A Study into the Perceptions of Students of Color and Their Ninth-Grade Academic Experience

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Barnes, Mullen, and Lieb (2013) suggested that the effective implementation of the freshman academy promoted positive achievement outcomes for students of color. From a socio-cultural perspective through the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), understanding the existence of racism is crucial to a positive academic environment (Beachum, 2013; Chapman, Dixon, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Using CRT, this study examined the perceptions of ninth-grade students of color who attended a ninth-grade academy in a racially diverse high school in North Carolina. The aim of the study was to provide educators with insight into how race and ethnicity play a factor in the educational experiences of ninth grade students of color and to determine if there are patterns or characteristics in their experiences. Additionally, this research study provided insight into programs and practices, which might lead to improved educational experiences for students of color and result in higher student achievement and decreases in dropout rates. This study found that 16 out of 26 students had positive experiences with the ninth-grade academy, race did not play a role in the programs and practices affecting their perceptions and experiences in the ninth-grade academy, and none of the 26 participants mentioned that race played a major factor in their overall ninth-grade academy experience. Evidence from this study suggests that neither race, gender, culture, nor teaching credentials played a major role in the student's perception of an effective teacher.

Introduction

Educators have a disconnection with students of color, African Americans and Latinos, from impoverished backgrounds (Neild, 2008). Neild furthers by claiming students of color generally do not feel appreciated and the results are reflected in their disproportionate achievement in high school. In fact, when students enter high school, if they are not successful the first year, they are twice as likely to not even graduate (Noguera & Wang, 2006). As a result, these children might have less of a chance in life to obtain steady employment or contribute significantly back to society.

Even though no school of thought is a perfect panacea, some can and should, serve to help many educators understand and connect with students of color. Through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), educators can better learn to understand and forge meaningful relationships with students who have historically been neglected by the dominant culture. CRT began in the mid-1970s, as a number of lawyers worried about the slow rate at which laws were changing to promote racial equality (Chapman et al., 2013). CRT can be another way of examining race relations, particularly within the United States, in a broader context than the civil rights approach (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

Transition from eighth to ninth-grade is a challenging time for students and could be a factor in student success. Knowing about the relationship of ninth-grade transition to school success is crucial to understanding strategies and procedures that may help students graduate from America's public high schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Viewing the ninth-grade academy through a CRT framework for ninth-graders of marginalized groups, can aid educators with better understanding past and current practices, as well as identifying what types of strategies are typically successful (Chapman et al., 2013). The objective of this work was to shed light on the ninth-grade academy through the experiences and perspectives from students of color. Specifically, this is a comprehensive examination of the perception of students of color of their ninth-grade academy experience.

Problem Statement

Education in the 21st century faces many challenges including high dropout rates and low student achievement. Despite increasing concerns and efforts, 30% of today's students are leaving high school without a diploma (Carter, 2008). In an effort to prevent students from dropping out, schools should be more responsive to the needs of today's students. Increased disengagement and declining motivation are predictors of school dropout (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Additionally, many students face academic, procedural and social challenges transitioning successfully from middle school to high school (Ascher, 2006). In fact, Anderson (2008) identified ninth-grade as the *most critical point* to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation. Transition continues to be an area of concern for educators, students, parents, and the community and has gained recent attention. Darling-Hammond (2010) maintains that when students have been discontented from school, their experiences in the ninth-grade may be a determining factor in whether they graduate from high school.

When compared to other grades, ninth-graders especially encounter academic, procedural, and social challenges. Ninth-grade is the *pivotal point* for intervention in the educational process to increase motivation and prevent dropout (Galassi & Akos, 2012). Academically, these students often enter new school settings, in different locations, often

larger, and have an increased number of adults to whom to be accountable. Moreover, there is often pressure because, for the first time, academics count towards permanent credit for graduation and post-secondary opportunities (Coley, 2008). It is likely that many students initially fear being lost in a new and larger environment and socially probably worry about being accepted by their peers (Coley, 2008). Ninth-graders often experience psychological adjustments that affect this pivotal social transition (Barnes et al., 2013). Because this is such a crucial time for students, more research is needed in this area and CRT is one lens by which researchers may actually help further unpack these complex phenomena.

