| GPA-Pre (covariate) | 1  | 830.58  | 830.58  | 56.87*  |
| Group               | 1  | 1912.24 | 1912.24 | 130.94* |
| Error               | 90 | 1314.33 | 14.60   |         |

\* $p < .001$

Table 2

*Means and Adjusted Means for Academic Performance Variables*

| Variable and Group | N  | M     | Adjusted M |
|--------------------|----|-------|------------|
| GPA-Pre            |    |       |            |
| Treatment          | 45 | 85.07 |            |
| Control            | 48 | 81.79 |            |
| GPA-Post           |    |       |            |
| Treatment          | 45 | 88.04 | 86.93      |
| Control            | 48 | 76.25 | 76.29      |

The second hypothesis was that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would improve their self-esteem after exposure to the treatment. This research hypothesis was not supported. The third hypothesis was that students who were exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase identification with academics. This research hypothesis was not supported.

ANCOVAs were conducted on self-esteem (RSE) and identification with academics (SPQ) to explore the hypothesized relationships between Start Something curriculum and these two nonperformance factors. Table 3 presents a summary for ANCOVA results. Comparisons of adjusted group means (see Table 4) revealed that there were no differences between those students who participated in Start Something curriculum and those who did not on RSE-Post,  $F(1, 75) = 1.22, ns$ , and SPQ-Post,  $F(1, 49) = .69, ns$ .

Table 3

*ANCOVAs Summary Table for Nonacademic Performance Variable*

| Variable and Source | Df | SS      | MS     | F      |
|---------------------|----|---------|--------|--------|
| RSE-Post            |    |         |        |        |
| RSE-Pre (covariate) | 1  | 290.60  | 290.60 | 16.53* |
| Group               | 1  | 21.40   | 21.40  | 1.22   |
| Error               | 75 | 1318.11 | 17.57  |        |
| SPQ-Post            |    |         |        |        |
| SPQ-Pre (covariate) | 1  | 0.53    | 0.53   | 3.14   |
| Group               |    | .12     | .12    | .69    |
| Error               | 46 | 7.77    | 0.17   |        |

\* $p < .001$

Table 4

*Means and Adjusted Means for Nonacademic Performance Variables*

| Variable and Group | N  | M    | Adjusted M |
|--------------------|----|------|------------|
| RSE-Pre            |    |      |            |
| Treatment          | 42 | 9.40 | 9.03       |
| Control            | 36 | 8.58 | 9.03       |
| RSE-Post           |    |      |            |
| Treatment          | 42 | 5.88 | 5.74       |
| Control            | 36 | 6.64 | 6.80       |
| SPQ-Pre            |    |      |            |
| Treatment          | 26 | 3.41 | 3.26       |
| Control            | 48 | 3.08 | 3.26       |
| SPQ-Post           |    |      |            |
| Treatment          | 23 | 3.42 | 3.39       |
| Control            | 23 | 3.23 | 3.28       |

In summary, ANCOVA was used to determine the effect of the Start Something curriculum on nonacademic variables and academic performance. The first hypothesis was supported. Students who were exposed to the Start Something curriculum performed better academically compared to those students not exposed to program. On the other hand, ANCOVAs were conducted on self-esteem and identification with academics to explore hypothesized relationships between the Start Something curriculum and these

two nonperformance factors. The comparisons of adjusted group means revealed that there were no differences between those who participated in Start Something and those who did not.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The Start Something curriculum provided the instructional program for the treatment group because it incorporated critical lessons and student activities for improving grades, self-esteem, and identification with academics. This study measured student performance, self-esteem, and identification with academics using the RSE and the SPQ.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the impact and the relationship of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American students. The secondary purpose was to clarify this relationship and determine educational practices and strategies that might promote achievement among African American middle school students.

### *Review of Methodology*

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which self-esteem and identification with academics affect the academic achievement of African Americans. The hypothesis tested in this study was that African American students who receive the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically, identify more with academics, and have increased self-esteem in contrast to those who did not participate in the Start Something curriculum.

