CHAPTER 5

Education and African American Children

OVERVIEW

The education of African American children has consistently generated discussion and debate among educators, social scientists, the media, and the courts. One topic in particular, desegregation, has occupied the attention of the nation for more than 40 years. The educational experience of African American children, unlike the educational experiences of their counterparts from other ethnic groups, has had a long, complex, controversial political and legal history.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss those educational experiences and to discuss the factors that impact their educational progress. The chapter is divided into four sections.

The first section of the chapter, School Desegregation and African American Children, provides information about the landmark court decision *Brown v. the Board of Education,* which changed the course of education for children of all races in the 20th century. The second section of the chapter discusses African American children in the public school system, specifically highlighting their academic performance and identifying the factors that influence their academic achievement. The third section of the chapter presents early intervention programs and information on public and private schools that work for African American children. The chapter concludes with a discussion of perspectives on education and African American children.

SECTION ONE: SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

We begin with a discussion of desegregation, education and African American children.

INSIDER'S VOICE: RESEGREGATION OF AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In January 2003, an article entitled "School Segregation Growing" written by Fredreka Schouten (Gannett News Service) appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The article discusses a disturbing trend, the resegregation of America's urban public schools. According to Ms. Schouten, a study conducted by Harvard University professor Dr. Gary Orfield and colleagues, revealed that urban public schools are becoming increasingly segregated. During the 2000–2001 academic year, more than 70% of Black and Hispanic students attended minority schools. Dr. Orfield believes that this resegregation has resulted in creating a form of "educational apartheid." "These schools tend to have fewer qualified teachers, and the students are presented with less challenging course work than students in integrated suburban schools. The tragedy is that the resegregation of public schools is undermining the quality of education that minority students receive. The trend is going to produce a deeply unequal education and a more polarized society," Mr. Orfield said.

Desegregation and African American Children

The story reported in the Insider's Voice on school desegregation is one issue that has dominated the heart of national politics and educational policies for the past 50 years. The movement from segregated schools to desegregated schools and finally to resegregated schools has been an extensive and complicated movement.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional and that schools must begin to desegregate with all deliberate speed (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). This ruling was a result of a series of court cases challenging the separate but equal educational doctrine that had operated in the United States for more than 70 years.

Prior to 1954, African American children and White children, primarily in the southern region of the United States, attended legally segregated schools. Those schools were inferior in both physical structure and educational quality. Black students were taught with outdated textbooks, lacked transportation to schools, and their school buildings were inadequately maintained (Dentler, 1991).

A collective of African American parents, educators along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), initiated legal action in both local and federal courts to protest this disparity.

According to the plaintiffs, this substandard education contributed to feelings of inferiority, lowered self-esteem, and lowered self-concept in Black chil-

dren, and resulted in decreased occupational opportunities for them as adults (Irons, 1994).

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that school segregation in any form was illegal, racially identifiable schools must be eliminated and school districts must implement plans to desegregate their school districts. The legal case became known as the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (see *Eyes on the Prize* for an excellent documentation of the case).

Resistance to school desegregation was widespread across the United States and efforts to stall desegregation were encouraged by state and local officials. In many parts of the United States, White parents and White citizens violently protested the entrance of Black students into schools. Federal troops were dispatched to provide protection for the students (e.g., Little Rock, Arkansas). It was not until passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that "sufficient movement was given to ensure progress in implementing the Court's ruling." The most consistent efforts to desegregate schools occurred between 1965 and 1973 (Fife, 1992). (See Box 5.1 for documentation on resistance to school desegregation).

Without specific directions and guidance from the courts, local school districts were left to develop their own desegregation plans. Those plans varied considerably from state to state and from school district to school district (Hayes, 1981).

BOX 5.1

Despite the 1954 *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling that required desegregation of public schools in America, one year after the decision most southern schools were still segregated and the quality of education offered to Black students was still far from equal to that offered to White students. In response, the Court ordered schools to integrate with all deliberate speed. With no definitive deadline, many states felt free to ignore the demand. In an effort to hold onto the long-standing tradition of segregation, many Whites joined the Ku Klux Klan and loosely organized groups called "White citizens councils" to terrorize and intimidate Blacks.

Chronology of Court Rulings and Efforts to Stall Desegregation

1954

The Supreme Court hands down the *Brown* v. *Board of Education* decision, stating that segregated school are inherently unequal, thus overturning the legal foundations of segregation.

School boards in Baltimore and Washington, DC, begin efforts to desegregate their systems.

1955

The Supreme Court, reacting to the slow pace of school desegregation following its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, orders that school systems begin to integrate with all deliberate speed.

The Georgia Board of Education announces that it will revoke the license of any teacher who teaches in an integrated classroom.

1956

Three days after a Black woman named Autherine Lucy attends classes at the previously all-White University of Alabama, riots break out on campus, and threats are made on her life. In response, the school suspends Lucy. Following her court ordered re-instatement, the University expels her.

One hundred and one southern congressmen sign a "Southern Manifesto," recommending that public schools continue to ignore the Supreme Courts order to integrate. Only three members of the southern delegation to Congress—Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Albert Gore, Sr., also of Tennessee, and Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas—refuse to sign.

1957

Governor Orville Faubus of Arkansas orders the Arkansas National Guard to block nine African American children from integrating the school. In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends in paratroopers from the 101st Airborne to enforce the Supreme Court's ruling.

1961

Four high schools in Atlanta integrate without incident, earning the praise of President John F. Kennedy.

Administrators respond to student protests at Southern Louisiana University by shutting down the school.

1962

The Supreme Court orders the University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith as a student. Following a violent confrontation between White protestors and federal authorities, Meredith enters the school.

1963

Alabama governor George Wallace attempts to physically block Vivian Malone and James Hood from entering the University of Alabama.

1967

Ruling in *United States v. Jefferson County* that "the only school desegregation plan that meets constitutional standard is the one that works," the Fifth District of the U.S. Circuit Court helps speed the process of desegregation.

Source: African-American Experience on File

In the early 1960s, school districts opted to use freedom of choice and open enrollment as their desegregation efforts. Both of these methods were minimally effective in desegregating schools. At the urging of the courts, school districts turned to other methods such as pairing, rezoning, pupil placement laws, minority to majority enrollment, and reassignment from neighborhood schools via court ordered busing (see Fife, 1992 for a review).