Characteristics of Ninth-Grade Academies

During the 1960s, the public concerns about providing a supportive environment for early teenagers started the entire Middle School Movement that advocated replacing junior high schools serving grades seventh through ninth with middle schools comprising grades sixth through eighth (Srofe, 2009). This transformation shifted ninth grade students away from junior high schools and matching them with high schools. However, with many students struggling to make this transition, some educators were leery of the wisdom of subjecting 14-year-olds to the intense academic and peer pressure of high school. Phillips (2009), from The Gates Foundation, contended that over the years, the challenge of helping 14-year-olds reach academic success continued to be an issue. By the mid-1990s, high schools faced crises that included, in many cases, as low as a 70% attendance rate, student unruliness, and high rates of academic failures (Phillips, 2009). Educators had to rethink the design of high schools that encompassed ninth through twelfth grade students. To combat many of these issues, one approach school personnel considered was the school-within-a-school model (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). While the ninth grade students attended classes within the high school building, they could still be somewhat detached from the rest of the 10th through 12th grade students.

Cook, Fowler, and Harris (2008) proposed that a separate ninth grade academy would be designed with interdisciplinary team teaching, block scheduling, and curriculum and instruction focusing on core academic subjects. Crosby (2011) believed these organizations should be restructured for a more flexible education, where small units would be created and anonymity dismissed. Additionally, Crosby recommended that ninth-grade academies have distinct characteristics, curricula that offered knowledge necessary for students to academically achieve, and teachers could assess students to determine which learning styles would best serve this population. Barnes, Mullen, and Lieb (2013) suggested that the effective implementation of a freshman academy promotes positive achievement outcomes for students of color.

Regardless of whether or not students are in an academy, a connection between students and teachers has always been essential for the student's success in any level of education (Beachum, 2013). In this study, through the theoretical lens of CRT, the researcher was able to discover which practices were, and were not, beneficial to students of color in a ninth-grade academy.

Background of Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged in the mid-1970s with an increased critical analysis of scholarship in education (Beachum, 2013). Based on evaluating educational policies, supporters of CRT concluded that law restricted educational access for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Ladson-Billing's (1999b) study provided exposure to qualitative research in education that was essential to CRT at the time. Based on that study, CRT was examined as a lens through which to best explore educational practices in general. In fact, it was the necessary method for examining the impact of racism on education (Beachum, 2013). CRT Key Elements:

1. A criticism of the limitations of an immediate and simplistic approach to resolving racism
2. Story-telling and counter-storytelling
3. Revisionists interpretations of American civil rights laws and programs
4. Applying insights from social science writings on race and racism
5. How do race, sex, and class connect
6. The significance of cultural nationalism/separatism
7. Legal institutions and critical pedagogy
8. Criticism and self-criticism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 31).

One major component of CRT is the creation of space where those from marginalized groups feel comfortable and are encouraged to share their perspectives. Through the lens of CRT, this study sought to discover how high school students of color experienced the ninth-grade academy and investigated what programs and practices in the ninth-grade academy were effective. Additionally, the study examined the impact of race on the experiences of students from marginalized groups in the ninth-grade academy. The following section highlights the methods used to collect data for the research.

Methodology

The research questions set the tone for investigating the ninth-grade academy and are followed by a description of the population studied and an outline of the data analysis used.

Research Questions

RQ1 How do students of color at the selected high school, experience the ninth-grade academy?
RQ 2 Based on their perceptions and experiences, what programs and practices in the ninth-grade academy are effective for students of color?
RQ 3 How does race impact the experiences of students from marginalized groups in the ninth-grade academy?

The ninth-grade academy studied has an ethnically diverse student population. The school's diversity is reflected in its mission statement, *To support an environment where high expectations foster lifelong success within a positive climate of diversity*" (Lexington Senior High School, 2013, p. 1). The ninth-grade academy is comprised of African Americans,

Latinos, Whites, Asians, and multi-ethnic students, Table 1. During the 2009-2011 school years, African Americans comprised the largest ethnic group, Latinos were second largest, Whites were third, and Asians were the smallest ethnic group.

Table 1
Ninth-Grade Academy Total Enrollment 2009-2012

School Year	White *n* (%)	African American *n* (%)	Latino *n* (%)	Asian *n* (%)	Other *n* (%)
2009-2010 (*N* = 228)	57 (25.0)	108 (47.4)	48 (21.1)	12 (5.3)	3 (1.2)
2010-2011 (*N* = 287)	76 (26.5)	113 (39.4)	75 (26.1)	18 (6.3)	5 (1.7)
2011-2012 (*N* = 317)	139 (43.8)	101 (31.9)	69 (21.8)	8 (2.5)	0 (0)

The participants in Table 2 corresponded with the student population of the whole ninth-grade academy in Table 1 over a three-year period, 2009-2012. The racial composition of the ninth-grade academy for the 2011-2012 school year has drastically shifted compared to the previous years in Table 1. White students were the largest racial group within the ninth-grade academy for the 2011-2012 school year. In the two years prior from Table 1, the Latino and African American population were the largest racial groups. The researcher selected the participants in Table 2 to racially mirror the population in Table 1 as much as possible. The major group excluded in Table 2 was White students since the focus of this study was how students of color experienced the ninth-grade academy

Table 2
Sample Study Enrollment 2009-2012 (N = 26)

School Year	White *n* (%)	African American *n* (%)	Latino *n* (%)	Asian *n* (%)	Other *n* (%)
2009-2010 (*N* = 16)	NA	8 (50)	3 (19)	5 (31)	0 (0)
2010-2011 (*N* = 8)	NA	4 (50)	3 (38)	1 (12)	0 (0)
2011-2012 (*N* = 2)	NA	1 (50)	1 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)

The ninth-grade academy was located in an urban school system of an un-named mid-Atlantic state. This study site had a diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture. In addition, the school had implemented the ninth-grade academy within the past five years and had low staff turnover. The staff exclusively worked with ninth graders and a counselor who had worked there since the school's inception. Its administrator also mainly worked with those staff and students in the ninth-grade academy.

All of the classes in the ninth-grade academy were held in an annex building of the high school. There were eight classrooms, some teachers *floated* because there was not

enough space to accommodate the estimated 250 student body in the ninth-grade academy. The ninth-grade academy's students were heterogeneously grouped into two teams.

The ninth-grade academy operated on a block schedule and teachers had the same group of students for fall and spring semesters. If a student was advanced in credits, s/he took classes outside the ninth-grade academy or enrolled in extra elective course. Ninth-grade academy teachers had fourth period common planning with which they attended to administrative issues, counseled students, held parent conferences, planned lessons, participated in staff development, and worked on a whole host of other tasks. Ninth-graders, in the meantime, took their elective classes outside the ninth-grade academy during that same period. In order for students to get promoted to the next grade level, they needed to pass six of their eight classes. Students who did not pass were not allowed to repeat courses in the ninth-grade academy; they had to take courses with upperclassmen in the general high school setting.

Participants

The study sampled ninth-grade academy students from a small urban public high school with an ethnically diverse student population. Since the focus of the research was the experience of students of color in the ninth-grade academy, consent forms reform White students were excluded. The researcher selected the participants based on race, gender, and grade level that corresponded with the student population, see Table 3.

Table 3
Participant Profiles

Categories	Female	Male
African American	7	6
Latino	4	3
Asian	3	3
ESL	7	6
Honors	11	6
Remedial	4	5
Behavior Documented	2	5
No Behavior Documented	11	8

The data analysis was based primarily on student interviews and 26 classroom observations of the ninth-grade academy. Since female students outnumbered male students during the 2009-2011 school years, 12 males and 14 females were interviewed. During the 2011-2012 school year, an African American male and a Latina female were interviewed multiple times to mirror the ninth-grade academy's population. After interviews with the 24 students were conducted, over the 2009-2011 school year, it was determined that more data were needed. Subsequently, two additional students were interviewed 10 times (between

September 2012 to December 2012) on a bi-weekly basis. This was done to develop a better understanding about ninth- grade transition for students of color. Also, 26 ninth-grade academy classrooms were observed during the 2011-2012 school year for 30-90 minutes each.

Data Analysis

Analyzing and organizing the data was a continuous process throughout the study with the chief goal of obtaining useful and *rich* information. Because data was reconstructed by the development of categories, findings and conclusions were connected to the existing literature. All information was coded into categories by the primary investigator. Systematic coding procedures ensured that all data was input accurately. Additionally, 50% of the data was double entered to ensure consistency. The researcher adhered to the following steps in collecting the data:

1. Organizing the responses of the interviews and compared them to the observation data.
2. Coding interview responses and observations by attaching basic marks to describe potential themes.
3. Analyzing the notes and codes looking for the meaning and themes in the data.
4. Examining the meaning and forming a classification system for individual meaning.
5. Attempting to form a collective meaning capturing the essence of the collective data.
6. Translating interpretation into information that was understandable; quotes, narrative texts, and other types of representation which captured the essence of interpretation.

Observation field notes and tape-recorded interviews enabled the researcher to listen to tapes and use notes repeatedly to identify themes and patterns. The multiple data collection methods required continuous organization and reflection of data collected while applying a basic coding system which evolved patterns and themes from the data. An ongoing analysis of data throughout the research study ensured data collected was connected to the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

The first data analysis procedure detected patterns of repeated information emerging from student individual interviews. This process allowed for reconciling data with information from the literature review on ninth-grade transition and ensured the research questions guided the study. The researcher compared the analysis of taped and transcribed interviews of participants with the document analysis to draw conclusions about the successfulness of the ninth-grade academy. While the researcher suspected certain outcomes, perceptions were not discussed with participants while conducting the research. The researcher's finding surfaced after all data was collected.

Findings

The findings in this section were based on the three research questions. These findings determined the researcher's interpretations and conclusions about this study.

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RQ1 How do students of color at the selected high school, experience the ninth-grade academy?

Sixty-five percent of the students of color had a positive experience at the ninth-grade academy. They seemed to feel they learned from their teachers and received support. It appeared they also favored an enclosed environment. The participants who did not enjoy the ninth-grade academy were unable to distinguish displeasure from issues they faced in transitioning to high school in general.

The 25% of participants at the ninth-grade academy expressed satisfaction with their ninth-grade experience. As interviewed participants' opinions and observation data were analyzed, it became obvious that the ninth-grade academy's staff worked diligently to thrive as a school-within-a school and were devoted to the success of students of color. The mechanism behind what was being accomplished was a concentration on achievement and meeting goals from NASSP's (1996) *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. During the interviews with the students, 16 out of 26 students mentioned they had positive experiences with the ninth-grade academy. Each of these participants reflected on their past and present classroom experiences and the effect it had on socialization and relationships. The other 10 participants felt their experience with the ninth-grade academy did not have a positive impact on them. However, when each explained why they were dissatisfied with the ninth-grade academy, the discontent appeared to be more about high school transition rather than the ninth-grade academy itself. The introductory interview sessions consisted of four or more questions. The focus of the first session correlated with the first research question. In sum, the overriding theme from this meeting was how 26 students of color perceived the ninth-grade academy.

Perceptions of schooling and career opportunities. The researcher's classroom observations and all 26 of the participants' responses indicated positive attitudes and beliefs about the schooling and career opportunities stemming from involvement at the ninth-grade academy. This success stems from the students' positive racial identity and critical race consciousness (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2013). Each participant emphasized a desire to continue their education beyond high school. One student, for example, said:

> Being a Black male is hard in society and not too many of us get the chance to do well and succeed. I'm proud to be Black because statistics are against me. I'm determined to prove them wrong. So me, I can't forget who I am. I think it's very important [to see myself as African American].

RQ 2 Based on their perceptions and experiences, what programs and practices in the ninth-grade academy are effective for students of color?

RQ 2 was formed based upon the ideas of researchers such as Vygotsky (1978), who asserted that learning is a social process and that the social and cultural backgrounds of students formed the cognitive schema from which they approach the learning process within the school setting. The social and cultural context of classroom practices and the school's organizational structures and systems can be equal with those already established in the student's social and cultural background, affecting academic achievement as a result (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2013). However, when the researcher investigated RQ2, results indicated that based on the

participants' responses, race did not play a role in the programs and practices affecting their perceptions and experiences in the ninth-grade academy. Participants described and advocated for programs and practices that benefitted students of any racial or cultural background. Quality teaching, personal relationships and *real-world* experiences were the responses all 26 participants gave that influenced their perceptions and experiences in the ninth-grade academy.

A total of 26 students participated in the second interview session. The focus of the second session corresponded with the second research question. Responses differed from what the researcher observed in the classroom, according to Table 4.

Table 4
Responses to Student Interview Question Session 2

Response to Questions	Responses	Frequency n=26	Percentage %
1. Classroom instruction had the greatest impact on my ninth-grade academy experience.	Quality Classroom Instruction	22	98%
2. My ninth-grade academy peers were the greatest influence on my experience.	Relationships	2	1%
3. Extracurricular activities greatly influenced my perception of the ninth-grade academy.	"Real-World" Connections	2	1%

Based on student interviews and classroom observations of the ninth-grade academy, it appeared that participants overlooked the racial aspect of their ninth-grade experience because they had not interacted with a predominately White student population. Ninety-eight percent of participants mentioned they did not encounter racial conflicts, nor were racial matters discussed. However, the researcher's 26 classroom observations suggest differently. Racial conflict was evident and teachers integrated it into their curriculum.

The participants gave general responses to question two. The majority of them believe that quality instruction was the most effective practice that influenced them in the ninth-grade academy. Others elaborated on personal relationships and "real-world" connections. Overall, the responses from the participants were universal. Even though all of the participants were of color, none of them identified with programs or practices that affected a specific race or culture. However, when the researcher observed certain classrooms at the ninth-grade academy, he witnessed some practices that connected with students based on race (quality instruction, developing personal relationships, and "real-world" experiences).

RQ 3 How does race impact the experiences of students from marginalized groups in the ninth-grade academy?

This question used CRT as a theoretical framework, which provided a vehicle for examining the student's achievement from an asset model. Based on this framework, the researcher analyzed the overall experiences of participants at the ninth-grade academy. From a CRT perspective, when people admit that racism does not exist, problems such as colorblindness, lack of counter-story telling, and stereotyping are often present (Parker & Stovall, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Feelings of cultural alienation, physical isolation, and silence are commonly expressed from students of color who attend predominately White schools (Datnow & Cooper, 2000). Ninth-grade academies nation-wide, however, tend to be located in urban areas where students from mainly marginalized groups attend (Barnes et al., 2013). Tantamount to the research, in this study, RQ3 revealed that none of the 26 participants mentioned that race played a major factor in their ninth-grade academy experience. Based on student interviews and classroom observations of the ninth-grade academy, participants had overlooked the racial aspect of their ninth-grade experience because they had not interacted with predominately White student population.

  Classroom observations/trends that suggest that race is relevant. Based on these classroom observations, a teacher's race played a significant factor in the participants' experience, despite their responses to the interview questions. If the teacher was nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic, the participants held the teacher's class in high esteem regardless of race. However, if teachers were of color and they had the previously stated attributes, they were perceived to be the most effective teachers at the ninth-grade academy. Teachers who lacked any of the five attributes (i.e., nurturing/caring, organized, confident, creative, and energetic) tended to have the most difficulty teaching the participants, especially if that teacher was of color.

  Whenever the researcher observed a teacher interacting positively with one class, they encountered a similar experience with the other classes regardless of the classroom demographics and abilities. Those teachers that participants viewed unfavorably, tended to struggle with the students in all the classes that were observed. The participants who were observed off task for one teacher, were on task for another one, and vice versa. In sum, 98% of the participants' responses and classroom demeanor suggested that a teacher's race was not the only major factor in their ninth-grade academy experience.

  Evidence of racial recognition versus colorblindness at the ninth-grade academy. The participants' responses suggested that they did not adopt a victim mentality. This defense motivated them to counter societal stereotypes about members of their racial groups and persevere in their academics, the same as Carter (2008) had claimed. The teachers the researcher observed were instrumental in socializing students of color in the ninth-grade academy to have positive racial identities that included awareness of racial discrimination. Same-race teachers were not the only ones implementing this practice, but all teachers were consistent with the ninth-grade students of color in the ninth-grade academy.

  One of the main possible reasons why students' responses suggested that they did not adopt a victim mentality could be that they identified African American and White teachers as being consistent in reiterating the counter-narrative of African American and Latino achievement that produces the development of positive accomplishments in society. For example, when the researcher observed an English class in the ninth-grade academy, the

teacher listed the objectives, followed the state's guidelines, and assigned those students extra books to read. These books were counter-narratives about people of color. That teacher's classroom library consisted of *When Marian Sang*, Maritcha*: A 19th Century American Girl*, *Novio Boy*, *The Great Migration*, La *Mariposa*, *The Bluford Series*, *Voices from the Field*, *Children of the Dust Bowl*, and many other books explaining how people of color overcame diversity. Once students read these books, they gave oral reports to the class and had classroom discussions. Other ninth-grade academy English classes conducted similar activities with their students.

Evidence of race as a factor in students' ninth-grade academy experience versus denial from the participants. Twenty-six classroom observations conducted in the ninth-grade academy indicated that race was a major component in the lives of students of color. When the researcher interviewed 26 participants about how race affected their ninth-grade academy experience, all but two responded that it did not have an impact. However, when the researcher observed the interactions with students in the classrooms and social settings, the researcher witnessed something different. Students tended to socialize with each other according to race. Many teachers connected with students by using race and ethnicity as a focal point.

Race addressed in the curriculum. Whereas most participants responded that race was not discussed in the classrooms, the researcher observed it being discussed when the English I honors class covered *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Some African Americans were in that class, as well as White and Latino students. The English teacher, a White male, had a discussion with the students about the content of the story. The researcher perceived, for example, how frustrated and uncomfortable the African American male students were in the classroom when the class addressed the sentencing of the African American character, Jim, falsely accused of raping a white woman then he was executed. Whereas the students who were non-African American had, no problems objectively discussed the sentencing of Jim, the African American male students appeared angry over the character's portrayal in the story. The book had constantly used the word *nigger*. Many students probably did not have a problem reading it in class; however, the African American students appeared very uncomfortable. The teacher acted as the facilitator in this situation. The teacher used this assignment as a *teachable moment*, and led the class to the understanding that Whites often falsely accused African Americans of crimes and punished them accordingly. He connected the story according to what happened in the present day legal system with African Americans or other people of color. The students appeared engaged in the assignment and the African American students appeared to understand how race is central to one's lifetime experience.

Teaching assignments. Ten of the teachers at the ninth-grade academy were White, and the remaining three were African American. This ninth grade academy's staff population was slightly less racially diverse than the rest of the school. The three African American teachers taught only standard level and a few honors level ninth-grade academy classes. The Advanced Placement (AP), highest level in academic achievement, at the ninth-grade academy was taught by two seasoned White teachers. These teachers had been at the high school before the creation of the ninth-grade academy. They were in their mid to late 40s and each teacher had at least 20 years of experience. The student demographics in the AP classes contained 15% more White students than the other ninth-grade academy classes.

The 26 classroom observations along with the 26 student interviews gave the researcher a more complete understanding about how students of color perceive the ninth-grade academy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how ninth-grade students of color experienced their first year at the selected ninth-grade academy. It focused on an academy's efforts in addressing the problems associated with ninth-grade transition. From this study, educators might develop a larger paradigm of pros and cons of ninth-grade academy for students of marginalized groups. The finding of this study mirror the literature suggested that the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promotes positive achievement outcomes for students of color (Carter, 2008). In keeping with Darling-Hammond's (2010) finding, this study also found that through the theoretical framework of CRT, a student's social and cultural capital worked cohesively with the capital within the context of the school to promote academic achievement.

The researcher's findings suggest that not an extensive amount of dialogue about race occurs within the context of many educational settings. However, in this selected school, there were clear structures in place that provided a comprehensive educational program for students regarding race. There was clear evidence of teacher belief in the student's ability to achieve and excel, regardless of race.

Evidence from this study suggests that neither race, gender, culture, nor teaching credentials played a major role in the student's perception of an effective teacher. Students of color identified the most effective teacher as one who was energetic, caring, well organized, and creative. Those teachers who possessed these attributes were the most beneficial, especially if they were the same race as the participant. However, those teachers who lacked any of those quality attributes had the most difficult time teaching, especially if they were teachers of color.

There was evidence to suggest that students at the targeted ninth-grade academy were motivated to learn. Students were actively involved, at least in most of the classrooms that were observed. Those who were not engaged in classes were honest about it. What actually motivated these students was not clear and could be researched in future studies. It is hoped that this study would influence educators to enhance their knowledge base of ninth-grade academies, to more effectively serve students of color, and reduce the high school dropout.

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