### *Procedures*

Each participant in the control group and the experimental group participated in the RSE and the SPQ as pretests/posttests. Each questionnaire took approximately 15

minutes to complete and was administered in different settings to minimize interference of responses on one questionnaire with responses on another.

The Start Something curriculum contains six units with different objectives. The first unit is called “Let’s Start Something” and prepares participants for the program, addressing the importance of working together. The second unit is “Heroes, Mentors, and Role Models,” which recognizes role models at home and around the world and examines leadership characteristics. Unit Three, “Discovering Who We Are,” provides information on the importance of setting goals and recognizing how individuals are different. Unit Four, “You’ve Got the Power,” engages participants in a volunteer service project and demonstrates the benefits of volunteering. Unit 5, “Discovering Who We Can Become,” provides an opportunity for participants to explore career options, learn the importance of making choices, and recognize behaviors that impede progress. Finally, Unit 6, “Take a Look Back and a Look Ahead,” helps students reflect on their involvement in the Start Something program by examining what they learned and what decisions they need to make in the future.

The total time commitment was 3 months, from October 2007 through December 2007. The program took 25 hours to implement. The curriculum recommended 15-20 hours for completion. The researcher implemented unit activities and lesson plans at least twice a week, but no more than four times per week. The researcher notified the principal prior to any schedule change.

### *Summary of Results*

The researcher hypothesized that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would perform better academically compared to those students not exposed to the curriculum. ANCOVA was used to determine the effect of the Start Something curriculum on academic performance and nonacademic performance variables.

ANCOVAs were conducted on GPAs to explore the hypothesized relationship between Start Something curriculum and academic performance. Table 1 presents a summary for ANCOVA results. Comparisons of adjusted group means (see Table 2) reveal that those students who participated in Start Something had higher GPAs,  $F(1, 91) = 130.94, p < .001$ , than their contemporaries who did not participate in the program. The hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis predicted that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would improve their self-esteem. The third hypothesis was that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase identification with academics. Neither hypothesis was supported.

### *Discussion of Results*

In the first hypothesis, the researcher predicted that GPAs would increase as a result of implementing the Start Something curriculum. ANCOVAs were conducted on GPAs to explore the hypothesized relationship between the Start Something curriculum and academic performance. The comparisons of adjusted group means revealed that those students who participated in the Start Something curriculum had higher GPAs than their contemporaries who did not participate in the program. Academic gains related to

appropriate teaching strategies, student choice, a validation of cultural heritage (Ford, 1992; Teel, Debruin-Parecki, & Covington, 1998), and the use of the Start Something curriculum

Moreover, the Start Something curriculum provided cooperative learning activities such as preparing a portfolio and journal, group activities, and role-playing scenarios. Thus, this curriculum allowed participants to work in groups with other students and engage in cooperative learning, which according to Wilson-Jones and Caston (2004) appeared to be the most conducive method for academic achievement for African American students. Previous research by Osborne and Walker (2006) revealed that higher grades among students correlated to academic identification.

Lee (1999) posited that African American males possess the gender perspective and the cultural perspective to assess the social, economic, and educational challenges facing African American children. Dee (2006) concluded that models of student achievement indicated that assignment to an own-race teacher significantly increased the reading and math achievement of Black and White students. Dee (2006) suggested in this study that models of student achievement increased academic performance, particularly in math and reading achievement in Black and White students.

The second hypothesis predicted that self-esteem would improve for students after exposure to the curriculum. Comparisons of adjusted group means revealed that there were no differences between those who participated in the curriculum and those who did not. Therefore, the second hypothesis was not supported. Participants' GPAs did increase,

but there was no difference between self-esteem for those who participated in the study and those who did not.

Baumeister et al. (2003) reported that modest correlations between self-esteem and school performance indicated that high self-esteem does not necessarily lead to good performance. Efforts to improve self-esteem have not shown an improvement in academic performance and may sometimes be counterproductive. Further, Baumeister et al. (2003) postulated that there is little evidence of how self-esteem programs or other interventions affect academic performance. If a program that attempted to boost self-esteem and improve study skills ended up producing an improvement in grades, it could not be concluded that self-esteem was responsible for the gain (Baumeister et al.).

