How to Re-engage High School, African American Boys

Attending Urban Schools: The Selection of Materials Matters.

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Abstract

Most educators have been aware of the glaring achievement gaps between Caucasian students and their minority counterparts. Even though there has been an awareness of this issue, limited research has been done into the source and solution for the problem. Having worked in an alternative high school program where the population is predominantly African American, this gap and the lack of research into why had been of interest and concern for this researcher for some time. This was particularly true in regards to the male students. Every year, these boys came into the classroom with very little, if any, interest in education. Their lives revolved around poverty, drugs, crime, and a desperate desire for change but little to no ability to do anything about it. Although these boys had been told from birth that education is important, they were very rarely given the tools to have succeeded in this endeavor. Also, many of these boys came from homes where educational value was not modeled, as the parent(s) barely, if at all, managed to graduate from high school themselves.

Research was conducted at Muskegon Community Education Center, an alternative high school within Muskegon Public Schools, focused on high school, African American males within an urban school. The focus group was 12 boys that had been previously unsuccessful with traditional curriculum materials, and they were given two questionnaires, and two short stories and film, each with comprehension questions to answer. One short story was a traditionally utilized Victorian-era text; the second was a slightly longer short story that is considered modern, urban literature focused on African American and street culture; the third is a major motion picture that fictionalizes the racial tension and injustice in modern American society.

Students reported an overall positive attitude toward school but the major concern was an overwhelming sense of boredom and disinterest. Further research into this particular problem could potentially identify specific, highly engaging materials and not only a cause to the overall sense of boredom, but also a concrete solution for these often overlooked and underachieving students.
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Chapter 1 – Problem

Introduction

This researcher began her teaching career with an interest in working with urban, underprivileged teenagers. Her first teaching job was in a high school that was part of a large, city district, and she worked with a variety of students from various backgrounds and ability levels. It was in this school that she first noticed the disinterest that many students had with traditional English curriculum pieces; students would or could not engage with materials written in previous centuries that focused on cultures predominantly or completely different from their own. Connecting these pieces, however, to modern society or pop culture made an impact on engagement and retention. It seemed possible that students were disengaged and bored with outdated and seemingly irrelevant materials, leading a desire to discover where the disconnect could be identified and overcome.

Later, the researcher began teaching at an alternative school in an urban environment, although it was in a much smaller city than the first. Students in this school were predominantly African American, and the vast majority of them had a history of academic disengagement and failure. Knowledge gaps, low reading levels, and frustration with content that was perceived as irrelevant to their own lives caused a constant classroom struggle in the quest for understanding and success. Here, the decision was made to incorporate modern society and pop culture, in addition to layering background information, and noticed students beginning to have a higher rate of interest and retention in class.

When the administration changed hands, it seemed like the opportune time to create a film-based curriculum that would allow for the highest rate of learning in the shortest amount of time. With the constant awareness of the affect various materials had on the students, this writer
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began to substantiate the film-based curriculum with various modern short stories and novellas to gain the maximum effect on the students’ overall learning. Since the beginning of her teaching career, it had been noted that the African American males were by and large underperforming in comparison to their peers, both of opposite gender and races, so they became the focal point for further interest in the correlation between materials and engagement. This interest became more specifically honed when it became clear that boys raised in the most urban areas of the city seemed more prone to disinterest in traditional English curriculum than those students that were transfer students from other districts or those students that lived further outside of the city limits. It was also important to challenge disengagement at the secondary level, before graduation, since “a lot of children in urban communities do not even think that college is an option, because they think it’s too expensive, or they do not think they are smart enough to attend college” (Harper & Davis, 2012, p. 115).

It was, at this point, decided to center research around exactly what opinions and beliefs these urban, African American, high school boys were bringing into the classroom and how three, particular stories were able to connect to them and why.

Problem

A large number of African American males in urban high schools come into the classroom with a myriad of distractions and previous struggles with education. Environmental factors ranging from poorly educated family members, large drop-out rates, criminal records, and the common burden of financial responsibility for themselves and/or other family members contributed to large background knowledge gaps and a general attitude of irrelevancy and apathy toward school in general (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). These attitudes transferred further when regarding reading and writing at higher levels, particularly when the subject had
nothing to do with lifestyles or cultures that are personally familiar to them. Hopefully, if educators were aware of this potential disconnect, perhaps they could do whatever possible to make school as relevant and engaging as possible to each student, on their level.

Purpose and Justification of the Study

The primary motivation and purpose of this study was to discover which materials could be used to re-engage at-risk, African American, adolescent males in their own educational process. Working in an alternative setting, this researcher had more room for experimentation with curriculum and curricular materials than teachers who work in a more traditional educational setting. The role of incorporating mandated state and federal standards had been placed upon this research, a role that had been gladly taken when this researcher chose to go into teaching profession. However, the curriculum pieces that have often been determined to be best suited to facilitate the learning of these standards apparently have been of little to no interest to students who have not been taught to appreciate classic literature, according to conversations that have previously been had with students. In addition to a lack of interest, there has often been a lack of ability that stems from low reading levels and little to no background knowledge, both of which made comprehension and personal connection next to impossible (Tatum, 2006). With these factors in mind, it was the belief of this researcher that modernization of materials, including use of controversial but relevant texts, would be the first step on the road to crucial re-engagement in education.

Information garnered from this study could do many positive things in an attempt to begin healing the achievement gap that currently exists in the American educational system. While this particular subject has been studied by various professionals before, the subject seems to have been very rarely studied within the walls of a small, alternative setting. In addition,
previous studies have shown more sociological, psychological, and anthropological data than
offered insight into which specific materials could be used for males in the educational setting in
which this researcher teaches. It is the hope of this researcher that invaluable information, as to
which materials are truly engaging for the students selected for this study, will be gained and
utilized for the greater good of not only the school, Muskegon Community Education Center, but
also the district, Muskegon Public Schools, and eventually into other classrooms outside of the
district.