Court-ordered busing, implemented in both the North and the South, was perhaps the most controversial facet of desegregation and caused negative and violent reactions from some parents across the nation (see Irons, 2002, for a discussion of the Finger Plan). Court-ordered busing was discontinued in the late 1970s.

During the 1980s, the desegregation process came to a standstill, and the courts ceased to monitor school districts and their compliance to the federal law.

For more than 30 years, scholars have debated whether desegregation has had a positive impact on the educational achievement of African American children. The research exploring this issue has yielded mixed results.

Systematic data collection did not begin until 1969, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) commissioned a study to examine the achievement test performance of African American children. From 1970 to 1984, 12 studies were conducted evaluating the impact of desegregation on the educational performance of African American children.

Few comprehensive studies have been conducted since the 1980s. Collectively, the findings from this body of research suggest two patterns: (1) Since 1971, the achievement test scores of African American elementary school children have steadily increased; and (2) despite this increase, African American elementary school children have lagged behind their White counterparts on all achievement measures by an average of 33 points (Garibaldi, 1997).

Some social scientists argue that it is difficult to determine the full impact of desegregation on the educational progress of African American children for the following reasons.

First, a decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education* judgment a significant proportion of African American students were still attending segregated

schools. As late as the 1972–1973 school year, 63% of the African American children attended predominantly Black schools, and these schools remained intellectually and structurally inferior (Gadsen, Smith & Jordan, 1996).

Second, 20 years after the court ruling, there was a 70% increase in the number of African American children attending segregated schools. Some scholars question whether desegregation was ever truly implemented and contend that increases in tests scores were not an outcome of desegregation (Vergon, 1990).

Third, the methodology in each of the studies conducted on achievement and desegregation vary significantly (e.g., different outcome measure, different time of measurement, different operational definitions of desegregation). Therefore, empirically it is difficult to formulate widespread and final conclusions about desegregation, African American children, and academic achievement.

Fourth, even though studies do indicate that the achievement gap has narrowed and that high school graduation rates and college enrollment have increased, the improvements affect only a very small percentage of African American students.

For the vast majority of African American students, desegregation has had a questionable or a detrimental influence on their educational process. Black students are more likely than their White counterparts to be expelled, suspended, or pushed out of school. Garabaldi and Bartley (1989) reported that in one school district, African American students comprised 41% of the school population, but 65% of those students were suspended. African American students are often placed in lower track courses or special education courses; as a whole, they take fewer foreign language courses, advanced math, or science courses, and therefore they are often unprepared to attend a four-year college or university. They are less likely than White students to participate in extracurricular activities, such as the marching band, the debate club, or other school-related activities. The nature and the quality of their classroom experiences differ from those of their White counterparts as well (Gadsen, 1996). Teachers have lower expectations for their academic success and potential, and tend to report them more often than their White counterparts as experiencing behavioral problems (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980). Consequently, African American students drop out of school in record numbers because of the differential attention, and due to their feelings of alienation.

Brown (1994) believes that desegregation has served to undermine the academic achievement of African American children in significant ways. Many African American neighborhood and community schools were closed, and African American children were bused to predominantly White neighborhoods.

Consequently, African American children lost important academic community anchors. The racial composition of schools that remained predominantly African American changed radically. Black teachers were fired and replaced with White teachers (Bankston & Caldas, 1996). At the onset of desegregation, 6,000 Black teachers were dismissed, and 25,584 were displaced (Jones, 1994). Some White teachers viewed teaching in these schools as a less desirable assignment. The least qualified and least experienced teachers were assigned to Black schools (Bruno & Doscher, 1981). Thus, as a result of desegregation, African American children lost academic role models.

There are researchers who counter and maintain that there is ample evidence to suggest that desegregation has had a positive impact on the academic achievement of African American children. As a consequence of desegregation, the reading achievement scores of African American children have improved in the last two decades, the dropout rates for African American students have decreased in the last three decades, and there have been advancements made in interracial social relationships and job opportunities (Schofiled, 1995). Furthermore, the achievement gap between African American students and White students has narrowed considerably due primarily to desegregation (Mahard, & Crain, 1983).

Forty-eight years after the *Brown v. Board* decision, as stated in the Insider's Voice, the resegregation of African American children in the public school system is on the rise and approaching the levels of 1970. Nationally, a third of African American children attend schools where the enrollment is 90–100% minority. The concern as raised by Dr. Orfield in the Insider's Voice is that these schools do not equip African American students with the academic skills they need to succeed. Unfortunately, African American parents expressed this same concern more than 40 years ago.

Social scientists have also voiced concerns about the plight of African American children in the public school system (Trent, 1997).

African American children comprise 50% of the enrollment in 9.7% of America's public elementary schools (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 2006). They are enrolled primarily in schools located in the urban areas of the United States and schools located in areas with high concentrations of poverty.

Based on indices of academic achievement, African American children have not fared well in the public school system. On critical measures of academic achievement, African American students consistently lag behind their White counterparts. Data in Figures 5.1–5.3 compare the reading, writing, and math achievement test scores of African American fourth graders and White fourth graders. The data in the tables suggest that the performance of fourth graders on reading, writing, and math tests has been steady, with few remarkable

changes in achievement for more than two decades. However, when the performance of African American children is compared to that of their White counterparts, the achievement gap is most observable in the reading achievement scores. This suggests that on the one hand, African American children are able to follow brief written directions, and engage in simple reading tasks. On the other hand, the pattern indicates that African American fourth grade children are not developing the reading skills necessary to master complex reading material.