In addition, Forsyth, Lawrence, Burmette, and Baumeister (2007) studied 86 students from a large psychology class who earned a C, a D, or an F on an exam and attempted to boost their self-esteem by review questions and exhortations. The students were tracked in two groups, based on having earned a C versus a D or F. The researchers predicted that encouraging students to maintain their self-worth would promote achievement. Contrary to predictions, the D or F students' grades became worse as a result of the self-esteem bolstering emails. Students who did not receive the emails did not experience a change in grades. Therefore, these findings raised practical questions about the widespread practice of bolstering self-esteem in hopes of improving academic performance.

Furthermore, Ross and Broh (2000) proposed that academic achievement boosts self-esteem. Self-esteem has been shown to increase student achievement (Sterbin &

Rakow, 1996). Several studies have reported moderate correlations between self-esteem and academic achievement (Bear, Minke, Griffin, & Deemer, 1998; Osborne, Walker, & Rausch, 2002; Renick & Harter, 1980). Although academic achievement is a major factor in developing a positive view of self (Osborne, 1995), African American children maintained high levels of global self-esteem with low academic achievement (Collins-Eaglin & Karabenick, 1993; Frisby & Tucker, 1993; Mickelson, 1990; Osborne).

Despite displaying lower academic achievement on average than White students, African American students usually have high self-esteem (Van-Laar, 2000). Simmons et al. (1978) suggested in their study of 798 students that Black children also appeared to have higher self-esteem than White students. However, studies have shown lower correlations between academics and self-esteem (Demo and Parker, 1987; Simmons et al., 1978).

The last hypothesis predicted that students exposed to the Start Something curriculum would increase their identification with academics. However, results from the study did not support this hypothesis. Comparisons of adjusted group means revealed that there were no differences between those students who participated in the curriculum and those who did not; therefore the hypothesis was not supported.

However, Osborne and Walker (2006) found that students who strongly identified with academics had higher grades. Success in school appears to be related to identification with academics (Finn, 1989). Osborne (1995) suggested that identification with academics is the extent to which academic outcomes form the basis for global self-evaluation. Theoretically, students identified with academics should be more motivated to

succeed because their self-esteem is directly linked to academic performance (Osborne (1995). Steele (1992) suggested that the concerns and discrepancies surrounding academic performance between African American and White students are due to group differences in identification. Steele (1992) argued that all students experience anxiety over possible failure in academic settings, and individuals who are members of disadvantaged groups experience the increased anxiety of confirming the negative group stereotype via personal failure (Osborne, 1997).

Furthermore, Fortier et al. (1995) concluded that perceived academic competence and perceived academic self-determination positively influence academic motivation. Their study of 263 students supported the findings of this study. In addition, Wilson and Corpus (2001) challenged educators to provide appropriate motivation for students to excel—motivation such as feedback, acknowledgment of feelings, real-life models, interpersonal feelings, and cooperative learning. These are also the tenets of the Start Something curriculum. Moreover, Karenti and Thibert (1995) suggested in their study that academic motivation closely relates to GPA. Deci et al. (1991) suggested that self-determination leads to outcomes that are beneficial to individuals.

Quality Education Data, as commissioned by Target in 2003, showed that the Start Something curriculum produced improvements in students' self-esteem, attitudes toward school, grades, and overall attitudes and behaviors toward achievement. The Quality Education Data results revealed that youth showed positive improvement in self-esteem after participating in the curriculum compared to control group members; in

addition, youth exhibited improved attitudes toward learning and an increase in overall positive attitudes.

### *Anecdotal Evidence*

The majority of students in this study were products of single-parent homes, with over 85% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. These students teased and bullied each other. These students were products of communities and neighborhoods that may not foster positive self-esteem. These students commonly faced the temptation to do drugs, and they had few positive role models. The students in the study faced conflicting images of who they are and how they should act in academic settings. The participants lacked positive opportunities to engage in constructive after-school activities. Self-esteem is a developing construct that needs daily attention, role models, and positive practices to affect a global sense of self.