Research Question

The proposed research question is as follows: what literary materials could be used as
curriculum pieces to re-engage high school aged, African American males in an urban
environment?

Definition of Terms

There are many key terms that go into this particular study. These terms, all formally
defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, primarily encompass:

Achievement

Constitutive Definition: the quality and quantity of a student’s work

Operational Definition: increase in retention and growth, as measured by
assessments and/or self-evaluations
Adolescent

Constitutive Definition: of, relating to, or being in adolescence; emotionally or intellectually immature

Operational Definition: a student of post-pubescent age, typically in high school

Alternative

Constitutive Definition: differing from the usual or conventional, as existing or functioning outside the established cultural, social, or economic system

Operational Definition: an educational establishment that provides a program that differs from that of the traditional educational setting. For the program of Muskegon Community Education Center, students are allowed to take online classes, only need 18 credits to graduate, and have been given more flexibility in their schedules due to court appearances, parenting, and numerous other situations.

Curriculum

Constitutive Definition: the courses offered by an educational institution

Operational Definition: the courses offered by the educational institution of Muskegon Community Education Center
Engagement

Constitutive Definition: emotional involvement or commitment

Operational Definition: a student’s emotional involvement or commitment to the class topic and their overall school work

Literary

Constitutive Definition: of, relating to, or having the characteristics of humane learning or literature

Operational Definition: relating to a traditional book or story taught in English Language Arts classes in American public education
Chapter 2 – Background and Review of Literature

Background

Many people have done their own research into the dilemma of the achievement gap between African American boys and their white counterparts. Achievement has been its own source of data and research, having considered the academic gaps between black male students and their white counterparts (Council of the Great City Schools, 2012; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012; Prager, 2011; White & Cotton, 2009). Several studies have been done regarding the contributing factors that go into both engagement and disengagement (Murray and Naranjo, 2008; Jones, 2011; James, 2010; Green, 2013), and these professionals have taken a multifaceted look into the historical, social, and academic concerns in an attempt to cover the issue from a whole child perspective. In addition to contributing factors to engagement, research has been conducted into the matter of classroom engagement, specifically (Thompson, Warren, Foy, Dickerson, 2008; Patterson, 2010; Noesen, 2009). The researchers studying actual classroom engagement looked at factors such as student/teacher relationships, comprehension assistance, and the perspective of the African American males themselves. When studying the literature engagement of males, it is important that actual text selection be considered. There are many text selections that can be used to assist at-risk, African American males (Barker, 2010; Bridges, 2010; Tatum, 2006).

Achievement

The educational achievement gap between African American boys and their Caucasian peers has been closely looked upon, particularly when the gap began to increase in the 1990s (White & Cotton, 2009). Although White and Cotton suggested many strategies for addressing
this gap – including advocacy, study circles, and reevaluation of the special education system (2009) – there still exists a substantial gap in achievement, beginning in elementary school. Early achievement measured a gap greater than 25% between the reading proficiencies of African American and Caucasian boys (Prager, 2011). Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, and Chen took the research into achievement farther by looking specifically at African American and Caucasian boys that existed within the same educational environment (2012), as opposed to merely comparing scores and achievement across various socioeconomic, geographic, and educational backgrounds. The Council of the Great City Schools took the collaborations of researchers within this field and offered not only a look at the various problems with achievement and engagement but also began offering suggestions and solutions for ways in which to mend the current problem (2012). The engagement and literature, however, needed to be further researched and analyzed for the purpose of determining the roots and solutions to the problem.

Contributing Factors to Engagement and Disengagement

The studies placed into this particular section comprised not only the educational factors contributing to the question of engagement but also the factors that occurred outside of school. While certain studies did not offer any concrete suggestions, but have given cautions into the complexities of the issue (Murray & Naranjo, 2008), others looked at specific factors. Policies and procedures influenced students in many ways (Jones, 2011), and looked at engagement through the lens of things such as discipline and school relationships. In specific cases, the complexities were analyzed through four components: expectations dissonance, disguised engagement, differential engagement, and expectations overload (James, 2010). Sociological explanations, told with the personal influences and experiences (Green, 2013), were also given.
Experts considered the problem of lack of achievement through disengagement as a problem that was not something that occurred in isolation or began in a vacuum, but something that has been studied as a generational difficulty.

Classroom Engagement

While overall engagement factors have been an issue, it was important to focus specifically on classroom engagement when analyzing what could get these students once again interested in their own education. Although the most obvious area of study was the teachers themselves (Thompson, Warren, Foy, & Dickerson, 2008) and how their role in the classroom and overall effectiveness influenced student performance, teachers were not the only factor involved in classroom engagement. Student interest in the materials being covered in class was key. While one study looked at the way classroom content engaged African American boys in private school (Patterson, 2012), there had been relevant research into the general population of African American male students and how curriculum has impacted and affected them (Noesen, 2009). This research also included the role of incarceration and the perspectives of masculinity as further influences on student engagement. With this research into the general problems with curriculum, more specified studies have looked not only at the deficiencies in curriculum but also began to offer suggestions as to how those deficiencies could be fixed.

