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*Urban Education* 2008; 43; 154

DOI: 10.1177/0042085907312351

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# Factors Affecting Urban African American High School Students' Achievement in Reading

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Data analyzed from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 indicate that the reading achievement of urban African American high school students is positively influenced by the amount of hours spent doing homework and by parents' expectations of their child's future educational attainment. Implications for practice and research are provided.

**Keywords:** *African American students; reading achievement*

National data have shown that African American students score lower than students from other racial groups on measures of reading achievement (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003; Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001). This finding has been consistent across several national studies over the years. For example, according to test score data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, African American high school students scored lower than their White counterparts on standardized reading assessments (Grigg, Donahue, & Dion, 2007). More specifically, in 1992 and 2005, there was a difference in reading achievement between African American and White 12th-grade students by approximately 24 and 26 points, respectively. Also, the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 had similar findings that showed that African American high school students scored lower than White students on standardized tests of reading achievement (Rock, Pollack, & Ingels, 1996).

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Although racial group comparison studies are instrumental in identifying group differences in reading achievement, they often mask the specific issues and factors that affect reading achievement for both African American and White students. Accordingly, over the years, scholars have explored factors that affect the reading achievement of African American students (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Ferguson, 2001; Washington, 2001). For example, studies have shown that early language development affects later reading achievement (H. J. Craig, Conner, & Washington, 2003; Hiebert, 1988; Reid & Hresko, 1980). Another important factor that has been shown to influence the development of reading achievement for African American students includes family and community backgrounds (Edwards, 1992; Foster, 1992; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2002, 2003). Additionally, some scholars have noted that the type and quality of educational experiences African American students are exposed to affects their reading achievement (Bell & Clark, 1998; L. A. Flowers, 2007; V. J. Harris, 1990; Lee, 1995; Paul, 2000). Based on an ethnographic case study in one urban elementary school, Gilmore (1985) noted that many African American students were denied full access to literacy-based experiences because of the teacher's assessment of the student's attitude and behavior. Despite the fact that many of the African American students observed in this study displayed higher order literacy skills, only a limited number of these students had the opportunity to participate in educational programs that provided them access to more advanced literacy instruction. Viewed collectively, these and other factors have been identified and have helped to shape the widely held view that increasing African American student reading achievement in schools will require a myriad of strategies that take into account the diversity of school and community environments and student diversity within the African American population (Entwisle & Alexander, 1988; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996).

Studies have also demonstrated that the development of interest and aptitude in reading begins in the early grades (H. J. Craig et al., 2003; Edwards, 1992; Ortiz, 2001; Yan, 1999). As a result, the No Child Left Behind Act places considerable emphasis on designing and implementing interventions in the early grades. More specifically, the Reading First initiative of the No Child Left Behind Act was established to ensure that students achieve reading proficiency by the end of the third grade. States have implemented the Reading First initiative in an attempt to improve and document student achievement. Preliminary data suggest that this initiative is facilitating the improvement process in reading skills by emphasizing scientifically research-based reading instruction (Moss, Jacob, Boulay, Horst, & Poulos, 2006).

However, as stated earlier, national data reveal that the racial achievement gap in reading still exists.

Reading scholars have also focused on several key indicators related to the early literacy achievement gap (H. J. Craig et al., 2003; J. L. Harris, 2003). Those indicators include (a) the language use of African American children, (b) the literacy experiences of African American families, (c) the socioeconomic background of students, and (d) the methods of classroom teachers. However, an examination of the research literature suggests that the strategies to increase reading achievement in the early grades may be insufficient because the reading achievement of African Americans does not increase at marked levels during the middle school and high school years. Thus, although considerable research and scholarship exists concerning the reading achievement gap, there appears to be a dearth of research that assesses the extent to which home and student engagement activities affect the reading achievement of African American high school students, especially those who attend urban school systems.

Given the research regarding the underachievement of African Americans in the area of reading, it is clear that more studies are needed that examine the direct and unique effects of reading achievement for high school students (L. A. Flowers, 2007; Langer, 2001; Rasinski et al., 2005). Although several scholarly works have been produced to better understand the impact of critical factors on African American students' reading achievement in the early grades, few studies exist that focus on African American high school students (Brooks, 2006; T. A. Flowers, 2003; Lee, 1995). Thus, additional research is needed to highlight some of the issues that affect African American students' reading achievement at the high school level to inform educational reform and curriculum development activities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend the research that focuses on specific factors that affect reading achievement for African American students by examining high school students in urban school environments.

## Method

### Data Source

Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS 2002) were analyzed for this study. The ELS 2002 base-year study was carried out in a national probability sample of 752 public, Catholic, and private schools in the spring of the 2001-2002 academic year. In total, "15,362 students completed a base-year questionnaire, as did 13,488 parents, 7,135 teachers, 743

principals, and 718 librarians" (Ingels, Pratt, Rogers, Siegel, & Stutts, 2004, p. 12). In terms of the level of urbanicity of the school locale within the ELS 2002 database, schools in urban areas accounted for approximately 40% of the schools in the sample.

In the first year of data collection, ELS 2002 measured student achievement and obtained information about students' attitudes and experiences (Ingels, Pratt, Rogers, Siegel, & Stutts, 2005). These same students were surveyed and tested again, 2 years later in 2004, to measure similar constructs, experiences, and educational outcomes (Bozick & Lauff, 2007; Ingels et al., 2007). Because the present study was interested in examining African American students in urban areas, given the weighting procedures used in the ELS 2002, the data analyzed for this study were based on 242,991 African American students in 184 urban schools. Approximately 51% of the sample consisted of African American males, and 49% of the sample consisted of African American females.

## Variables

Variables from the ELS 2002 were used in the present study (variable names for each variable from the ELS 2002 are shown in parentheses; see Table 1). The dependent variable for this study consisted of the reading test standardized score (BYTXRSTD). Based on an earlier study by Peng and Wright (1994), the present study incorporated a number of independent variables. The first set of independent variables consisted of personal, family, and home characteristics: gender (BYSEX), family composition (BYF-COMP), parent's educational attainment (BYPARED), and family income (BYINCOME). The second set of variables consisted of how students spend their time outside of school: hours spent doing homework (BYS34B) and hours spent watching television (BYS48A). Parents' interactions and expectations constituted the third set of independent variables: parents' help with homework (BYS85B), parents' discussing of school courses (BYS86A), and parents' expectations of their child's future educational attainment (BYP81). The analytical model also included students' extracurricular experiences outside of school: time spent taking music, art, language, and dance classes (BYS44F) and hours spent reading outside of school (BYS43). Precedent for using these independent or predictor variables can be found in other research investigations estimating the impact of home, family, and student characteristics on academic achievement (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bui, 2007; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Peng & Wright, 1994; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2007; Thomas, 2000; Walberg, 1984).

**Table 1**  
**Operational Definitions of Variables From the ELS 2002**

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Dependent Variable

*Reading Achievement:* A continuous variable based on a norm-referenced assessment of reading achievement.

Independent Variables

*Gender:* A categorical variable was coded 1 = *female*, 0 = *male*.

*Family composition:* A categorical variable based on the type of parental structure at home (1 = *lived with mother and father*, 0 = *other parental relationship types*).

*Parent's educational attainment:* A categorical variable based on the highest educational level attained by either parent was coded 1 = *did not finish high school*, 2 = *graduated from high school or GED*, 3 = *attended 2-year school but did not earn a 2-year degree*, 4 = *graduated from 2-year school*, 5 = *attended college but did not earn 4-year degree*, 6 = *graduated from college*, 7 = *completed master's degree or equivalent*, 8 = *completed PhD, MD, other advanced degree*.

*Family income:* A categorical variable based on the student's family adjusted gross income in 2001 was coded 1 = *none*, 2 = *\$1,000 or less*, 3 = *\$1,001 to \$5,000*, 4 = *\$5,001 to \$10,000*, 5 = *\$10,001 to \$15,000*, 6 = *\$15,001 to \$20,000*, 7 = *\$20,001 to \$25,000*, 8 = *\$25,001 to \$35,000*, 9 = *\$35,001 to \$50,000*, 10 = *\$50,001 to \$75,000*, 11 = *\$75,001 to \$100,000*, 12 = *\$100,001 to \$200,000*, 13 = *\$200,001 or more*.

*Hours spent doing homework:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of the amount of time they spent doing their homework was coded 0 = *0 hours*, 1 = *1 hour*, 2 = *2 hours*, 3 = *3 hours*, 4 = *4 hours*, 5 = *5 hours*, 6 = *6 hours*, 7 = *7 hours*, 8 = *8 hours*, 9 = *9 hours*, 10 = *10 hours*, 11 = *11 hours*, 12 = *12 hours*, 13 = *13 hours*, 14 = *14 hours*, 15 = *15 hours*, 16 = *16 hours*, 17 = *17 hours*, 18 = *18 hours*, 19 = *19 hours*, 20 = *20 hours*, 21 = *21 hours*, 22 = *22 hours*, 23 = *23 hours*, 24 = *24 hours*, 25 = *25 hours*, 26 = *26 or more hours*.

*Hours spent watching television:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of how many hours a day were spent watching television or videotapes/DVDs was coded 0 = *0 hours*, 1 = *1 hour*, 2 = *2 hours*, 3 = *3 hours*, 4 = *4 hours*, 5 = *5 hours*, 6 = *6 or more hours*.

*Parents help with homework:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of how often their parents assist with homework was coded 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*.

*Parents discuss school courses:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of how often parents discussed selecting courses or programs at school was coded 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*.

*Parent's expectations of child's educational future:* A categorical variable based on parents' self-reported assessment of how far they expected their child to go in school was coded

(continued)

**Table 1 (continued)**

1 = less than high school graduation, 2 = high school graduation or GED only, 3 = attend or complete 2-year college/school, 4 = attend college but not complete 4-year degree, 5 = graduate from college, 6 = obtain master's or equivalent, 7 = obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree.

*Art, music, or language classes:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of the amount of time spent taking music, art, language, dance classes was coded 1 = rarely or never, 2 = less than once a week, 3 = once or twice a week, 4 = everyday or almost everyday.

*Reading outside of school:* A categorical variable based on students' self-reported assessment of how much additional reading they engaged in each week independently outside of school, not in connection with school work was coded 0 = 0 hours, 1 = 1 hour, 2 = 2 hours, 3 = 3 hours, 4 = 4 hours, 5 = 5 hours, 6 = 6 hours, 7 = 7 hours, 8 = 8 hours, 9 = 9 hours, 10 = 10 hours, 11 = 11 hours, 12 = 12 hours, 13 = 13 hours, 14 = 14 hours, 15 = 15 hours, 16 = 16 hours, 17 = 17 hours, 18 = 18 hours, 19 = 19 hours, 20 = 20 hours, 21 = 21 or more hours.

Note: ELS = Educational Longitudinal Study.

## Data Analysis Procedures

This study employed nationally representative data to examine critical factors that affect the reading achievement of African American high school students in urban areas. Stated differently, this study attempted to explore the unique effects of research-based factors on African American students' achievement. Data analysis occurred in a two-stage process. In the first stage of data analysis, descriptive statistics were computed for selected variables. In the second stage of data analysis, employing ordinary least squares regression, the dependent variable was regressed on the entire set of independent variables, simultaneously, while applying statistical controls for the effects of all other variables in the equation (Pedhazur, 1982; see Table 2). All statistical results were reported significant at  $p < .01$  (two-tailed). In the third stage of data analysis, effect sizes were computed by dividing the metric regression coefficient of each significant factor by the pooled standard deviation of the outcome measure to examine the practical significance of the significant effects (Cohen, 1988; Hays, 1994).

## Results

According to data from the ELS 2002, reading achievement was significantly affected by family income, the amount of time spent on homework,

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics of Selected ELS 2002 Variables<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family composition	0.278	0.477
Parent's educational level	4.300	1.900
Family income	7.803	2.517
Hours spent doing homework	5.106	5.778
Hours spent watching television	3.866	1.964
Parents help with homework	2.534	1.011
Parents discuss school courses	2.072	0.714
Parent's expectations of child's educational future	5.051	1.485
Art, music, or language classes	1.605	1.068
Read outside of school	3.224	4.325

Note: ELS = Educational Longitudinal Study.

a. Weighted sample size = 242,991.

and parent's expectations of their child (see Table 3). More specifically, family income exerted a significant and positive effect on reading achievement ( $B = .714$ ,  $d = .283$ ). The effects of hours spent doing homework on African American students' reading achievement was also significant and positive ( $B = .231$ ,  $d = .039$ ). Additionally, the effects of parental expectations of their child's future educational attainment was positive ( $B = .994$ ,  $d = .669$ ).

### Limitations of the Study

The present study has some limitations that should be factored into any meaningful attempt to use the study's findings in a decision-making context. First, the regression model was limited to particular factors from earlier research (Peng & Wright, 1994) that examined home and student factors that affect student achievement; thus, this study was limited to the extent that it did not focus on school-related factors, such as teacher quality and the organizational culture of the school. As a result, additional studies should incorporate these and other important variables, such as community and peer group factors. The second limitation of the study is that the student and institutional sample and the resulting student characteristics controlled for in this study, though extensive, may not apply to all urban schools. Third, although the student sample contained African American high school students in urban areas representing a geographically diverse population, the student



**TABLE 3**  
**Regression Analysis Summaries for the Effects of Selected**  
**Factors on Reading Achievement<sup>a,b</sup>**

Independent Variables	Metric Regression Coefficient
Family composition	.868
Parent's educational level	.056
Family income	.714* (.283)
Hours spent doing homework	.231* (.039)
Hours spent watching television	-.148
Parents help with homework	-.791
Parents discuss school courses	.465
Parent's expectations of child's educational future	.994* (.669)
Art, music, or language classes	.031
Read outside of school	-.139

Note: Effect sizes for each statistically significant variable are shown in parentheses.

a. Weighted sample size = 242,991.

b.  $R^2 = .15$ .

\* $p < .01$ .

sample did not include all African American high school students attending schools in urban areas. Therefore, the findings may not resonate with the experiences or developmental patterns of all African American high school students. A fourth limitation is that most of the data used in this study were based on student self-reported information. However, self-reported data have been shown to yield valid and reliable indicators of student involvement and development (Anaya, 1999; Pike, 1995, 1996).

Fifth, this study did not attempt to explain why certain pre-high school student characteristics or student engagement experiences had a significant influence on reading achievement and others did not. Additional research should explore these questions employing qualitative research designs or experimental research designs. A sixth limitation of this study, which is related to the fifth limitation, was that the analytical procedures used in the present study did not permit the identification of conditional effects of personal, family, home, or student engagement variables on African American students' reading achievement. As a result, future research is needed to determine if the direct effects of personal, family, home, and student engagement on African American students' reading achievement differs for students who possess certain characteristics or have particular experiences in high school.

## Discussion

This study yielded three major findings. First, controlling for an important set of variables (Peng & Wright, 1994), urban African American high school students' reading achievement was positively affected by family income. Consistent with other studies measuring the influence of socioeconomic status on academic achievement (Johnson, McGue, & Iacono, 2007), this finding highlighted the positive impact of income on academic achievement. This study also found that African American high school students' reading achievement was positively affected by the amount of time they spent doing homework. This finding indicates that time spent engaging in homework resulted in higher reading achievement scores for African American high school students. Thus, although some researchers contend that the relationship between homework and achievement is immaterial (Trautwein & Köller, 2003), the statistical findings of this research study indicate that engaging in homework influences the reading achievement of African American high school students. This particular finding resonates with previous research (Peng & Wright, 1994) as well as a review of the research literature conducted by Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) that indicates engaging in homework and related activities contributes to the achievement of all students.

Also, taking into account an extensive set of independent variables, the study found that African American high school students' reading achievement was positively affected by their parents' expectations of their future educational attainment. This finding suggests that urban African American high school students whose parents believed that they would attain educational credentials beyond the high school diploma are more likely to score higher on a measure of reading achievement. This finding was consistent with other research that suggests parents' expectations are directly related to their children's expectations and achievement outcomes (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001). Moreover, similar to other studies (Jeynes, 2007), this result suggests that parental involvement positively influences student achievement. Overall, the findings of this study are significant and relevant for researchers, counselors, teachers, and parents as they seek to create meaningful and enriching educational experiences for African American high school students.

### Perceived Labor Market Explanation

This research is aligned with existing research related to African American students' achievement in schools (Fordham, 1996, 1999; Ogbu, 1992). Stated

differently, various researchers have purported a myriad of explanations for the underachievement of African American students. For example, researchers have found that the unequal access to social and cultural capital in schools negatively affects African American students' achievement (J. L. Harris, Kamhi, & Pollack, 2001). Another prominent explanation includes the "perceived labor market explanation" between African American students and teachers (Erickson, 1987; Fordham, 1996, 1999; Ogbu, 1992) as defined by Erickson (1987) in the following manner:

The position, as articulated by its chief proponent, John Ogbu (1974, 1978a, 1982, 1987b), argues that the main reason for the low school achievement of many minority students in the United States is that those students (and their parents and peers) are convinced that school success will not help them break out of a cycle of poverty that they attribute to the racism that is endemic in American society. (pp. 339-340)

According to Ogbu (1992), the perceived labor market explanation accounts for the underachievement of African American students. Another explanation for the underachievement of African American students in schools focuses on the nexus between the educational environment and organizational issues. Aligned with this view, Erickson (1987) defines the politics and culture of school failure and success by stating:

One way to reconcile the two positions is to consider school motivation and achievement as a political process in which issues of institutional and personal legitimacy, identity, and economic interest are central. To do this we must also consider as well the nature of the symbolic discourse through which issues of legitimacy, identity, and interest are apprehended and framed by individual students and teachers in local communities and schools. (p. 341)

Thus, exploring the role of a teacher's pedagogical practices, perspectives, and the cultural background of teachers may prove to be a promising endeavor as researchers explore the specific strategies used by classroom teachers to enhance African American students reading skills. Currently, in this regard, researchers are focusing on the role of pedagogy and teacher quality to help explain the reading achievement gap. However, it is important that teachers, school counselors, and school administrators continue to question the training of all educational professionals and discuss the fundamental questions related to African American student achievement.

## Implications for Practice

In a landmark article, Delpit (2006) offers several recommendations for teachers to enhance their ability to work with urban schools. She notes that teachers should focus on teaching higher order thinking skills; teachers should use curricula that emphasize and respect home, community, and students' background factors; and teachers should seek to increase a sense of community in the classroom to encourage academic achievement and mitigate notions of inferiority. Based on the findings in this study, it should also be noted that educational professionals (e.g., teachers, school counselors, librarians, and school administrators), working in conjunction with parents and their communities, may be able to improve reading achievement for African American students by employing several techniques. First, teachers will need to collaborate with librarians and parents to obtain a better understanding of the types of books that students are more likely to enjoy reading and then use these texts during reading instruction. Second, parents must monitor their children to ensure that they are reading consistently and comprehending a variety of reading materials. This may involve parents monitoring television viewing and other activities that distract from developing critical reading skills that are tested on standardized assessments. Third, parents must also model appropriate behaviors by reading with their children and engaging in learning opportunities. This approach may communicate to students that learning the many tasks associated with reading requires an ongoing effort. Perhaps if parents spend more time reading and discussing books at home, African American students may be more likely to gain a stronger appreciation for reading. Fourth, school administrators must hold teachers accountable with regard to ensuring that all students are making gains in reading achievement. Fifth, school counselors and administrators should seek partnerships with external organizations to ensure that students have access to high-quality reading materials in school and that public libraries are accessible and inviting. Each of the previously mentioned strategies has implications for the in-service and preservice training of reading specialists, literacy coaches, parent liaisons, librarians, teachers, school counselors, and administrators. Furthermore, perhaps these strategies should be translated into learning goals in graduate programs in appropriate courses to ensure that future educational professionals are equipped with these skills and knowledge. In the next section, there are additional topics and issues that may be relevant to incorporate into graduate programs of education and teacher training programs.

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

According to Erickson (1987), culturally responsive pedagogy is a way to foster a system of trust in the classroom that builds bridges between teachers, students, and the community. In addition, other scholars continue to call for culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to foster communication within classrooms and limit cultural conflict (Delpit, 2004; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2002; Lee, 1995). However, since Erickson's work in 1987, there is limited scholarship that takes into account what teachers can and should do in the classroom (Darling, 2005; Matczynski, Rogus, Lasley, & Joseph, 2000). One such study, by Lee (1995), addresses how to use diverse literature with culturally and racially diverse students, while simultaneously teaching comprehension strategies. In the study, Lee identifies "signifying" as a procedure for using language to scaffold information during literary interpretations and as a strategy to initiate effective or culturally relevant instruction for African American students. By drawing on African American high school students' linguistic strengths to foster literacy in the classroom, Lee (1995) suggests that reading instruction that includes literary interpretations has the potential to enhance English language arts classrooms and improve African American students' reading achievement.

Other scholars have also described strategies for using culturally relevant pedagogy to increase student achievement. An article by Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that

culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Furthermore, Ladson-Billings recognizes that culturally relevant pedagogy includes various approaches within classrooms, such as linking the school and home culture of students. Moreover, Ladson-Billings explains the premise of culturally relevant pedagogy as a link between the school, home, and community culture of students. In addition, Ladson-Billings believes that teachers must focus on empowering African American students to achieve academically and that teachers should aid African American students in challenging existing social systems.

African American students' sense of cultural competence is tied to the ability to preserve their sense of community, language, and family (Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005). Therefore, it is important that we

teach educators the importance of honoring and respecting students' cultural backgrounds. An example of cultural competence among African American children is their ability to tell stories (Champion, 2003; Foster, 1992; Norment, 1995). In a landmark study, Champion (2003) compares the variations and patterns in stories by African and African American children and found similar patterns. In addition, Champion addresses the implications for classroom teachers and community leaders in improving and continuing the tradition of storytelling.

Understanding storytelling among African American students may help educators to gain greater insight into (a) the socialization of African American students through language and storytelling, (b) the casual and formal language patterns among African American female and male storytellers, and (c) how to incorporate storytelling as a part of the rich traditional community norm that is learned through observation, interaction, and participation. Studying the language experiences of African American students through storytelling may also hold great possibilities for educators who want to study the distinct features of African American vernacular and dialect. Encouraging storytelling among African American students may enable teachers to learn about their students' traditions, language, and learning styles. In addition, classrooms that value a student's home language are classrooms where students are more likely to experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Researchers who support the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy assert that the linguistic differences, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic status are all positive factors that teachers should consider within their pedagogy (Asante, 1991; Watkins, 2001; Wilson, 1991). Furthermore, researchers have asserted that teachers' interactions with African American students create confusion and cultural conflict for African Americans within the classroom, thus making learning difficult (Delpit, 2004; Ferguson, 2001; Hale, 2001; Thompson, 2004). Therefore, culturally relevant pedagogy represents another positive contribution that may positively affect the reading achievement of African American students throughout the educational pipeline. In fact, educators who employ this approach believe that culturally relevant pedagogy is important for the academic, cultural, and social development of all African American students (Gay, 2000; Paul, 2000; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

## **Implications for Future Research**

Given the importance of developing reading skills, some of the research that has been conducted to enhance students' reading skills (M. T. Craig &

Yore, 1996; Lee, 1995; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Vaughn & Klingler, 1999) and data highlighting African American students' reading achievement test scores, it is clear that the educational community must continue to study and identify mechanisms and concepts that may support desired educational outcomes in reading. For example, strategies that incorporate African Americans students' heritage and lived experiences into the instructional time devoted to improving reading skills should be considered and tested in high school classrooms to determine their potential impact on increasing reading comprehension skills and students' interest in reading (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007). Similarly, educational practices that focus on gender-specific development in reading should be studied to ensure that the talents of African American male and female students are thoroughly examined and integrated into the curriculum (Tatum, 2005). To overcome some of the logistical challenges associated with conducting these types of studies, scholars should establish research partnerships with local schools and other local area educational agencies. Additionally, it may prove helpful to study programs, such as Early Start, Even Start, and Head Start, in the early preschool years, when children acquire language and reading skills. This approach could yield information to strengthen the language and reading skills of African American students in the later grades.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be the case that integrating culturally relevant pedagogy in reading instruction at the high school level may provide a series of strategies to move educational practices and research away from deficit orientations and closer to approaches and concepts that help students and parents facilitate reading achievement in schools. Because of the utility of its practices and perspectives, a culturally relevant approach appears to be promising for African American students in urban settings (Hale, 2001; Lee, 1995, 2001). However, more research is needed in this area to determine whether culturally relevant pedagogy positively affects African American high school students' reading achievement. As more research is conducted to study culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students in urban school environments, we can determine whether these and related approaches may improve the reading achievement of African American high school students.

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