This particular school is located in inner-city Durham in a formerly abandoned building. In this area, poverty and despair are evident in the homes and the surrounding landscape. Many students reported they did not like the appearance of the school and were forced to attend by their parents. This attitude may have influenced the responses on the SPQ. The students felt at odds with their teachers and some had not developed positive relationships with them. The principal reported the termination of eight teachers for poor performance during the 2008 school year. The school has one school guidance counselor to serve over 300 students.

After the sessions with the students, some students stayed behind to share personal feelings and concerns surrounding community issues that they face such as peer

pressure, domestic violence, and financial hardships. In particular, one student reported being picked on because of body odor; there was not running water in this student's home. Another student reported being verbally abused by her father. The researcher spent additional time meeting with the school counselor. This effort linked students to the school counselor for mental health services and academic assistance. These students appeared eager to please and to engage in conversation, but they found it difficult to connect with the school and the staff. Many students shared stories of how their communities do not favor school or education. These students did want to do well academically, and many wanted to go to college.

### *Implications*

African American middle school students who followed a rigorous and detailed instructional program tied to a positive role model (e.g., a sports figure) may improve their grades. The Start Something curriculum provided relevant topics that students identified with, such as discovering self and setting goals, talking about the importance of working together, and engaging in group activities that emphasized cooperation, trust, and leadership. The students found relevancy in the curriculum. They gravitated to the curriculum because it was tied to a popular sports figure, Tiger Woods.

The Start Something curriculum provided detailed teaching materials and sample lesson plans for teachers to follow. Teaching resources listed goals and objectives for each activity with accompanying activity sheets and handouts. A curriculum that is connected to a sports figure and that allows students to engage in conversation, activities,

and community involvement might lead to academic gains for African American students.

### *Principal's Reflections*

The researcher met with the principal of the school to discuss the findings of the study and to expand upon the rationale behind the results. The principal reported that many of the students came from single-parent homes. Students in this school were once in public schools, but parents withdrew them for reasons such as failing grades, peer pressure, bullying, low self-esteem, and suspensions. Over 85% of the students lived in impoverished neighborhoods. The principal further reported that getting students to school on time was a monumental task. Students faced ridicule from family members and community bullies for attending a charter school in inner-city Durham.

Students continued to find it difficult to connect life to learning. According to the principal, many Love School students faced educational practices in public school that did not address their educational needs. In addition, according to the principal, students at Love School withdrew from the academic environment based on their experiences and perceived negative attitudes toward them.

Many students in the school come from deprived homes; adequate housing is not the norm. Moreover, the principal has implemented effective education and counseling groups to address positive self-esteem building activities for students and to build relationships with students, community, and faculty. The principal said he believes that greater academic gains, increased self-esteem, and school identification could occur once students feel connected to the school and are supported by the larger community, peers,

and families. Schools need the assistance of community groups, businesses, and various other public groups in enhancing the self-esteem and positive feelings of students toward school. Communities and families must work together.

The students in this school faced societal pressures and family situations that have not prepared them to develop healthy self-esteem or identification with school. Many of these students did not value school because they were imitating the negative attitudes of parents and the community. These students seriously lacked positive influences outside of school, influences that could assist in fostering a sense of academic belonging and a positive centrality towards self and academics.

#### *Applications*

Few social scientists would disagree that there is a significant relationship between the past and the future in regards to present cultural experiences. The academic achievement of an individual is tied to life goals and identification with academics (Berry & Asamen, 1989). Unmet psychosocial needs, especially when accompanied by government policies that foster social and economic inequities, can lead to negative educational and academic achievement in a student group (Berry & Asamen, 1989). One of the most actively discussed and sometimes vigorously debated issues since the late 1980s has been the declining social, economic, and educational status of African Americans (Garibaldi, 1992).

The confusion over the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement may be due to the context in which how the connection is viewed (Sanders-Phillips, 1989). The researches do not provide a straightforward answer in concluding

that self-esteem increased academic achievement. The significance of this failure is based on the following reactions (Kohn, 1994, p. 12):

- “No one has shown that self-esteem does not matter.”
- “Self-esteem is related to things other than academic performance and social behavior.”
- “Self-esteem may not be sufficient to produce achievement or to serve as a social vaccine, but it may be a necessary component.”
- “If the techniques for measurement are so problematic, how can people rely on studies using these measures to challenge the importance of self-esteem?”