Suggested Literature and the Role of Language and Culture

Theoretical work has been done into the value of certain literature and its content relevancy (Barker, 2010), particularly celebrated texts that focus on the African American perspective within the context of historical struggles: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. However, Dr. Alfred Tatum has done much work into the issue of
engagement, what could be done about it, and which particular literary pieces could begin to get the adolescent, African American male to be on track to not only finish his education but also have increased achievement in the time he had left at school (Bridges, 2010; Tatum, 2006). The data that has been collected on this has been influential on this researcher and has motivated her to consider this issue specifically in her own classroom and school district, which further compelled the necessity for research and study into this complicated issue.
Chapter 3 – Procedures

Development of Research Question

As previously stated, the research question that drove the data collection centered on what materials could re-engage high school, African American boys in their own educational process. It was the belief of this researcher that contemporary texts and stories, such as urban street literature and film adaptations, could be the answer to this question. While these texts have often been highly controversial, they did cover a scope of content that was not only relevant to the lives of these particular students but was quite often the very breadth of these students’ lives. It was the assumption that these particular texts would not only serve to eventually improve the vocabulary and comprehension of these students but would also re-engage them to a point where understanding of standards and literary conventions, as well as overall retention, would have improved.

Description of the Research Design

Given the nature of the data and information that needed to be collected, both action research and survey questionnaires were the tools that were used to conduct the research for this study. The information gathered was not only opinions and personal perspectives on school, in general, and school work, specifically, but also gave documentation of comprehension of three separate stories that may or may not have proved to be stimulating to the subjects: “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, “His Mother’s House” by Edward P. Jones, and “A Time to Kill”, the film adaptation of John Grisham’s novel. This, in turn, became data utilized to determine what changes should or must be made to the curriculum of the courses this researcher taught.
Students were selected from a group of volunteers that were enrolled at and attending Muskegon Community Education Center in Muskegon Public Schools. There were flyers posted around the school, calling for all interested students to attend an informational meeting that would offer them of the parameters and content of the study, as well as the time requirements; research took place Mondays through Thursdays, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Students were given consent forms, and those who were of legal age signed their own; those who are not of legal age took the consent home forms for their parents/guardians to sign. The research began two weeks from the informational meeting, in an attempt to give enough time for the parents to return, and possibly to receive additional copies, of the consent form. The initial survey was given upon that date. The action research took place over the next six weeks, which allowed for students to work at their own pace. Each participating student was given the three stories with a corresponding series of comprehension and connectivity questions; the questions were the same for each of the three texts and stories covered. The follow-up survey occurred before the research is finalized.

Description of the Sample

The participants of this sample were chosen from the population enrolled at Muskegon Community Education Center for the 2014-2015 school year. The anticipated number of participants was 10-20, and these were all African American, adolescent males in an alternative education environment in an urban setting. The students ranged in age from 16-19 years old. Due to the fact that the students were enrolled in the alternative program, there was no specific grade differentiation for the students. The focus of the study revolved around the fact that regardless of their grade, these students were all poor performing and below grade level in all subjects.
Description of the Instruments Used

Both the initial and follow-up questionnaires were based on a four-point Likert scale and were 25 questions each. Samples of the questions included, “my teachers don’t make class work interesting” and “it’s possible for me to like school again”. Students rated their responses to these questions as to whether or not they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. These surveys were not anonymous, but utilized the assignment of a pseudonym that was given to each student, determined by a computer-generated randomizer. Each of these surveys can be found in the Appendix at the conclusion of this proposal.

The action research included two texts and a film. The first text was Kate Chopin’s “Story of an Hour”, a European Caucasian short story written in the Victorian era that has been typically included in the standard curricular liturgy. This story was given the pseudonym “Story A” and was read first. The lexile level for this text is 990, which fell into 6th grade reading levels or higher. The second text was Edward P. Jones’s “His Mother’s House”. The text was classified under urban street literature, as it dealt with African American characters and their struggles with crime, drugs, and family struggles. This story was given the pseudonym “Story B” and was read second. There was no current lexile level for this text, specifically, but other works by Edward P. Jones have rated on the lexile level of 1060. This fell into a minimum of 7th grade reading levels. The third piece in the study was “A Time to Kill”, the film adaptation of John Grisham’s book by the same name. Including a film adaptation offered the perspective of relevancy and impact of visual cues; the story itself covered the southern racial tensions in modern society as well as the racial inequalities in the modern American justice system. The film was last and was given the pseudonym “Story C”. There is no lexile level for this piece, as it was a film and cannot be measured. However, the original text was measured at a 770 on the
lexile scale. Each story came with the same set of comprehension and connection questions, covering things such as “Describe the setting of the story”, “What is the main character’s motivation”, and “How can you relate to this story” (Appendix). Informal conversations took place upon the conclusion of each reading, and students decided which text they liked best, and why they liked it, upon the conclusion of all three texts.

Description of the Procedures Followed

Upon the first day of research, students were given the initial questionnaire. Once this was completed, turned back into this researcher, and locked into a cabinet within the classroom, the students were given the first story to read. Each student was allowed to read at their own pace and answered the comprehension and connection questions upon completion of reading. After the first set was given, the second text was given. Again, students were allowed to read at their own pace and answered a set of questions about the story; the questions were identical to those asked in regards to the first text. The film was then watched, and the same questions as given for the first and second texts were answered. When this process was completed, students were given the follow-up questionnaire. Any student who needed additional time to complete the readings, past the six weeks, was given such. Students only read from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and texts did not leave the classroom. Students who had participated in the program had agreed to do so of their own free will, and received free snacks and 30 points of extra credit upon completion of the study, as remuneration for their free time.

Discussion of Internal and External Validity

The internal validity of this particular form of research was called into question most specifically in regards to the teacher-student relationship between this researcher and the
participants. However, although the students were very loyal to this researcher, they were also very honest and forthcoming with their true opinions on classroom and curriculum materials, so there was little to no room for concern over the results being influenced by a desire to please. It was also made very clear to the students at the informational meeting, before any research began, that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and would not in any way affect their grade should they have chosen to not participate or discontinued participation. Internal validity may have also be affected by the fact that “A Time to Kill” is a major motion picture that many students have seen, and students may have felt more biased to this story due to potential prior familiarity with the film.

The largest issue facing the external validity was the specificity of the students involved in the study, not only due to the fact that they are few in number but also that the school community in which they attend was specific and unique. While the findings of the study could have had relevancy and direct impact on the futures of the students at Muskegon Community Education Center, it may not have be applicable or useable in any other setting, including that of the traditional high school in the school district. Given that Muskegon itself had a complex and varying culture separate from other environments that have a large population of impoverished African Americans, materials that potentially elicited interest in those students may not have elicited interest in those from another socioeconomic region, including an urban district as close as Grand Rapids Public Schools. Students within Muskegon Public Schools have lived in a smaller community with far less travel to other areas or exposure to additional cultures, lifestyles, and life experiences as those students enrolled in Grand Rapids Public Schools. Although it was possible to witness the same cultural and socioeconomic perspectives and challenges, those existed in Muskegon in a much more short-term way and with less sense of
isolation of the individual. The smaller community afforded students a greater sense of familial and communal ties that offered support, although the support was often not academic and did not provide a strong, positive sense of academic self-worth or achievement.
Chapter 4 – Results, Analysis, and Data

Results and Analysis

It was the hope that the data would show a correlation between overall attitudes toward school and the ability to comprehend and connect to the materials reviewed. Specific levels of growth were not measured, as student lexile scores were unavailable at the beginning of the study and no assessment was given to measure specific growth. It was not the purpose of this study to measure quantitative data but only qualitative. It was also the hope that the data would demonstrate a correlation between their beliefs in their academic abilities and their attitudes toward school. Once the data had been compiled and analyzed, the results offered a slightly different outcome than what was originally hoped for and assumed.

The initial questionnaire was given to the students in the beginning of May 2015, and it was met with a surprising amount of enthusiasm. The students were reminded to treat each piece of the research with absolute honesty, as there was no penalty to them for answers that they were potentially concerned would be taken badly. Once the survey was completed, students read Story A and answered the corresponding questions. Students had appeared to do well but seemed to show limited interest in the story itself. Several students reported feeling confused and that the story was boring. Students then read Story B and answered the same set of corresponding questions. Students demonstrated a larger problem with this story due to the fact that it was about 20 pages long, compared to the three pages of Story A. Students expressed apprehension at the length of the story and seemed to have a hard time working their way through it, even though the story itself was still, by definition, a short story. Story C was then viewed and, although a major motion picture, the majority of the students had never seen the film. Each student expressed their interest in the film and, upon completion, had limited trouble
answering the questions. The final questionnaire went smoothly, and students didn’t have much to say or question on this piece of the research.

Once the data were compiled and synthesized, the results of the survey provided an interesting perspective into the students’ beliefs of themselves. The majority of participating students believed that they did well in school and were good students. They reported being happy in school, and felt that doing well in school was important, as they also unanimously agreed that doing well in school was important to their futures. The students also unanimously agreed upon having regrets over their past academic performances. Despite expressing happiness in school, however, the majority of students felt school was boring, and this also contributed to their lack of interest in reading. They believed their interest in school would be higher if the overall school work more directly related to them and their lives. Students were divided on their perspectives of the difficulty of work, the role teachers played in their engagement in the work, and their reasons for attending school. It was not a surprise to discover that each of the students could remember a time in their previous schooling where reading had been enjoyable.

The students’ ability to answer comprehension questions correctly was varied both within each story and between Story A and B. The overwhelming majority of students were able to correctly identify the protagonist and determine events within the beginning of Story A, but were mixed on their abilities to identify the antagonist, setting, the middle and ending events, and a positive personal connection to the story itself. Almost all of the students were unable to identify the main character’s motivations throughout the story, and they were incorrect in identifying the overall conflict as well. For Story B, students were again able to correctly identify the protagonist and the beginning of the story but then were also able to identify to antagonist and
the middle events. Students had an easier time with the ending, as well, but were still having difficulty identifying the conflict and main character’s motivation. They also, again, were mixed on their connection to the story. Story C, as predicted, offered the greatest success; the majority of students answered every single question correctly. However, there was still a mixed response over positive and negative connections to the story.

The follow-up questionnaire provided the greatest surprises to this writer. Although having had difficulty correctly answering questions on Story A and B, students expressed that they enjoyed both stories. They did not, however, feel they would be comfortable taking an assessment on either story. Story C was the most widely liked, and students did feel as though they would be able to take an assessment on that particular story. Their responses were divided over the rest of the responses, including their beliefs on whether or not material would affect attendance, desire for the work to be more like one or more of the three stories covered in the research, and whether or not it would be possible for them to like reading and writing again in the future.

To the researcher’s surprise, the students did not feel lost in school; this, however, is most likely directly related to the fact that the students did not find academic work hard but boring. Their opinions on their academic ability appeared negated by their inability to answer a handful of questions about short stories, but this could also be directly related to boredom and therefore, engagement. The beginning of the story and the protagonist were always readily identified, before the student had lost interest in the story itself. In addition to being bored with reading itself, students took several days to read the short stories and were constantly having to remember their reading from the previous day. The film did not present this same problem, possibly due to the highly visual nature of the students participating in the research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Survey Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Agree Responses</th>
<th>Agree Responses</th>
<th>Disagree Responses</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think I do poorly in school.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I am a good student.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe education can offer me many opportunities.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Schoolwork is uninteresting to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am bored in class.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy at school.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Grades are important to me.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I think school is difficult.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>I take pride in my performance and successes at school.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I enjoy answering questions in class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel good when I complete schoolwork.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I get upset when I have missing work.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I do well in school so that my family will be proud of me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School is not going to help me get anywhere in life.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I go to school for reasons other than class work and grades.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>I regret some of the decisions I have made in school.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s too late for me to be successful.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My teachers don’t make class work interesting.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work in class has nothing to do with me or my life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like school better if I felt like the work had anything to do with me or my life.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have trouble understanding when I read.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot concentrate in class, particularly if we are supposed to read.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hard time picturing a story because I don’t understand the words being used.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have hard time picturing a story because the story itself is boring.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember a time when I actually did enjoy stories and reading.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Story A – “Story of An Hour”
By Kate Chopin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct Response</th>
<th>Incorrect Responses</th>
<th>Positive Relation to Story</th>
<th>Negative/No Relation to Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the main character (protagonist)?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the setting of the story.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Beginning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Middle</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Ending</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main character’s motivation?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the problem (conflict) in the story?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you relate to this story?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Story B – “His Mother’s House”
By Edward P. Jones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct Response</th>
<th>Incorrect Responses</th>
<th>Positive Relation to Story</th>
<th>Negative/No Relation to Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the main character (protagonist)?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the setting of the story.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Beginning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Middle</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Ending</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main character’s motivation?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the problem (conflict) in the story?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you relate to this story?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Story C – “A Time to Kill”
Film Adaptation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct Response</th>
<th>Incorrect Responses</th>
<th>Positive Relation to Story</th>
<th>Negative/No Relation to Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the main character (protagonist)?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the setting of the story.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Beginning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Middle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story about? – Ending</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main character’s motivation?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What is the problem (conflict) in the story?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>11</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can you relate to this story?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow Up Survey Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Agree Responses</th>
<th>Agree Responses</th>
<th>Disagree Responses</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really liked Story A.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would remember Story A more than Story B.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really like Story B.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used to like reading.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s possible to like reading again.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s possible for me to like writing.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think school ruins reading and writing.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really like Story C.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would remember Story C more than any other story.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy to answer questions about Story A.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy to answer questions about Story B.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy to answer questions about Story C.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish more work related to me like Story A.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish more work related to me like Story B.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish more work related to me like Story C.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story A.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story B.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story C.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is nothing anyone can do to make school interesting to me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel completely lost in school, no matter what the stories are or how the work relates to me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could actually picture what was going on in Story A.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could actually picture what was going on in Story B.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could actually picture what was going on in Story C.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of this data indicated a need to address the boredom of the students on a larger and more diligent level. While the materials selected for this study may not have provided the greatest or best impact in an overall classroom environment, or for long-term academic analysis, it was clear that the more modern materials were met with a greater understanding and ease by most, if not all, of the students. Further research, prompted by the results of this study, could potentially go further into the root of the students’ boredom and address curriculum and classroom materials that could more heavily combat this particular barrier between perceived and actual academic success.
Chapter 5 – Discussions and Conclusion

A direct relationship between boredom and ability to answer questions was the most apparent result of the data. This finding was further supported by research, as “Seventy-four percent of the students identified two qualities [of outstanding teaching], explain things well and make the course work interesting, as important” (Thompson et. al, 2008, p. 127). The students had very positive attitudes toward the entire process and were genuinely interested in being a part of research they perceived to be relevant to not only their own educational process about also the potential academic futures of others like them. They enjoyed the entire experience and were also curious about the relativity of research specifics, such as the particular stories selected and the types of questions asked on both the initial and follow-up questionnaires. This personal connection to the process was not unexpected, as students given more direct control over their education tend to naturally have a higher interest. As stated in research, “These young men are rich data sources. They can provide insights and characteristics into the types of texts they find motivating” (Tatum, 2006).

The story with the greatest positive results was the film “A Time to Kill”, quite possibly because the students are inundated in a film-based culture and society as well as being able to comprehend visual materials more easily than written. It was also more than likely that since they were used to a film-based classroom format in their English classes at the alternative school, this particular style was something they were more comfortable with from recent academic experience. Students in the study also had personal and/or familial experience with the modern American justice system and racial interactions between Caucasian and African American populations, background knowledge that was vital to comprehension. While this researcher was
not claiming nor advocating for the primary focus of English classrooms to be film based, there did seem to be merit in including more visual adaptations and references for written materials.

It was also worth considering what affect reading the stories aloud and together would have garnered. Novellas and stories covered in the English classes at Muskegon Community Education Center are dissected in this way, with frequent reading interruptions for questions and clarifications as well as discussions of motivations, character relationships, connectivity to self and world, and overall cultural impacts of materials. The students were left to read these stories individually and without the scaffolding or discussion of materials to which they had grown accustomed. The goal of this research was to determine comprehension and connection ability at an individual and basic level, without higher-level concepts and inundation of background information and support to assist the students in their relationship to the stories. A few students did attempt to ask questions but were gently reminded that they were simply to do the best that they could on their own and would not be penalized for incorrect answers.

This researcher would be interested in conducting this study on a wider scale not only at the same school but different schools as well, gathering data that would more conclusively determine what specific materials would assist in the re-engagement of high school, African American males in urban schools. Future research would more likely yield stronger results if conducted toward the beginning of the school year instead of the end, and it is important to have continued, independent discussions with students regarding their attitudes and beliefs about not only their own education but also the American education system in general. With open and honest discussions revolving around materials, comfort, connection, and comprehension, it is possible to build a classroom environment in which there truly is no student left behind, regardless of their perceived academic ease and abilities in comparison to their actual academic
status. This researcher continues to be hopeful that modernization of curriculum and traditional materials utilized within the classroom will help further bring students and education into the necessary skills and abilities necessary to function happily and successfully in the 21st century.
References

Being black is not a risk factor: A strengths-based look at the state of the black child. (2013). Retrieved from National Black Child Development Institute website:
http://www.nbcdi.org/sites/default/files/resourcefiles/Being%20Black%20Is%20Not%20a%20Risk%20Factor_0.pdf


Emdin, C. (2012, February 3). Yes, black males are different, but different is not deficient [Education Week]. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/03/kappan_emdin.html


Appendix

Engagement of Adolescent, African American Males: A Study

Welcome!

You have been invited to participate in a research project that takes a look at what school, and English Language Arts in particular, means to you and why. Your participation and assistance in this study are greatly appreciated and will be helpful for not only your own education but also future students that are in similar education positions.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to consider the reasons why students become disengaged and how educators and curriculum changes can attempt to overcome that disengagement. This study is going to most closely look at what materials are most engaging to African American teenage boys and what affect those materials have on their potential successes and interest in school. Materials used in this study will teach the same standards and concepts as traditional English curriculum but will be modern adaptations of content.

How will the findings be used?

The information gathered from this study will not only be applied in the regular, daily English classes at Muskegon Community Education Center, but will also be shared with the entire staff of MCEC and administration of Muskegon Public schools. If the more modern materials are found to be more relatable, then they will be integrated into the English class. If the more traditional materials are more engaging, they will be integrated into the class. Potentially, the outcome of the study will result in curriculum changes made not only at MCEC but at other MPS schools as well. Any curriculum suggestions or changes will comply with the current state standards, as set by the Common Core.

Contact Information:

Primary Researcher –

Ms. Heidi Williams

hwilliam@mpsk12.net or willihei@aquinas.edu

(616) 634-8723

Faculty Advisor –

Dr. Carol A. Winkle

winklcar@aquinas.edu

(616) 632-2434
What is expected of each participant?

This study is completely voluntary. For each student that agrees to participate, they will be required to stay after school with Ms. Williams from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. for the time it takes to complete the parts of the study. The parts of the study include:

- Beginning survey/questionnaire
- Story A, with questions
- Story B, with questions
- Story C, with questions
- Final survey/questionnaire

Participating students will be provided with snacks during each after school session, and they will be given 30 points of extra credit in English upon completion of the study. If at any point in time the student decides to quit the study, it is within their right to do so. This will not, in any way, be reflected in their grade or their standing in class, but the extra credit will only be awarded with full completion of the study.

How will the participant’s identities be protected?

Students who participate in this study will be given a pseudonym, and this will be the identification they use in each of their surveys and responses. Participant work will be kept in a locked drawer, and any data recorded in the computer will be password protected. The only person with any access to the specific responses of each participants will be Ms. Williams.

Are there any risks in participating in this study?

The only risk involved in this study is the potential to be more engaged in the study materials than the regular school work. Should this level of engagement occur, Ms. Williams will take the student interest into consideration for future curriculum developments, but she will also make sure that the student is able to use their newfound engagement to develop literacy skills that become transferable to other material.

What will happen at the end of the study?

Students will be debriefed with a discussion on their overall opinions of their participation, not to be included in the study. This will be for Ms. Williams to touch base with them on their thoughts and opinions of this particular type of research. Each student will be given a certificate of completion and a receipt for their recorded extra credit. A thank you letter will be sent home to the families of each participating student.

Thank you so much for considering participating in a study that will help future generations of students as they navigate the successes and pitfalls of school!
Parental Consent Form

I, ____________________________________________, with full knowledge and consent, agree to allow ___________________________ to be a participant in the research study entitled “How to re-engage high school African American boys attending urban schools: the selection of materials matters.” The study is being conducted by Miss Heidi Williams, English teacher at Muskegon Community Education Center. I understand that the purpose of this study is to determine which literature is most engaging for urban, teenage, African-American boys. I understand that my son will be required to stay after school, Monday through Thursday from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., for approximately three weeks; he will be asked detailed questions about his personal background and overall thoughts and opinions on the education he has received so far. He will also be reading a selection of materials that are pre-determined by Heidi Williams and will be asked a variety of questions about his thoughts and opinions on the material.

Questionnaires will be no longer than 25 questions each, and there will be two of them. The initial survey will be the one discussed in the previous paragraph and will give him the opportunity to analyze how he feels about school, learning, reading, class content, teachers and the importance of school in the home environment. I understand he will be asked follow-up questions for each of the stories he is exposed to. He will be reading “The Story of an Hour”, by Kate Chopin; reading “His Mother’s House”, by Edward P. Jones; watching “A Time to Kill”, a film based on the novel by John Grisham. The questions he will be asked will be comprehension based, and he will be given a score on the assignment that will be recorded for the purposes of the study but will not affect or be entered into his daily classroom grade. A final questionnaire will be given at the end of the three stories, and it will ask questions about the engagement in each story, the ease of understanding with each story, and his comfort level with each story. He will also be engaging in a follow-up interview with Ms. Williams that will not be recorded in the study for data purposes, but will allow Ms. Williams to touch base with him on his overall thoughts and feelings on being a part of the project. He will be one of approximately 15 participants in the study, all of whom have been selected based on volunteering to participate. All students are enrolled in and attending Muskegon Community Education Center.