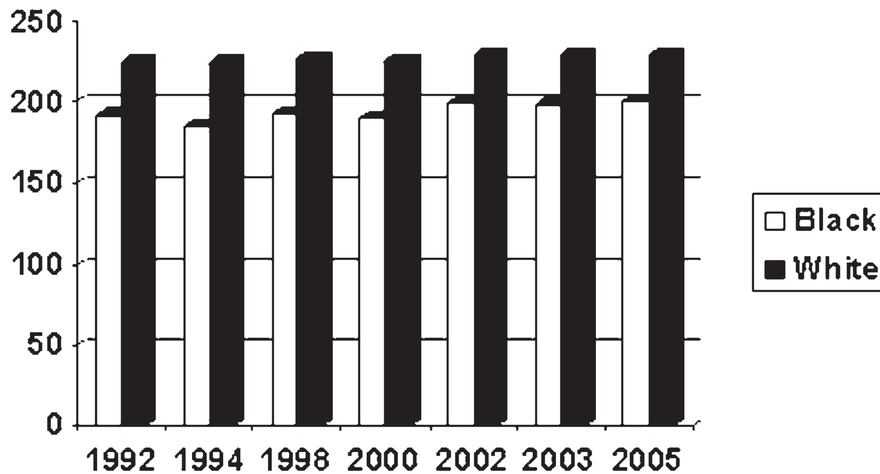

FIGURE 5.1 Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency Test Scores, 1992–2005
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

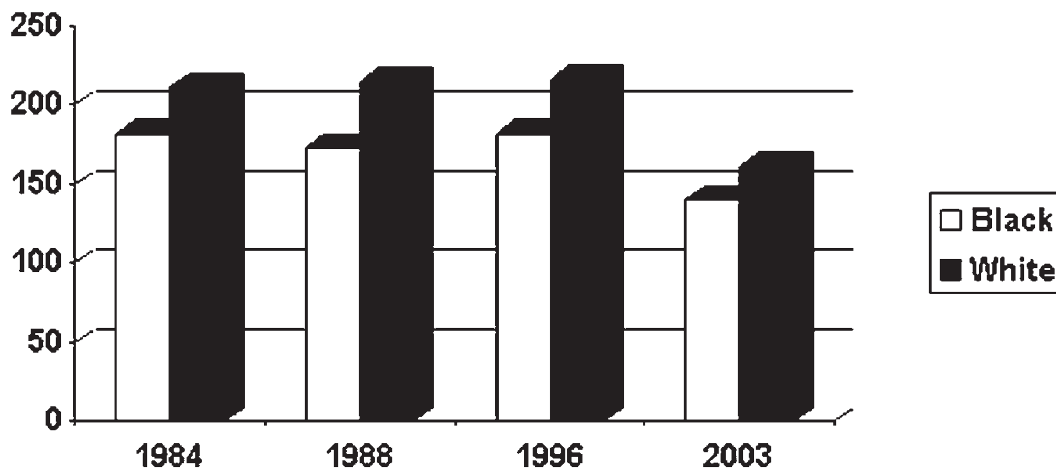

FIGURE 5.2 Fourth Grade Writing Proficiency Test Scores, 1984–2003
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, and Statistical Abstracts of the U.S., 2003.

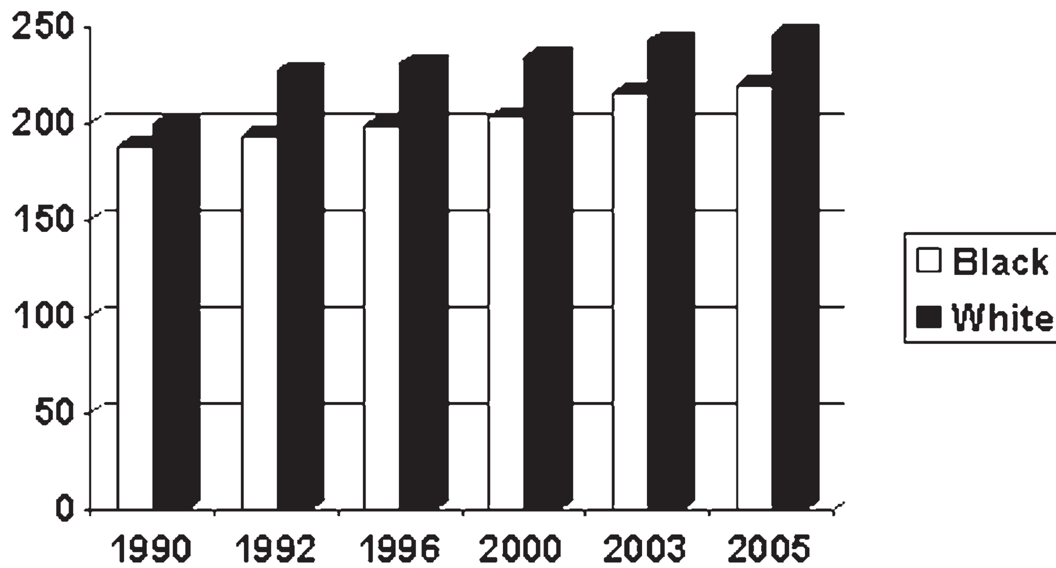

FIGURE 5.3 Fourth Grade Math Proficiency Test Scores, 1990–2005
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

Over the past several decades, a myriad of theories have been proposed to account for the achievement gap between African American children and White children. These theories have ranged from genetic inferiority accounts (Hernstein & Murray, 1994), to environmental deprivation perspectives (Scarr & Weinberg, 1978), to socioeconomic status, to persistent economic hardship views (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005); parenting practices (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005), the quality of early childhood education programs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005) to cultural background (Boykin, 1986).

According to Irvine (1990), Garabaldi (1997), and Pollard (1989), the achievement gap is not a result of those factors, but due to an interaction of factors inherent in the structure of the public school system that predispose African American students for academic failure and leave them ill-prepared for college and gainful employment.

The factors inherent in the structure of the public school system include placement in special education classes, teacher attitude and expectations, peer influence, and parental involvement.

Placement in Special Education Classes. African American children are disproportionately placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR) based on their performance on intelligence tests and achievement measures.

In an analysis of 505 school districts in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas, over 80% of the students enrolled in educable mental retardation (EMR) classes were Black and the majority of these students were African American males. African American students comprise 16%

of the public school population, but 35% of the special education population (Harry & Anderson, 1994). These placements begin at an early age and for many African American students there are few opportunities to re-enter regular classes (Oakes, 1995).

Placement in special education classes affects students' academic performance in a variety of ways. First, the quality of teaching and teacher student interaction differs markedly from the quality of teaching and teacher student interaction found in regular classes. Oakes (1995) found that teachers of African American students in special education classes expect less of them. These expectations are often reflected in their teaching styles and interactions. During those interactions, teachers provided students with fewer opportunities to learn essential information and to build the academic skills that prepare them for high school completion and gainful employment. Second, students placed in EMR classes fail to make achievement gains. In fact, achievement test scores decrease from grades three through eight. Third, students' self-concept and peer relationships are damaged as a result of the stigma associated with placement in special education classes (Trent, 1997).

The placement of African American children in special education became a legal issue in the 1970s (Macmillian, Hendrick & Watkins, 1989). Two cases, *Diana v. Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Wilson Riles* (1971), serve as the landmark cases, prohibiting the use of IQ tests to assign African American children to special education classes. In both of the cases, the litigants argued that standardized IQ tests used to assess African American children were culturally and racially biased; and placement in special education resulted in little remediation or efforts to improve their deficits. Consequently, these students failed to complete high school and were unable to secure employment as adults (Reschly, 1982).

The judge concurred with the plaintiffs and ruled that the method of evaluating and placing students was inappropriate in two ways: Standardized tests were discriminatory toward African American students; and the history of placing African American students in EMR classes pointed to unlawful segregated intent (Prasse & Reschly, 1986).

As a result of the court ruling, changes were implemented in both testing and placement policies, especially for African American children and other children of color. Guidelines for nondiscriminatory assessment were developed (see Table 5.1), and Public Law 94–142 was established to ensure due process and legal protection for African American children and other children of color (Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Despite the public law, the legislation mandating changes in testing African American children, and the development of nondiscriminatory guidelines,

TABLE 5.1 Guidelines for Nondiscriminatory Assessment

1. A student must be assessed in their native language.	5. Every student identified as having a disability must be re-evaluated every 3 years.
2. Tests must evaluate what they were intended to evaluate.	6. An individual educational plan must be developed for each child.
3. Examiner must be appropriately trained to administer and interpret specific test results.	7. Parents must be involved in discussions of placement and assessment.
4. Placement decisions cannot be made on the basis of any single factor. A multidisciplinary team or group of educational practitioners must make the decision.	

Source: Wodrich, (1997). Children's Psychological Testing.

African American children still remain overrepresented in EMR classes (Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Social scientists speculate that this practice continues because teacher training programs fail to adequately expose teachers to cultural issues and how those issues impact test performance of African American children; schools are not monitored for their compliance to the federal law; and are not required to demonstrate improvement in tests scores of children placed in EMR classes. (Nelson, 1995)

Teacher Attitudes, Expectations and Teaching Styles. The teacher expectancy theory holds that teachers communicate both subtly and overtly their attitudes and expectations about their students' achievement capabilities. In response, students perform according to the teacher's attitudes and expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1982). In the specific case of African American children, researchers have observed that very often teacher attitudes and expectations for success are lower for African American students than for White students (Seyfried, 1998).

Beane (1985) found that even when academic performance is similar, teachers view African American students as low achievers and majority students as high achievers. They are critical of their academic work and pessimistic about their prognosis for academic success; they often judge Black students as the least studious and least prepared, and the teachers describe the Black students as talkative, lazy, fun-loving, high strung, and rebellious. In one detailed observation of student-teacher classroom interaction, White students received more praise and encouragement for their classroom performances regardless of the teacher's race than did African American students (Baker, 1999).

Rong (1997) proposes that these teacher attitudes and expectations are caused in part by cultural incongruence: The majority of the teachers are White, female, middle class graduates of teacher training programs. The programs provide little guidance on working with children of color. Therefore, the teachers may have pre-set and sometimes unfavorable notions about the intellectual and academic capabilities of African American children.

In addition to teacher attitudes and expectations, the teaching techniques used in urban school settings fail to prepare and equip African American students with important academic skills and critical learning skills. Carta (1991) found that in a typical day in an inner-city classroom, students are exposed to more audiovisual materials and teacher-directed class discussions than one-on-one teacher interaction and independent seat work. The former requires less active responding from the students, encourages passive attention, and results in lower levels of achievement (Carta, 1991); or what Greenwood, Hart, Walker, & Rishley, (1994) refer to as "developmental retardation." As a consequence of this type of instruction, which fails to challenge and actively engage African American students with the material, students lag behind their peers in suburban schools in their mastery of basic academic skills; and this is reflected in their performance on state and national achievement tests (see Box 5.2).

In terms of specific academic subjects, Strutchens and Silver (2000) found that in the area of math instruction, teachers tend to emphasize reasoning skills in their instruction to White students, whereas teachers tend to use drill-based instruction with their African American students. In terms of assessment, Lubienski (2002) found that African American children are more likely than their White counterparts to receive multiple choice exams, and exams that require fewer computational and reasoning skills.

BOX 5.2

Is there an African American Learning Style?

Several social scientists have encouraged educators to tailor their teaching style to the learning and cognitive styles of African American children (Hurley, Boykin & Allen, 2005; Watkins 2002; Willis, 1992). These scholars maintain that the teaching and instructional style used in most elementary schools is an analytical type of style. This type of style involves the use of rules, encourages memory for specific facts, emphasizes the use of logic, and utilizes deductive reasoning. According to Hilliard, this is in contrast to the cognitive style that African American children use to process information. Their style is a relational cognitive style that emphasizes the use of freedom of exploration, memory for the essence of material, and the use of inductive reasoning.

The information presented in the preceding section discusses the major factors that are believed to influence albeit negatively, the academic performance of African American children in the public school system. Other factors such as academic self-confidence, peer influence, and alienation of African American parents from the school system are also linked as well.

Academic Self-Concept and Peer Influence. Some scholars argue that the public school system has created a sense of learned helplessness or a cycle of frustration within African American children and as a result their academic performance is adversely impacted (Graham, 1994). According to Claude Steele (1995), as a consequence of repeated exposure to indifferent and negative treatment from teachers, African American children internalize those experiences, and construct a "mental model." This mental model is easily retrievable even when the stimulus is absent. Steele refers to this as stereotype threat. Any situation can trigger the activation of the mental model, and those experiences become so salient and vivid that the children foreclose on their academic abilities and their academic performance is hampered.

Alternately, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that African American children seek out negative experiences, which affirm their sense of low self esteem, in order to protect their identity or buffer their self-esteem from the indifferent and negative treatment received in school. This is acted out in their resistance or opposition to teachers, or to the authority structure of the school. The peer culture, rather than the school culture, becomes the respected authority figure in the school environment. Peers then, play a profound role in influencing each other's academic achievement. This peer culture provides opportunities, especially for African American boys, to demonstrate competence and to maintain a sense of self-respect (Polite & Davis, 1999).

Alienation of African American Parents From the Educational System. Researchers have long acknowledged that parental support and involvement in the academic lives of their children is a key variable in ensuring the academic success of children (Tucker, Harris, Brady, & Herman, 1996). However, low-income African American parents do not participate at the same level as do middle class parents in the academic lives of their children (Halle, Costes & Mahonney, 1997). Such factors as their single parenthood, their socioeconomic status, and their low educational attainment level have been identified as contributing to their low participation rates (Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003). Teachers often describe low-income African American parents as uninterested, inaccessible, and difficult to communicate with (Trotman, 2001). Low-income African American parents on the other hand, report feeling unwelcome, alienated, dismissed, and unfairly treated by both teachers and administrators in the public school system. Therefore, they limit their contact with teachers and administrators.

Trotman (2001) offers the following ten suggestions for increasing the involvement of low-income African American parents (Box 5.3).

BOX 5.3

Increasing African American Parental Involvement in Schools

1. Urge parents to remain or become active in their children's educational process.
2. Make sure that each child is properly educated and attends school regularly.
3. Develop a case history of the family in an effort to determine what is hindering their involvement.
4. Establish a rapport with parents.
5. Provide parents with authority.
6. Follow the lead of chapter 1 programs. Implement programs which assist parents in developing their own academic skills.
7. Ask parents about their interest in school.
8. Ask parents who attend meetings to spread the word to other parents.
9. Use parents as teaching partners.
10. Do not judge or criticize parents.

SECTION TWO: SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

There are public and private schools located across the United States that are effective in facilitating the academic success of African American children. These schools provide African American children with a solid educational foundation that prepares them for college and later employment opportunities.

The next section of the chapter focuses on discussing the characteristics of both public and private schools that work for African American children.

Public School Models

The concern with the failure of public schools to effectively educate African American children forced scholars to critically examine the structure of the public school system, identify those aspects that were in need of modification, and develop and implement programs or models that were sensitive to African American cultural and historical issues.

These schools follow either James Comer's School Development Program Model, or Ron Edmonds Effective School Model. Examples of these schools were highlighted in the 1988 special issue of the *Journal of Negro Education*. Each school is located in an urban area, where the majority of the families are low income, and the majority of the children are from single-parent family homes. Each of the schools has received both national and local recognition for significantly improving the students' achievement test scores, increasing school attendance, and decreasing disciplinary problems.

Dr. James Comer conceived the idea of the School Development Program (SDP), in 1968, with the conviction that schools located in low-income areas were capable of providing African American students with a quality and a solid education. He believed that public schools could improve academic achievement outcomes for African American children if collaborative relationships were established between administrators, teachers and parents; he also believed that administrators, teachers, and parents, rather than district school boards, should assume the leadership role and determine the structure of key aspects of the school. The core features of the SDP are presented below.

Governance and Management Team. This team is composed of the principal, teachers from each grade level, parents, and members of the mental health team. This team is responsible for implementing academic plans and evaluating curricula, staff development, student achievement, and the general climate of the school. Unlike typical urban public schools, which are under the auspices of school boards, or the principals, the governance and management team, assumes total control over the functioning of the school.

Mental Health Team. The mental health team, according to Comer, is a crucial and important element of the school. In typical urban public schools, there is usually one school psychologist (with a very heavy cases load) assigned to several schools, shouldering the responsibility for working with a number of teachers and students from many school districts. This person is also responsible for assessing and meeting the mental health needs of the students.

In the SDP, this becomes the responsibility of a team of individuals called the mental health team. This team is composed of social workers, psychologists, and teachers who provide counseling and assessment for students, consult with teachers, and offer outreach to the children and their families. In addition, the team is in charge of developing and implementing alternative methods for dealing with behavior problems.

Parent Participation. Parents assume a variety of roles in the SDP model, ranging from being classroom aides and hall monitors to library assistants. Unlike in the typical urban public school setting, parents' participation is actively sought and rewarded.

Staff Development and Training. In the usual urban school setting, the focus of staff development and training is decided by the school administrators or principals. In the SDP model, teachers select the topics as well as the consultants.

How do children who attend schools which employ the SDP model perform? According to Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1988), there have been observed changes in both academic achievement and the school climate. Over a four-year period, schools employing the SDP model have experienced significant increases in reading and math scores, exceeding both district and state level performances. Furthermore, these schools have observed a decrease in suspensions and behavioral problems. However, a more recent comprehensive independent evaluation of schools employing the Comer SDP model (Cook, Murphy & Hunt, 2000) found that over a 4-year period, although initial improvements were observed in academic performance, behavior problems, and truancy, these gains faded by the end of a 4-year period.

The late Dr. Ronald Edmonds (1982), who like Dr. Comer held that the urban public school system could be reformed to improve the academic achievement of African American children, developed the Effective Schools Model (ESM). However, unlike the SDP, which provides guidance on implementing structural changes within the school, the ESM is a prescriptive for attitude and behavioral change for principals and teachers who work in low-income urban public school environments. The ESM consists of the following prescriptives.

Principals. The ESM encourages principals to assume the role of the instructional leader of the school. They model for teachers an attitude of genuine concern for the academic performance of all children in the school, and an acceptance of the "cultural background" of the children. In addition to their role as instructional leaders, according to the ESM, principals should have an open door policy for parents, and an egalitarian approach to decision making in the school.

Pedagological Attitudes. The teachers and the principal must embrace similar goals related to students' academic achievement and share similar goals on strategies, techniques, and methods to achieve the students' school success.

Provide a Safe and Community-Like Climate for Learning. The school must visually reflect the attitudes of success embraced by principals and teachers. Student work should be displayed; student academic honors should be acknowledged, and the school environment must be safe and in excellent physical condition.

Professional Staff. Teachers should hold similar expectations for the academic capabilities of all of their students and adopt flexible assessment and

instructional techniques. According to the ESM, teachers are "driven by pupil performance," and they should adjust their teaching techniques to maximize student mastery and performance.

Flexible Assessment and Instruction. According to the ESM, assessment should be used for diagnostic and remedial purposes rather than placement purposes. The Harford Heights model uses "continuous student assessment" which involves diagnostic tests, summative tests, and proficiency tests, as well as standardized tests.

Examples of the schools that use the ESM are presented in Box 5.4.

Reform movements such as the ones described above have not proved successful in approving academic performance, especially of African American

BOX 5.4

Examples of Schools Which Use the Effective School Model

1. Stowe Middle School is located in a midwestern urban environment with 80% African American enrollment. Achievement test score performance indicates that over a 7-year period 95% of the students were passing all sections of proficiency tests (Young, 1988).
2. Harford Heights is located in an eastern urban environment with 95% African American enrollment. There were overall increases in achievement scores in a 3-year period, as well as an increase in school attendance (Nicholsonne, 1988).
3. Lee Elementary School is located in a midwestern urban environment, with 98% African American enrollment. Test scores have improved an average of 64% since the implementation of the ESM (Hughes, 1988).

males. That is, schools that employ models such as the SDP or the ESM have not produced significant and lasting gains in the education of African American students (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). Other efforts have focused on creating schools within the public school system designed specifically for African American students. These schools are called immersion schools. Box 5.5 describes an Immersion School.

Independent Black Schools (IBS)

Independent Black Schools have served a critical role in educating African American children for more than two centuries (Lomotey, 1992). The first

BOX 5.5

What Is an Immersion School and Does It Work?

Immersion schools were developed in the early 1990s with the aim of improving the academic achievement of African American children, especially African American males. The pedagogy is primarily African-centered education, derived from an Afrocentric worldview, that focuses on the ways in which African culture and people of African ancestry have contributed to the world (Leake & Leake, 1992).

In Milwaukee Wisconsin, 5,700 of the African American males enrolled in the city's high schools were performing below average, and nearly 50% of them were dropping out of school. To address the problem, Milwaukee created two schools focusing specifically on the needs of African American males. One school targeted elementary school males and the other school targeted high school students. The schools were designed to meet the academic and social needs of African American males; and assist them in developing social competence, communication skills, as well as problem solving and critical thinking skills.

A mentoring program is a core part of the immersion schools' concept and teachers are required to make 18 home visits per semester.

What does an immersion school look like? The structure of the curricula differs significantly from the typical public school. The focus of the curricula is on the contribution of Africans and African Americans to history. Lessons are designed to highlight African culture and history. Such topics as social studies, language arts, math, and home economics would be introduced in the context of a traditional African marketplace. In contrast to the typical public school, there is more of an emphasis on cooperative learning in immersion schools. Finally, the physical environment of the immersion schools reflects an Afrocentric theme (e.g., maps of Africa displayed throughout the school).

How effective are immersion schools? Pollard & Ajirotutu (2000) evaluated the effectiveness of the Milwaukee African American immersion schools, measuring changes in teacher attitudes as well as changes in student performance, both academic and behavioral. They found that at the end of a 5-year period, the students' achievement performance had increased, where 92% of the third graders were performing at or above the state average on math and reading measures. In addition student suspensions and behavioral problems decreased as well. Teacher attitudes had become more favorable about their work environment, although some attrition had occurred during that time period.

Independent Black School (IBS) was founded by Prince Hall in 1798 as a result of his unsuccessful petitions to the city of Boston to establish a separate tax-supported school for Black children (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). The civil rights era produced the second wave of IBS. The Freedom Schools of the South represent an example of this effort. These schools were designed to provide African American children during 6 weeks of the summer with academic curricula that focused on remediation and African American history. Since then IBS have been formed to provide African American children with alternatives to the public school system.

The Independent Black Schools are under the auspices of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) founded in 1972. CIBI provides teacher training and conducts annual science competitions for participating schools. There are currently 40 IBSs located throughout the United States. The enrollment ranges from a low of 50 to a high of 200 students going from preschool up to twelth grade, however the highest concentration is at the elementary level. Each IBS consists of a board of directors responsible for establishing school policy; a parent-teacher organization; and a director, in charge of the administration of the school (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). The schools are supported primarily by student tuition.

African American children who attend IBSs come from families with diverse socioeconomic status backgrounds and educational backgrounds. IBSs have become educational choices for some African American parents, who express their concerns about the capability of the public school system to effectively educate their children (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987).

The academic structure of an IBS is similar to that of the typical public school. However, similar to the immersion school concept, the goal of the IBS is to link African cultural knowledge with traditional subject matter. Such topics as math and science are discussed in terms of their historical and cultural significance. A lesson on the counting system might initially focus on the chronological and historical development of counting systems in Africa. Students are then taught to count in both ancient Egyptian and Yoruba systems (Akoto, 1992).

Integrated within curriculum is an emphasis on the seven principles of Ngusabo (Karenga, 1982). These values are introduced to the students in a variety of ways, including establishing dress codes, writing stories, developing cooperative learning experiences, and celebrating holidays (e.g. Kwanzaa). Finally, the role of teachers in an IBS is perceived to be critical for the students' success. Teachers serve as surrogate parents and role models.

How do children who attend IBSs perform on measures of achievement? Ratteray and Shujaa (1987) found that students attending IBSs performed at or above the national norm on such achievement measures as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, the California Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Metropolitan

Achievement Tests, and the Stanford Achievement Test. Sixty-four percent of the children scored above the norm on reading and 50% of the children scored above the norm on math. Children attending IBSs also have a higher sense of self-worth; they experience positive peer pressure, and are more likely to attend college than students not attending an IBS (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987).

Essentially, the act serves as a blueprint for change, as well as emphasizes the use of incentives and sanctions to produce improvement in achievement test scores.

Has the achievement gap closed since the implementation of NCLB (see Box 5.6)? The answer to this question depends on the source. In April 2006, the federal government issued the following brief report documenting the improvement of African American children improvement on various achievement measures.

- Reading scores for African American fourth graders have increased.
- The achievement gap between African American and White fourth graders is at an all time low in reading and math.
- Studies by the Council of the Great Schools released in March 2006 showed urban students to be improving in reading and math.

BOX 5.6

No Child Left Behind and African American Children

In 2002 President George W. Bush signed into law Public Law 107–110, which is known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The law is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. The general thrust of the law is "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind." The NCLB law is a 1425-page document that provides direction and guidance to school administrators, and teachers on four basic reform principles.

1. Strong accountability for results
2. Increased flexibility for local control
3. Expand options for parents
4. Emphasize teaching methods proven to work

A comprehensive study by Sunderman et al. (2004) sheds light on teacher perception and reaction to NCLB. According to the findings, while teachers are generally supportive of the mission to improve the academic achievement of

children who are attending low-performing schools, they are uncertain about the capability of the law. The law requires there to be a public identification of underperforming schools and a subsequent implementation of sanctions. Students are also allowed to use school vouchers and options. These three policies are meant to improve outcomes for children attending low-performing schools. Many teachers argue that the consequences of these policies will only serve to undermine teacher confidence, encourage teacher flight from low-performing schools, and encourage parents to remove their children from low-performing schools. Furthermore, the law discourages teaching other subjects and encourages a form of teaching to the tests.

The general dissatisfaction with the law is echoed by Mathis (2005) in his article entitled "Bridging the Achievement Gap: A Bridge Too Far?" He raises the following concerns about the effectiveness of NCLB in producing immediate and long-term improvements in the achievement test performance of African American children:

- To effectively and completely close the achievement gap, the underlying problems in society must be confronted.
- Second, poverty, rather than educational reform, is a larger influence on the variance of improving test scores. Schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students will fail to make adequate yearly progress.
- Third, even successful schools fluctuate in achievement gains.

SECTION THREE: AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

A chapter on education is not complete without a discussion of African American children and early intervention programs.

The momentum established by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act laid the groundwork for the types of educational experiences that African American children would encounter for the next four decades. One outcome of this was the development of compensatory education programs or early intervention programs for poor children. These programs were designed with the goals of enhancing the educational readiness of poor children, providing poor children and their families with access to health care and other social support services. The programs that African American children participate in, or have participated in, are discussed below.

According to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) the percentage of African American children enrolled in preprimary education (67%) is

slightly higher than the percentage of White children (65%). These programs are primarily federal and state funded early intervention programs, although some African American preschool children attend privately operated preschool programs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005, Wasik et al., 2000).

The programs are frequently identified in the educational and social science literature as effective early intervention programs, and at some level they have demonstrated positive outcomes for African American preschool children and serve as models for other state and local early intervention education programs.

Head Start

Head Start began in the summer of 1965 as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty. Initially designed as a summer enrichment program for poor children, in 1972 Head Start expanded to a 9-month program designed to offer a variety of services to poor children and their families. Today there are over 1,500 Head Start programs located in rural and urban areas across the United States. Serving approximately 700,000 children, 40% of the children enrolled in Head Start are African American between the ages of 2 and 5 (Digest of Educational Statistics, 2003).

Head Start provides comprehensive services to the children and their families ranging from providing preschool educational services and health services to job training for caregivers. The Head Start curricula involve exposing the children to a variety of academic related activities including learning words, colors and numbers. Health care provides the children with access to vision and hearing screening tests, and immunizations and dental exams. Children and caregivers also have access to psychological and behavioral services. Parents are provided with information on job training, the opportunity to complete their education, and the opportunity to attend parenting classes. As part of this component, parents also have a voice in the administrative decisions of Head Start. Finally Head Start provides outreach and referral services for families (Zielgler & Muenchow, 1992).

How effective is this early intervention program for African American children? Answering this question is difficult for various reasons. One reason is that data are rarely separated by race, so it is difficult to tease apart the impact of this program on improving the cognitive and intellectual performance of African American children. Another reason is that the programs have varied from state to state, so tabulating the comprehensive impact is difficult to document. Third, the methodology used in collecting the data has varied as well: Studies have differed significantly in terms of type of IQ outcome measure used, subject demographics, and sample size.

Nevertheless, two decades of research on Head Start indicates that there are two patterns of how Head Start has affected the African American children who have participated in the program. The first pattern shows that in comparison to a control group, African American children who attend Head Start generally score higher on standardized language performance measures (i.e., they have higher Peabody Picture Vocabulary [PPVT] scores) and score higher on other measures of achievement (Barnett, 1993). The second pattern shows that these differences seem to fade by third grade and completely disappear by middle school and high school (Curie & Thomas, 2002; Westinghouse Learning Corporation, 1969). However, when researchers used other indices such as school attendance, grade retention, graduation rates, premature parenting, and placement in special education classes, they found that in the longterm, participants in Head Start are less likely to be truant, less likely to be placed in remedial education classes, more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to have higher achievement motivation scores and goals (Slaughter-Defoe & Rubin, 2001), and lastly, less likely to become teen parents in comparison to those who do not participate in Head Start (Lee, et al. 1990).

Curie and Thomas (2000) offer some insight into why the gains fade for African American children particularly in the areas of IQ and academic achievement. They argue that this is because African American children in comparison to their White counterparts are more likely to attend schools that are of inferior quality.

Head Start has had a significant impact on improving the lives of parents as well. Many of the parents have completed their education, participated in job training programs to secure employment, and attended college (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003).

High/Scope Perry Preschool Project

The High/Scope Perry Preschool program was started in 1962 by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and is one of the best-known longitudinal studies examining the influence of early intervention on the cognitive and social development of low-income African American children (Barnett, 1993). One hundred twenty-three African American children between the ages of 3 and 4 participated in the project. Fifty-eight were assigned to the preschool program, and 65 were assigned to the no-preschool control group. The groups were closely matched on such demographic characteristics as maternal education level, income level, and on cognitive and intellectual performance measures. Those preschoolers participating in the two-year intervention program attended 2½ hour

morning classes and were visited in their homes weekly by their teachers for 90 minutes. IQ demographic data and teacher ratings were collected at ages 11, 14, 15, 19, and 28. The findings revealed that participants in the preschool intervention program were more successful academically (e.g., fewer grade retentions, higher academic achievement scores, and better high school graduation rates) as well as socially (e.g. fewer arrests and fewer out of wedlock births) than those who did not participate in the intervention program.

Why has this program been so successful? According to the project coordinators, as a result of their participation in the program, the children developed school-readiness skills, which prepared them for successful interactions with teachers and helped them to develop positive attitudes about school. Seitz (1990) believes that the home visitation component of the program was an essential ingredient for the academic and social success of the participants. She speculates that parents gained experience in developing positive and comfortable relationships with teachers and they continued this pattern of interaction with teachers throughout the grade school years. They modeled positive behaviors for their children and indirectly influenced their attitudes about school and their academic success.

The program is no longer in operation, but is often cited in the literature and by politicians as an exemplary intervention program for poor African American children.

The Abecedarian Project

The Abecedarian project began in 1972 as an experimental intervention program. The overall goal was to determine the effectiveness of early intervention on later outcomes for African American children. The basic methodology involved assigning 111 infants to an experimental group or control group. The experimental group received 5 years of educational intervention that involved year-round full-day educational childcare, or preschool, along with nutritional supplements, and social support services for the families. The control group received everything but the educational intervention. The results indicated that at age 15, the experimental group in comparison to the control group performed better academically, and required fewer social or remedial services (Campbell & Ramey, 1994).

What conclusions can be drawn about African American children and early intervention programs? Do early intervention programs prepare African American children to succeed in elementary school? Some scholars would argue no, because there is a great deal of discontinuity between the structure of these early intervention programs and the structure of elementary school.

Even with the implementation of Project Follow Through (an elementary form of Head Start), the elementary school experiences can undo the advantages of a year of Head Start and other early intervention programs (Lee et al., 1990).

Future research about Head Start should attempt to isolate the components of the program that most effectively impact achievement. Given the number of African American children who enroll in Head Start, Head Start can serve as a natural laboratory for developing ways to improve education for African American children overall.

PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

According to John Jacobs (1989), "there is a growing number of African American youth who face a perilous economic future because they are not adequately prepared to participate in an economy that is undergoing fundamental structural change." Jacobs, then president of the Urban League, made this statement as part of his commentary on the "state of education and African American youth." Eighteen years later, the academic achievement of African American children remains a pressing concern for educators, social scientists, and politicians.

For the past few decades, a plethora of intervention programs, policies, and reform movements have been designed all with the goals of narrowing the achievement gap between African American children and their counterparts from other racial groups. There has also been an exponential increase in the number of books, pamphlets, and articles written on the issue. Despite this attention, the achievement gap persists. Perhaps, it is time to explore other questions about academic achievement and African American children, and focus on identifying the teaching techniques and strategies that facilitate achievement. Furthermore, research should begin to examine effective approaches to engaging poor and disenfranchised African American parents into the academic lives of their children.

The reform movements have had a questionable impact on the academic achievement of African American students (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000).

As Theresa Perry (2003) states, "a problem as complex as eliminating the achievement gap requires effort and ideas from many people." The issue of eliminating the achievement gap as well as the issue of resegregation of American public schools will dominate the focus of discourse, politics and research in the 21st century.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins with a discussion of school desegregation. The landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* changed the educational process for all children in the United States. There is a growing trend toward resegregation of American public schools.

The chapter continues with a discussion of the plight of African American children in the public school system. It is evident from the available achievement data that African American children continue to lag behind their counterparts from other ethnic groups by an average of 30 points on critical measures of academic achievement. School factors (e.g., teacher perception), self-concept, peer influence, and parental involvement are identified in the chapter as causal factors.

Reform movements in the 1970s and the 1980s produced schools with the primary agenda of educating African American children. Those movements have offered suggestions on restructuring schools and offer prescriptives for attitude and behavioral change for teacher and administrators.

Independent Black Schools (IBS) are alternatives to the public school system for many African American children. In addition to the rigorous education, IBSs provide African American children with information about their cultural heritage. According to recent achievement data, African American children who attend IBSs score at or above the national average on achievement measures.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of African American children and early intervention programs. African American children are more likely than their White counterparts to participate in early intervention programs. However, due to the variability in the academic structure and the focus of those programs, achievement gains are negligible or fade by first grade.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Desegregation

Beals, M. (1994). *Warriors don't cry: A searing memoir of the battle to integrate Little Rock's Central High School*. New York: Pocket Books

Irons, P. (1994). *Jim Crow's children: The broken promise of the Brown decision*. New York: Penguin Press.

Education

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lomotey, K. (1990). *Going to school: The African American experience*. SUNY Press: New York.

Polite, V., & Davis, J. (1999). *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education*. New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press.

Watkins, A. (2002). Learning styles of African American children: A developmental consideration. *Journal of Black Psychology, 28*, 3–17.

Web Sites on Achievement Issues and African American Children

Closing the Achievement Gap. www.ncrel.org/gap.

National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities. www.aacld.org.

National Council on Educating Black Children. www.ncebc.org.

Schools That Work

Akoto, A. (1992). *Nation building. Theory and practice in Afrikan centered education*. Washington, DC: Pan African World Institute.

Bullard, P., & Taylor, B. (In press). *Keeper's of the dream: The triumph of effective schools*.

Collins, M., & Tamarkin, C. (1990). *Marva Collin's way*. Houghton, Mifflin: Boston.

Videotapes on Education and African American Children

Blackside (producer). (1994). *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement. 1954–1985.* Television series. Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service.

Brokaw, T. (producer). (July 23, 2006). *Separate but unequal: Special report on school desegregation.* Television broadcast. New York: NBC News.

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CHAPTER 6

Language and Literacy

OVERVIEW

> I can skate better than Louis and i be only eight. If you be goin' real fast, hold it. If it's on trios and you be goin' and you don't go in the ring, you be goin' around it. You be goin' too fast, well, you don't be in the ring. You be outside if you be goin' too fast. That man he'a clip you up. I think they call him Sonny. He real tall. (Excerpt taken from Dillard, *Black English,* 1972).

The dialogue in the excerpt taken from Dillard is an example of a speech pattern commonly referred to as Black Dialect, Black English, Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), spoken by members of the African American community.

For more than four decades, American linguists, educational psychologists, developmental psychologists, journalists, and lawmakers have debated whether AAVE is or should be considered legitimate as a language. Central to this issue is the question of where it began and how it differs from Standard English (SE).

With the advent of desegregation, AAVE became a focus of theoretical discourse and research agendas. This was due in part to teacher perceptions and assessments of language competency of African American children.

It is estimated that approximately 8 million African American students in United States schools speak AAVE (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995). Their comparatively low performances on standardized literacy assessments, as well as their low performance on literacy activities in the classroom, have been attributed to the fact that AAVE interferes with their performance on classroom language and literacy activities.

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the language and literacy issues of African American children.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section of the chapter discusses the most recent controversy about AAVE, with a specific focus on