Implementing a successful curriculum such as the Start Something curriculum may address the academic needs of African American students. When African American students receive clear instruction, constant reinforcement and praise, group discussion, hands-on activities, and a relevant curriculum, they may realize academic gains. However, if people assume that self-esteem, despite all the research, is really an unequivocal producer of positive attitudes, then dismissing the findings of this study is debatable. If classroom interventions or programs have not proven successful in raising self-esteem, and if self-esteem has not been causally linked to achievement or positive social behavior, then the claim that classroom-based self-esteem programs will bring about these other benefits becomes even more dubious (Kohn, 1994).

### *Significance of the Study*

Implementing a student-centered curriculum with student-engaging activities may benefit African American students. The Start Something curriculum provided opportunities for active participation and discussion with hands-on activities, which is a cornerstone in getting African American students engaged in the learning process. Moreover, the curriculum was of interest to the students, and they admired Tiger Woods and his accomplishments. This identification appeared to have made a difference in improving grades.

### *Delimitations*

Limitations for this study must be acknowledged. This study covered a relatively small group of students attending a local charter school in inner-city Durham. Charter schools in North Carolina vary in demographics and student abilities. In addition, the charter schools across North Carolina have different amounts of resources, including parents, educational supplies, teaching staff, infrastructure, grants, and community assets. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to apply to all charter schools or to all African American students. Generalizing across all charter schools or schools is not advisable.

The fact that students in the treatment group did not reveal a difference in self-esteem may be due in part to external factors, such as lack of community support, role models, and opportunities for the researcher to expose the students to positive influences. After school, over 90% of these students return to homes without adult supervision or constructive activities.

In addition, the lack of increased school perception might have been due to students' perceptions of the school and the teachers. Some of the students indicated that the teachers did not care about them or did not take the time to teach them. The climate of the school, according to the students, was poor.

The role of the principal investigator, who is an African American male, may be a limitation to the findings. All of the students studied were African American. Each lesson and activity was implemented as recommended. The investigator took great strides to allow the curriculum to direct the program in hopes of reducing research bias, and he made no additions to or deletions from the curriculum. These students had few opportunities to increase self-esteem and to increase positive school perceptions, but they could benefit from opportunities such as mentoring programs, community engagement in the school, and family educational support. The curriculum was purported to increase grades, self-esteem, and identification with school. Grades did increase, but self-esteem and school identification did not change after exposure to the Start Something curriculum.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study provided opportunities for further research and exploration regarding the achievement of African American students. Further study could include public schools or larger student populations to draw a comparison between public and charter schools, income levels of students, and diverse study bodies. Hale (2001) postulated that African American students need positive opportunities to engage with African American role models to impact and increase self-esteem. Osborne (1997) posited that African

Americans are prone to disidentification. Therefore, future studies could implement a program using role models to increase identification with academics and self-esteem.

Compelling factors thwarted a significant improvement in self-esteem and school perceptions in these students, such as students' perceptions of their community and the lack of positive activities and role models in their lives. Lee (1999) believed that African American men can boost the self-esteem of African American children. Over 85% of the participants in this study were without a father in the home. Therefore, the inclusion of role models in a study may prove beneficial in affecting the academic gains or self-esteem of participants. Finally, a longer study to determine improvements in self-esteem and identification with academics, coupled with outside activities and community support to affect self-esteem and school perception, would be beneficial.

Students in this study need consistent and ongoing opportunities to engage in positive, constructive activities. Therefore, research opportunities may need to involve community leaders simultaneously working with the school to assess the impact of self-esteem and academic identification. Other salient recommendations for studying the impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American children include conducting a longitudinal study using income as a variable alongside self-esteem and identification with academics, implementing a study that uses role models as a variable, and exploring diverse school settings such as a public or magnet school.

These recommendations for further study could help educators and stakeholders fully understand the impact of achievement for all African American students in various

settings. The challenge for school administrators, educators, and parents has been to compel students to adjust their perceptions so that school remains a viable option through which they will be able to affirm the self. Simply telling students they have the ability to succeed without clear opportunity or models of success is insufficient (Osborne, 1997; Baumeister et al., 2003; Simmons et al., 1978). Only through independent performance and success can any student, independent of race, overcome hurdles they are sure to face.