He will receive snacks for every day that he is after school with Ms. Williams and will also receive 30 points of extra credit upon completion of the study. I understand that there will be absolutely no penalty to him should he chose to withdraw his participation from the study, and he is allowed to do so at any point in time. His name will not be put on any documentation or paperwork related to or involved in the study, but data and information will not be truly anonymous. Ms. Williams will know the identity of each participant, but confidentiality will be maintained because all data and findings will be reported through pseudonyms and randomly selected numbers provided through a computer-generated randomizer. I understand that this study will help offer information on how to close achievement gaps and make school more relevant for students of all backgrounds and interests and that the materials he will be reading and watching are intended to show him three different categories of potential reading material. I also understand that the purpose of these selected materials is to expose him to potentially engaging reading material and is intended to spark an interest in reading. These materials are...
also intended to give him a more relevant platform for understanding literary conventions and English Language Arts standards.

I understand that I am allowed to ask any questions I have about the study or its findings at any point in time. There will be no physical risk to my son or any other participants, and no medical assistance will be necessary. Any potential risk involved will be possible boredom and frustration with existing or suggested new materials, which will be discussed with participants at length and recorded for data purposes. If I, or anyone else, have any questions, I can contact Miss Heidi Williams, at either hwilliam@mpsk12.net or (616) 634-8723, or Dr. Carol A. Winkle, faculty advisor, at either winklcar@aquinas.edu or (616) 632-2434. I have read and fully agree to the terms and information in this consent form.

Parent/Guardian _________________________________________________________
Date ________________________________

Student Consent Form

I, ______________________________________________________________, voluntarily and with full knowledge and consent, agree to be a participant in the research study entitled “How to re-engage high school African American boys attending urban schools: the selection of materials matters.” The study is being conducted by Miss Heidi Williams, English teacher at Muskegon Community Education Center. I understand that the purpose of this study is to determine which literature is most engaging for urban, teenage, African-American boys. I understand that I will be required to stay after school, Monday through Thursday from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., for approximately three weeks; I will be asked detailed questions about my personal background and overall thoughts and opinions on the education I have received so far. I will also be reading a selection of materials that are pre-determined by Heidi Williams and will be asked a variety of questions about my thoughts and opinions on the material.

Questionnaires will be no longer than 25 questions each, and there will be two of them. The initial survey will be the one discussed in the previous paragraph and will give me the opportunity to analyze how I feels about school, learning, reading, class content, teachers and the importance of school in the home environment. I understand that I will be asked follow-up questions for each of the stories I am exposed to. I will be reading “The Story of an Hour”, by Kate Chopin; reading “His Mother’s House”, by Edward P. Jones; watching “A Time to Kill”, a film based on the novel by John Grisham. The questions I will be asked will be comprehension based, and I will be given a score on the assignment that will be recorded for the purposes of the study but will not affect or be entered into his daily classroom grade. A final questionnaire will be given at the end of the three stories, and it will ask questions about the engagement in each story, the ease of understanding with each story, and my comfort level with each story. I will also be engaging in a follow-up interview with Ms. Williams that will not be recorded in the study for data purposes, but will allow Ms. Williams to touch base with me on his overall thoughts and feelings on being a part of the project. I will be one of approximately 15
participants in the study, all of whom have been selected based on volunteering to participate. All students are enrolled in and attending Muskegon Community Education Center.

I will receive snacks for every day that I am after school with Ms. Williams and will also receive 30 points of extra credit upon completion of the study. I understand that there will be absolutely no penalty to me should I choose to withdraw my participation from the study, and I am allowed to do so at any point in time. My name will not be put on any documentation or paperwork related to or involved in the study, but data and information will not be truly anonymous. Ms. Williams will know the identity of each participant, but confidentiality will be maintained because all data and findings will be reported through pseudonyms and randomly selected numbers provided through a computer-generated randomizer. I understand that this study will help offer information on how to close achievement gaps and make school more relevant for students of all backgrounds and interests and that the materials I will be reading and watching are intended to show me three different categories of potential reading material. I also understand that the purpose of these selected materials is to expose me to potentially engaging reading material and is intended to spark an interest in reading. These materials are also intended to give me a more relevant platform for understanding literary conventions and English Language Arts standards.

I understand that I am allowed to ask any questions I have about the study or its findings at any point in time. There will be no physical risk to myself or any other participants, and no medical assistance will be necessary. Any potential risk involved will be possible boredom and frustration with existing or suggested new materials, which will be discussed with participants at length and recorded for data purposes. If I, or anyone else, have any questions, I can contact Miss Heidi Williams, at either hwilliam@mpsk12.net or (616) 634-8723, or Dr. Carol A. Winkle, faculty advisor, at either winklcar@aquinas.edu or (616) 632-2434. I have read and fully agree to the terms and information in this consent form.

Signature _________________________________________________________

Date ________________________________

I, ________________________________________________________________, understand that I can voluntarily withdraw from this study at any point in time with no penalty to myself or my grades.

Signature _________________________________________________________
Initial Questionnaire – Personal and Educational Background

Directions:

Circle which answer best correlates to your response. Answers from which to choose are SA (strongly agree), A (agree), D (disagree), and SD (strongly disagree). Please answer each question honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Answers are strictly opinion based, and there are no incorrect answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think I do poorly in school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I think I am a good student.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I believe education can offer me many opportunities.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Schoolwork is uninteresting to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am bored in class.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am happy at school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Grades are important to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I think school is difficult.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I take pride in my performance and successes at school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I enjoy answering questions in class.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel good when I complete schoolwork.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I get upset when I have missing work.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I do well in school so that my family will be proud of me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. School is not going to help me get anywhere in life.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I go to school for reasons other than class work and grades.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I regret some of the decisions I have made in school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I think it’s too late for me to be successful.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. My teachers don’t make class work interesting.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The work in class has nothing to do with my</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. I would like school better if I felt like the work had anything to do with me or my life. | SA | A | D | SD
21. I have trouble understanding when I read. | SA | A | D | SD
22. I cannot concentrate in class, particularly if we are supposed to read. | SA | A | D | SD
23. I have a hard time picturing a story because I don’t understand the words being used. | SA | A | D | SD
24. I have a hard time picturing a story because the story itself is boring. | SA | A | D | SD
25. I remember a time when I actually did enjoy stories and reading. | SA | A | D | SD

Questions for Story A

1. Who is the main character (protagonist)?

2. Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?

3. Describe the setting of the story.

4. What is this story about?
   a. Beginning –
   b. Middle –
   c. End –

5. What is the main character’s motivation?
Questions for Story B

1. Who is the main character (protagonist)?

2. Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?

3. Describe the setting of the story.

4. What is this story about?
   a. Beginning –
   b. Middle –
   c. End –

5. What is the main character’s motivation?

6. What is the problem (conflict) in the story?

7. How can you relate to this story?
Questions for Story C

1. Who is the main character (protagonist)?

2. Who is the bad guy (antagonist)?

3. Describe the setting of the story.

4. What is this story about?
   a. Beginning –
   b. Middle –
   c. End –

5. What is the main character’s motivation?

6. What is the problem (conflict) in the story?

7. How can you relate to this story?
Follow-Up Questionnaire – Materials

Directions:

Circle which answer best correlates to your response. Answers from which to choose are SA (strongly agree), A (agree), D (disagree), and SD (strongly disagree). Please answer each question honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Answers are strictly opinion based, and there are no incorrect answers.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I really liked Story A.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I would remember Story A more than Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I really liked Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I used to like reading.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I think it’s possible to like reading again.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I think it’s possible for me to like writing.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I think school ruins reading and writing.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I really like Story C.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would remember Story C more than any other story.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. It was easy to answer questions about Story A.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It was easy to answer questions about Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. It was easy to answer questions about Story C.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I wish more work related to me like Story A.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I wish more work related to me like Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I wish more work related to me like Story C.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story A.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I would feel comfortable taking an assessment on Story C.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. There is nothing anyone can do to make school interesting to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I feel completely lost in school, no matter what the stories are or how the work relates to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I could actually picture what was going on in Story A.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I could actually picture what was going on in Story B.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I could actually picture what was going on in Story C.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I finally feel connected to a piece of writing.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I would attend school more if the work related and connected to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I Hate School!!”

Have you ever felt this way?

Does school seem too hard or pointless?

If you are a male, African American student who has had trouble in school…

You are invited to participate in a study that could change the way teachers see your education!!

See Ms. Williams in Room 232 for Details
Dear Student:

You have been selected to attend an informational meeting on ________________, 2015, at ___________ in ___________________ in order to have an opportunity to participate in a study. This study will be focused on a group of 10-20 African American boys, all of whom are currently enrolled at Muskegon Community Education Center. The purpose and focus of the study is to look at the student interest and engagement in school, traditional classroom materials, and modern adaptations of materials. Participation is completely voluntary.

For students who do decide to participate, the study will take place after school in room 232, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., over the course of three weeks. The researcher will be Miss Heidi Williams, English teacher at MCEC. Students will have the opportunity to come in during that time from Monday through Thursday. The focus of the study is three stories, and participating students will answer an initial questionnaire, questions on each of the three stories, and a final questionnaire. As compensation for time, each student will receive snacks on the days they participate after school and completion of the study will bring the award of 30 extra credit points toward their English grade.

If you decide to back out of the study at any time, it is your right to do so. You will not be penalized or punished in any way for choosing not to continue. However, the 30 extra credit points are only for students who complete the entire study. There is absolutely no physical risk to participating in this study, and all information will be strictly confidential. The only person who will know the true identities of the students participating is Ms. Williams, and all questionnaires will be headed with a pseudonym assigned to each student. Documents will either be locked in a drawer or password protected in the computer.

This is an exciting and unique opportunity to have your voice heard and to truly look at your own thoughts and opinions on education. It is not a secret that there is an achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts, and it is very important that each student have a voice in their own educational process in an attempt to begin to close this gap. Your participation in this study is welcomed and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ms. Heidi Williams
English Teacher
MCEC
hwilliam@mpsk12.net
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your son has been selected to attend an informational meeting on __________, 2015, at __________ in ______________ in order to have an opportunity to participate in a study. You are welcome to attend this meeting as well. This study will be focused on a group of 10-20 African American boys, all of whom are currently enrolled at Muskegon Community Education Center. The purpose and focus of the study is to look at the student interest and engagement in school, traditional classroom materials, and modern adaptations of materials. Participation is completely voluntary.

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If your son decides to back out of the study at any time, it is his right to do so. He will not be penalized or punished in any way for choosing not to continue. However, the 30 extra credit points are only for students who complete the entire study. There is absolutely no physical risk to participating in this study, and all information will be strictly confidential. The only person who will know the true identities of the students participating is Ms. Williams, and all questionnaires will be headed with a pseudonym assigned to each student. Documents will either be locked in a drawer or password protected in the computer.

This is an exciting and unique opportunity to have your son’s voice heard and to truly look at his own thoughts and opinions on education. It is not a secret that there is an achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts, and it is very important that each student have a voice in their own educational process in an attempt to begin to close this gap. Your son’s participation in this study is welcomed and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ms. Heidi Williams

English Teacher

MCEC

hwilliam@mpsk12.net