### *Conclusion*

The challenge continues to be that of educating all children at all times, especially African American students. Research must continue to explore studies and opportunities investigating how African American students learn and, most importantly, in what environments. A “feel-good education” may not necessarily lead to academic performance (Baumeister et al, 2003). The debate continues concerning the issue of increasing self-esteem in hopes of improving academic performance. However, research must continue to examine how self-determination can promote academic achievement.

Academic achievement is often linked to student achievement. The debate continues in understanding what comes first, self-esteem or student achievement. Self-esteem proponents argue that high self-esteem yields high student achievement. Furthermore, others find sufficient evidence to make a clear determination in offering self-esteem as the sole panacea for student success and identification with academics.

The research is clear that African American students tend to have high self-esteem and low academic performance (Hale, 2001; Steele, 1997). Therefore, self-esteem cannot just be tied to academic achievement without testing other variables such as self-

determination, motivation, and self-efficacy. The research findings here present an additional view in educating African American students. First, African American students must participate in a curriculum that supports them by providing hands-on, engaging activities that incite motivation and determination. Second, these students thrive when given an opportunity to bring their home situations and experiences into the classroom and into the learning process. Third, their academic successes tie in with motivation, role models, and determination. As this study indicated, GPA can increase independently of an increase in self-esteem and identification with academics.

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## Appendix A

## Informed Student Consent

**Project Title:** *Impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American Adolescents*

Edward E. Bell, Principal Investigator  
Dr. Kathie Johnson-Morgan, Faculty Advisor  
Liberty University

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate as a participant in a research project entitled: "*The Impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American Adolescents*" being conducted by Edward E. Bell as an authorized part of the education and research program at Liberty University.

**Purpose:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to access the impact of self-esteem and identification with academics on the achievement of African American adolescents.

**Procedure:** I will utilize the Start Something curriculum for up to 8 weeks for 40 minutes a day, one day per week, which will be administered to the experimental group. The lessons will begin in August 2007 and will be completed in October 2007, and be given to approximately 20 students. The pre-tests will be given to the experimental group and the control group: the Rosenberg Self-esteem Inventory and the School Perception Questionnaire; after using the Start Something curriculum, the pretest and post-tests will be given to both groups. Students not participating in the research will continue with their normal instructional day.

**Consent:** I understand that neither my name or any other personally identifying marks will be attached to any of my data and that the code sheet linking my personal identity information with my data will be kept in a locked and protected location in the investigator's office.

Further, I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, involves no risk to my physical or mental health beyond those encountered in everyday life, and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. I also understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that only the researcher listed above will have access to my identity and the information associated with my identity. I further understand that for any correspondence conducted by email, confidentiality will be maintained to the degree

permitted by the technology used. Specifically I understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

**Questions:** I understand that the information given to me along with any questions I might have had related to this study have been satisfactorily answered. I also know that if I have any additional questions about this research project.

I also understand that should I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research, I may contact the Liberty University Office for Research Protection at (434) 592-4054.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or guardian  
(If minors are involved)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher: I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed and that I have answered any questions from the participant as completely as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

## Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)**

The scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 High School Juniors and Seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York State.

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

|     |  |    |   |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|---|----|
| 1.  | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.                                  | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2.* | At times, I think I am no good at all.                                     | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3.  | I feel that I have a number of good qualities.                             | SA | A | D | SD |
| 4.  | I am able to do things as well as most other people.                       | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5.* | I feel I do not have much to be proud of.                                  | SA | A | D | SD |
| 6.* | I certainly feel useless at times.   | SA | A | D | SD |
| 7.  | I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 8.* | I wish I could have more respect for myself.                               | SA | A | D | SD |
| 9.* | All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.                     | SA | A | D | SD |
| 10. | I take a positive attitude toward myself.                                  | SA | A | D | SD |

Scoring: SA=3, A=2, D=1, SD=0. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3. Sum the scores for the 10 items. The higher the score, the higher the self esteem.

The scale may be used without explicit permission. The author's family, however, would like to be kept informed of its use:

The Morris Rosenberg Foundation  
c/o Department of Sociology  
University of Maryland  
2112 Art/Soc Building  
College Park, MD 20742-1315

**References**

References with further characteristics of the scale:

Crandal, R. (1973). The measurement of self-esteem and related constructs, Pp. 80-82 in J.P. Robinson & P.R. Shaver (Eds), **Measures of social psychological attitudes. Revised edition.** Ann Arbor: ISR.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## School Perceptions Questionnaire

Please indicate how much you agree/disagree with each statement below by filling in a bubble.

|  | Disagree<br>Strongly  | Disagree<br>Mildly    | Neutral               | Agree<br>Mildly       | Agree<br>Strongly     |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Being a good student is important to me.                            | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. School is important in life.  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I don't care whether I get good grades or bad grades.               | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. School is one of my favorite places to be.                          | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I feel good about myself when I get good grades.                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. It is a mistake to drop out of school.                              | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. I'd rather be anywhere but in school.                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. When I work on homework I feel like I am doing something important. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. I can talk to my teachers about anything.                           | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. I think it is important to do well in school.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. I want my friends to think of me as a good student.                | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. If I do well in school I will get a good job.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 13. School is very boring for me.                                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. I feel nervous or uncomfortable in school.                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. When I am in school I feel like people are always judging me.      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. I always put a lot of effort into the work I do for my teachers.   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. I get treated with respect in school.                              | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. I participate in school activities.                                | <input type="radio"/> |
| 19. I would feel really bad if I got a bad grade on a test.            | <input type="radio"/> |
| 20. I enjoy learning new things.                                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| 21. I plan to go to college.   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 22. I feel like the things I do at school are a waste of time.         | <input type="radio"/> |
| 23. How I do in school is really not important to me.                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 24. School is only useful for getting a good job.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 25. I want my teachers to think I am a good student                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| 26. I would be really sad if people thought I wasn't a good student.   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 27. I am proud of being a student in this school.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 28. The things we do in class are useless.                             | <input type="radio"/> |
| 29. Teachers don't care about me.                                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 30. The people in my school are interested in me.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 31. School is a waste of time.   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 32. I feel comfortable when I am in school, like I belong there.       | <input type="radio"/> |

Please do not make any marks below this line.

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## Appendix D

## Sample Start Something Curriculum

## Tiger Time!

Any of the following passages from the Start Something book will reinforce the objectives of this unit. These passages are not required for activities in the unit but have value as support material. Teachers have assigned them in homeroom, read them over the PA to the entire school, made them an option during silent reading time, and/or used them as quick discussion starters.

- p. 15 Introduction
- p. 23 Something Good Happened to You Today—Did You Notice?
- p. 62 Are You Too Critical?
- p. 69 Are You Listening?
- p. 78 Open Up
- p. 91 Should You Cover Up for a Friend Who Breaks the Rules?
- p. 114 Support Your Teammates (Especially When They Really Need It)

Additional activities that supplement the Teacher's Guide are available online at [www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org](http://www.tigerwoodsfoundation.org). These activities are grouped by unit and designed to reinforce the stated goals and objectives.

TIGER'S ACTION PLAN MIDDLE SCHOOL UNIT 1 p. 6

# UNIT 1

## LET'S BEGIN!

### GOAL:

In Unit 1 the teacher and students gain an understanding of the Action Plan.

### OBJECTIVES:

Prepare the teacher and students for what's ahead

Become familiar with the program's goals and objectives

Address the importance of working cooperatively in their group

Conduct an assessment of student attitudes at the onset of the program

### UNIT 1

#### Whole Group

1. Ask students what they know about Tiger Woods. Record their responses on the white/chalkboard.
2. Introduce the *Start Something* book.
3. Pass out copies of Resource Sheet 1.1 which contains the letter by Tiger Woods (pp. 9–13 in book). Students may read silently, or you or a student may read the letter aloud to the group.
4. Ask students if they have new information about Tiger that they can add to their list.
5. Read the following passages from the *Start Something* book to the students: