The University of Southern Mississippi

The Aquila Digital Community

Spring 5-2009

Drop Out or Persist? The Influence of Differentiated Instruction and Teacher Behavior on College Freshmen and GED Students

Vera Strickland Robertson
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations

Part of the Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons

The University of Southern Mississippi

DROP OUT OR PERSIST? THE INFLUENCE OF

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND TEACHER BEHAVIOR

ON COLLEGE FRESHMEN AND GED STUDENTS

by

Vera Strickland Robertson

May 2009

The University of Southern Mississippi

DROP OUT OR PERSIST? THE INFLUENCE OF

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND TEACHER BEHAVIOR

ON COLLEGE FRESHMEN AND GED STUDENTS

by

Vera Strickland Robertson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
Of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
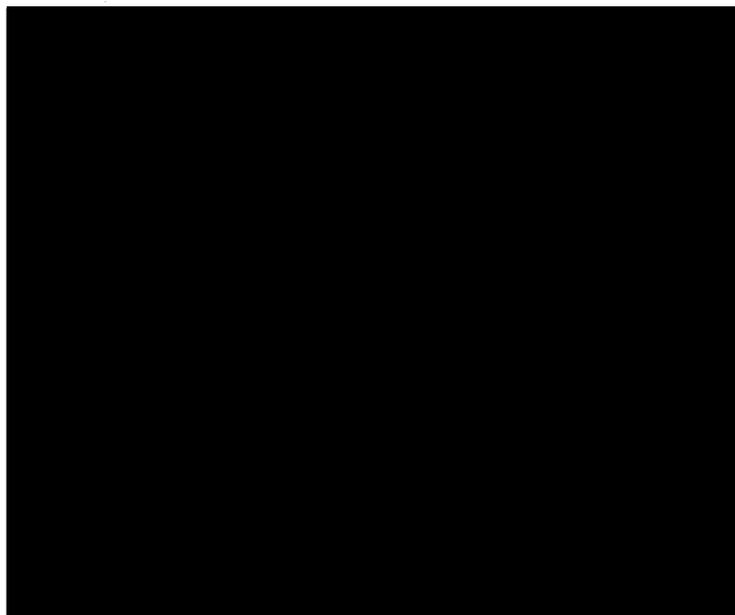
Approved:

May 2009

ABSTRACT

DROP OUT OR PERSIST? THE INFLUENCE OF

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND TEACHER BEHAVIOR

ON COLLEGE FRESHMEN AND GED STUDENTS

by Vera Strickland Robertson

May 2009

The purpose of this research was to provide information to school administrators about the impact differentiated instruction and teacher behavior have on students' decision to drop out of high school or persist. The ultimate goal of this study is to determine if a significant relationship exists between differentiated instruction, teacher behavior and dropout status.

The participants in this study included students enrolled in select colleges or GED programs. The ages of the participants were ages sixteen to twenty-one. The participants completed a questionnaire constructed by the researcher to gather data pertaining to participants' experiences with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior their last year in high school. Eighty-six first year freshmen and fifty GED students completed the questionnaire.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to test for significant relationships between differentiated instruction, teacher behavior, gender, race and dropout status. A significant relationship was found between differentiated instruction, teacher behavior, and dropout status. However, there was no significant relationship between gender and dropout status, nor race and dropout status.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for my very being. It is by His grace I have made it this far. His blessings have been so abundant.

I wish to express my sincerest thanks to my committee, Dr. Ronald Styron, Committee Chair, Dr. Kyna Shelley, Statistician, Dr. Gaylynn Parker and Dr. Maria Guilott. You all were extremely patient and supportive throughout the entire process.

I wish to extend a special thanks to my husband, Ben, for his unconditional love. Your unwavering support and provisions for our son, Jarred, while I spent countless hours completing this process will never be forgotten. Ben, I love you!

I want to thank my parents, Dudley and Mary Strickland. You never stopped believing in me. Thank you for instilling in me, a long time ago, the drive and motivation to work hard to pursue my dreams. Mama and Daddy, I love you.

Finally, I want to thank a dear and close friend, Dr. Melanie Nelson. You have always encouraged me to never give up. Love you, Sis!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The increasing school dropout rate is a local, state, and national problem that is reflected in the assessment of school quality, in the workforce of a community, in the economy of the state, and it is certainly a concern of the nation (Blackledge, 1997). A nation where all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college would be ideal. High schools educate, challenge, support, and graduate students ready to compete and succeed in the world, but numerous factors affect student performance (Blackledge), therefore causing students to drop out of school before graduating. Many years after Brown v. Board of Education, the image of public high school providing all students with a high quality education remains inspiring. However, current reality offers a more troubled picture (Barton, 2006).

Over the years, research has indicated many various reasons why youth drop out of school, but the dropout problem must continue to be addressed. Youth may leave school because of academic failure, disciplinary problems, or employment opportunities (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Stearns and Glennie note the decision to stay in school is extremely important because dropping out has both public and private costs.

Currently, the nation's graduation rate is about 70%. If only 70% graduate from high school, it would mean that every year we are sending 1,443,000 youth onto the streets without diplomas (Bracey, 2006). As noted in a study by Bracey, there is a higher dropout rate for African Americans and Hispanics than any other ethnic group. Minority graduation rate is approximately 50%, making the average graduation gap between Caucasian students and minorities about 20 percentage points (MacPherson, 2004).

According to Vail (2004), many years ago, the American high school was doing fine. Most students who attended high school had no plans to go to college. The high school diploma allowed graduates to find well-paying jobs. Today, things have changed drastically, and the only way to get a good job is to earn a college degree (Vail). Sherrow (1996) says the nation's economic strength depends upon having a well-educated and well-trained workforce. Yet America has a higher dropout rate than other industrialized nations, such as Japan, Canada, and Germany.

One in every ten teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 is neither a high school graduate nor enrolled in school (Barton, 2006). Personal and social issues are some of the reasons these students leave school. Family and social pressures play a significant part, but teachers and high stakes testing also affect students. Low income or single parent families, low academic achievement, frequent absences, changing schools, peer pressure, and a lack of support from teachers and administrators are factors related to high school dropout rates. Many students do not like school and feel as if they do not belong (Barton).

According to Stevenson and Ellsworth (1991), there are two kinds of school processes that contribute to students' perceptions of lack of support from school and staff. First, the school's general rules and policies often make many students, especially older ones, feel as though they are not treated as being responsible and trustworthy students (Stevenson & Ellsworth). Policies on attendance, discipline, suspension, and grade retention can create severe problems for students. In some schools if students skip school, they are suspended. Suspending the student ensures the misbehavior will continue. Second, messages that relay a lack of concern by not responding to students' needs and problems give students a sense of hopelessness when it comes to school. These messages

foster the students' perceptions regarding the lack of teacher support (Stevenson &

Ellsworth).

The youth of today are totally different from the youth of the past. Azzam (2007)

claims that youth today have so many other interests that the adults today did not have as

youth. Youth are extremely skilled in using technology, and it has become the sole means

of communication for many of our youth. Our youth have changed, but we have not

changed to meet the needs of today's youth (Azzam, 2007). The curriculum has changed,

but some teacher instruction has remained the same. This is where differentiated

instruction comes into play.

It is important to pay attention to the needs of students from specific groups

because these students tend to quietly disappear. Our high schools are being called

"dropout factories" because of soaring dropout rates (Bracey, 2006, p. 799). Ellensworth

conducted a study of Chicago schools and the study concluded that among boys, only 39

percent of African American students graduated by age 19, compared with 51 percent of

Latino students and 58 percent of Caucasian students. The girls in the study fared much

better with comparable rates of 57 percent for black students, 65 percent for Latino

students, and 71 percent for white students (Barton, 2006). Rudden states, "44 percent of

African American students and 46 percent of Latino students dropout of high school,

compared to just 22 percent of Caucasian students" (2001, p. 13). Improving the

graduation rates of minorities should be considered a primary goal. Minorities who drop

out widen the racial achievement gap and support stereotypes placed on minorities.

According to Barton, educators blame families of students who have dropped out of

school, but instead of blaming the families, it is up to the educational system to provide

solutions to this growing problem.

The underlying principles of No Child Left Behind, the demand for high standards, greater accountability, and the focus on long-overlooked student populations have to be addressed, but students are given the option to leave school before they are offered tutoring or counseling (Stover, 2007). With demands of high stakes testing, many of our youth's personal problems go unresolved. Many of these personal problems affect youth's performance in the classroom and sometimes lead to youth dropping out of school. It becomes crucial to look at the whole child on an individual basis. One student may have dropped out of school because of failing grades, while another may have dropped out to work and help his/her mother take care of younger siblings. Martin, Tobin, and Sugai (2002) state drugs and violence, pregnancy or parenthood, failing grades or employment could have played a part in a student's decision to drop out of school. Whatever the reason, addressing some of these issues could possibly curtail student dropout rates.

Statement of the Problem

Addressing the issue of high school students dropping out of school has been at the forefront for administrators, teachers and parents for many years. This growing concern has caused many stakeholders to form committees and organizations to address high school dropouts. Students continue to leave school for various reasons and stakeholders continue to look for solutions to this growing problem. However, this is not a high school dropouts study. This study focuses on experiences GED students (subset of dropouts) and first year college freshmen had in high school with their teachers and their teachers' instruction.

Differentiated instruction allows the teacher to meet the needs of all learners by providing student centered instruction, incorporating a blended use of whole class, small group, and individual instruction, and accommodating multiple learning styles (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006). This study will seek to address whether or not differentiated instruction will predict students' persistence or dropout rates.

The impact of teacher behavior on students' decision to drop out or persist will also be a focus of this study. Little attention is given to the influences of schools, their organization, leadership, and teachers on students' decisions to dropout of school. Regardless of background, what happens to students in school influences whether they will stay and graduate (Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005).

The state and federal government's accountability system focuses on ways to improve student achievement through student assessment, school accreditation, and accountability standards (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). Students in high school must pass subject area tests to graduate. These requirements placed on high school students to graduate have discouraged some students. These students begin searching for an outlet for inquiring about the General Educational Diploma (GED) or waiting until they are above compulsory school age (MDE, 2005). High school seniors have opportunities to retest online in order to graduate, but not all students are good test-takers.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that certain assessments be given to all students in schools across the country and that states establish a system of accountability for all schools. Mississippi has made revisions to the curriculum and assessmentto be consistent with the requirements of NCLB (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The Mississippi curriculum has become more rigorous which may

have an impact on the high school dropout rate. Differentiating instruction and teacher behavior will play an important role in preparing students for a more rigorous curriculum and state testing.

This school year Mississippi elementary and middle/junior high schools took the Mississippi Curriculum Test 2. This test is said to be more challenging than the Mississippi Curriculum Test. The state has revised the math and language arts framework to correlate with a more challenging standardized test. Each objective has been assigned a Depth of Knowledge level to inform teachers of what level of difficulty the objective should be taught. Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) is a judgment placed on each objective. Teachers will be required to move from total recall assessments and begin creating demonstration and application assessments (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). High stakes testing is producing a top-down effect of pressure from superintendents to school building administrators to teachers to students. School building administrators and teachers become stressed and students sense the pressure from such demands.

Several factors contribute to a student's decision to leave school. This study will investigate variables associated with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior and the influence they have on students' decision to leave school or stay in school.

Hypotheses

H1   Differentiated instruction is significantly related to dropout status.

H2   Teacher behavior is significantly related to dropout status.

H3   Gender is significantly related to dropout status.

H4   Race is significantly related to dropout status.

H5   There will be an interaction of race and gender with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior with regard to the relationship to dropout status.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions apply to terms used in this study:

Achievement gap is the differences in scores on state or national achievement tests between various student demographic groups.

African American is a black American of African ancestry.

Caucasian is a person born in the Caucasus, loosely called the white race.

Differentiated instruction is the process of addressing all student needs in a classroom.

Dropout is one who withdraws from school before graduating.

Dropout rate is the total number of dropouts in a school divided by that school's total enrollment, expressed as a percentage.

Female is suitable for women or girls; feminine.

GED is a trademark for General Educational Development and also stands for general equivalency diploma.

Male is suitable for men or boys; masculine.

Race is any of the different varieties of human beings distinguished by physical traits.

Socioeconomic status is based on a family's income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status.

Teacher behavior describes the interaction between student and teacher in terms of how the teacher made the student feel while in class: welcomed, respected, safe, helped, encouraged, and listened.

Delimitations

In this study, the following delimitations were anticipated:

1. Participants only from select colleges and a GED program were utilized to conduct this study.

2. Participants in this study were limited to ages 16 to 21.

3. Only the variable associated with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior were measured in relation to students' decision to drop out of school or persist.

4. Only two ethnic groups were included in this study, African American and Caucasian.

Assumptions

1. Students were honest in their responses to the questionnaire/survey.

2. There was a representative sample of GED students.

3. There was a valid measure of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior.

4. This study was not geographically limited to a certain location. There are people enrolled in GED programs all across the United States.

Justification

The curriculum for high school students has become more rigorous to meet the demands placed on students by state and federal governments. Addressing the issue of high school dropouts is just as important today as it was over thirty years ago. Students dropping out of school is not limited to a certain gender or race. Research indicates that students who drop out of school are more likely to abuse drugs, become incarcerated, and

become dependent on the federal government to assist in providing life's necessities. Adults who do not complete high school have children who may not complete high school. This cycle repeats itself generation after generation. Therefore, our society becomes comprised of more and more uneducated adults who are not academically equipped to be productive citizens (Bracey, 2006).

Bracey (2006) states that over a million students leave school without a high school diploma. The number alone is alarming. Students who choose to drop out of school do not have much of a future. Goldentyer (1994) claims there are not a lot jobs out there for people without high school diplomas. The chances these dropouts will ever own a home or land a job that will pay adequate wages to purchase a home are highly unlikely (Bracey, 2006).

The effect high school dropouts will have on society is tremendous. The socioeconomic status of students who drop out of school tends to be lower. Students who leave school early will make hundreds of thousands of dollars less in a lifetime than students who graduate (Bracey, 2006).

Knowledge helps one to make informed decisions. Students who complete high school express a desire to further their education whether it be immediately following high school or later in life. A high school diploma allows students more opportunities for better job employment. It is reported in Education Vital Signs (2007) that the median earnings of male four-year college graduates were 63 percent higher than the median earnings of male high school graduates. For women, the gap between median earnings of high school and college graduates was 70 percent. A high school diploma is a requirement for accessing additional education or securing good income. Research shows

that each student who graduates from high school rather dropping out will save states an average of $13,706 in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured care over the course of his/her lifetime (Education Vital Signs, 2007).

Students who complete high school are less likely to commit crimes. "There is a higher incidence of criminal activity among non-graduates" (Vanderslice, 2004, p. 15). Many youth who have spent time in some type of correctional facility do not possess a high school diploma. Hardy (2006) states that 75 percent of state prison inmates, and 59 percent of federal inmates, are high school dropouts. The lack of education prohibits students from finding suitable employment. These students resort to other means of caring for themselves financially, such as pilfering and peddling drugs. Inmates are housed and fed at the expense of the taxpayer.

The dropout rates for African American students are substantially higher than Caucasian students. "Nearly half the nation's African American students and almost 40 percent of Hispanic students attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm" (Hardy, 2006, p. 18). Becoming more knowledgeable of minority cultures will help teachers prepare instruction to meet the needs of all students. A society consists of all races and ethnicities, and each individual has something to contribute making the world extremely diverse. About 65 percent of America's population growth in the next two decades will be among minorities (Vanderslice, 2004).

Many students who leave school early due to pregnancy or parenthood become dependent on the government for financial assistance at the expense of taxpayers. Dropouts are more likely to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives (Vanderslice, 2004). The higher the dropout rate, the lower the socioeconomic

status of citizens. Again, the cycle repeats itself resulting in more and more dropouts. Vanderslice (2004) states that dropouts are at a greater risk for getting pregnant and becoming single parents.

If the national dropout rate continues to escalate, there will be more and more students who are not academically prepared to be productive citizens. Increased dropout rates will cause local and federal governments to induce more pressure on school districts to address the concern and find a solution to the growing problem (Vanderslice, 2004). Not addressing this problem will create a deficit in positive adults who are able to function and contribute to society.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Students dropping out of high school is a problem that continues to draw attention. Many students choose to drop out of school for various reasons. Family, school, peers, and the community all play a significant role in a students' decision to leave school. It is evident that it will take the cooperation of family, school, and society to reach common ground and collaborate to resolve such a problematic issue.

Differentiated instruction allows teachers to educate through various instructional methods to ensure student success. Teachers' behavior plays a crucial role in the success of some students. Teachers are empowered with the ability to equip students with necessary tools to be productive citizens. Many students only experience success at school due to negative environmental factors outside of school. It is imperative that the educational system not fail our students and take the necessary steps to support all students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Reducing the number of high school dropouts is a national concern. Dropping out of school is thought to be an impulsive act rather than a long term process. Leaving school before graduation is not an impulsive decision; it is an extended process that should be tracked long before a child transitions or progresses into high school. This study will focus on students who drop out of school and enroll in GED programs. The dropout problem will continue to be an important issue because each day, a student somewhere drops out of school.

This chapter will provide an overview of various reasons given for students dropping out of school and the factors that play a role in students' decision to leave school. Family, school, peers, and the community all influence students' academic careers. It is important to understand these factors in order to identify a solution to this growing problem.

Among the factors that have shown to correlate with dropout rates are gender, ethnicity, parental education, scholastic ability and achievement, self-esteem, socioeconomic status, drug and alcohol use, parental involvement, peer relations, school climate, class size, and participation in extracurricular activities (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders & Williams, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

This literature review focuses on both individual and institutional factors and how these factors influence students' decision to drop out of school. Russell Rumberger (2004) presents two conceptual frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of dropping out. One framework is based on an individual perspective that focuses on individual factors associated with dropping out. The other framework is based on an institutional perspective that focuses on the contextual factors found in students' families, schools, communities, and peers. Both frameworks are useful and necessary in understanding why students drop out of school. Rumberger (2000) uses these two frameworks to explain the connection between individual factors, institutional factors, and students' decision to leave school.

Dropout Factors

Students' values, attitudes, and behaviors have a powerful influence on their decision to drop out of school. A student's level of engagement in school can indicate his/her values, attitudes, and behaviors about school. Engagement is described in two dimensions, academic and social. Students are engaged in their learning and students are engaged in the social dimensions of school (Orfield, 2004). Some students decide to leave school because they do not do their schoolwork (academic engagement) or because they do not get along with peers (social engagement).

Orfield says that "dropping out is one aspect of three interrelated dimensions of educational achievement" (2004, p. 134). Educational achievement consists of academic achievement, educational stability, and educational attainment. Students who earn poor test scores and frequently change schools are less likely to graduate or complete school.

Engagement and educational achievement are influenced by students' backgrounds prior to entering school (Orfield, 2004).

Absenteeism and student discipline problems are factors associated with students dropping out of school. Dropping out of school is not just a result of academic failure. Student mobility is also associated with dropping out of school. Frequently changing residences or schools can increase the risk of dropping out of high school. Students who are very mobile do not get a chance to fully engage with teachers and peers and tend to withdraw or disengage themselves from school (Orfield, 2004).

High school employment is associated with dropping out. Some students work long hours and have little time to study, which results in poor grades. Research shows that students who drop out of school due to working long hours do not vary among gender, race, or socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2004). Students like the idea of having their own money, become more disengaged from school, and become more interested in work. Vollstadt (2000) states that teens are more concerned with job skills and employment opportunities than Shakespeare and French verbs.

Teenage pregnancy can influence students' decision to leave school. Studies have shown that teenage pregnancy has a negative effect on high school completion (Orfield, 2004). There are also several demographic variables such as, gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and language background that have been shown to predict withdrawal from school (Black, 2005). Orfield states that disabilities and low educational and occupational inspirations are associated with dropping out of school (2004). Azzam (2007) maintains that students who experience poor academic achievement and

disengagement in elementary and middle school tend to be at higher risk for dropping out of high school.

Retention indicates a student's past academic performance. Each year, a large number of students are retained in various grades. The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 2006 suggested that about one in five eighth graders had been retained at least once since first grade. Students are no longer being socially promoted and high school exit exams have become more rigorous. Retention significantly increases the likelihood of students dropping out of school.

The parallel structure of where people live and where they socialize can affect their attitudes and behaviors. Families, schools, and communities all shape a student's behavior. A student's family background is the single most important contributor to success in school (Black, 2005). Family background can have a strong influence on student achievement. A family's socioeconomic status, measured by parent income and education, is a good indicator of achievement or dropout characteristics in school. The more income parents have the better equipped they are to provide resources to support their children's education.

Family relationships also play a role in student achievement. When there is a strong relationship between parents and students, students are less likely to be influenced by other environmental factors, such as peers, and are more likely to stay in school. Parents who are more involved in their children's academic career take on the role of promoting student achievement. Parents who monitor and regulate their children's activities and provide emotional support decrease the likelihood of their children dropping out of school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Schools are also influential on student achievement, including dropout rates. School resources, such as pupil/teacher ratio and teacher quality can have a bearing on student achievement. The academic and social climate of a school is important. Orfield says that "school social capital as reflected in positive relationships between students and teachers reduce the risk of dropping out" (2004, p. 143). Many policies and procedures directly and indirectly cause students to withdraw from school. Policies that concern poor grades, attendance, and misbehavior can lead to suspensions, expulsions, or transfers. Other policies that are created to encourage the overall effectiveness of the school affect student withdrawal. Requiring students to pass exams to receive a high school diploma can influence high school dropout rates.

In addition to families and schools, communities and peers can alter a student's decision to stay in school. Students with friends who have dropped out of school are more likely to drop out of school. Low-quality neighborhoods affect dropout rates through the lack of resources, such as playgrounds, parks, and afterschool programs. Students are exposed to negative peer influences, which increase the likelihood of dropping out of school (Orfield, 2004).

There are persistent inequalities in student achievement among racial and ethnic groups. Every year an alarming percentage of poor and minority students drop out before graduating from high school. Nationally, only about two-thirds of all students and only half of all African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans who enter ninth grade graduate with high school diplomas four years later (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Although there has been a lot of attention placed on student achievement measured by grades and test scores, there has also been a significant amount of attention focused on

explaining differences in dropout rates in racial and ethnic groups. Many racial and ethnic groups lack the resources to support student achievement increasing the risk of poor outcomes. Child poverty rates for African Americans and Hispanics are more than twice as high as child poverty rates for Caucasians (Rudden, 2001). Many minority students attend poor schools that do not possess the necessary resources to provide quality instruction. Cultural differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors contribute to the explanation of why some racial and ethnic minorities are not successful in school.

Race and ethnic differences often become socioeconomic differences, which in turn, lead to differences in opportunity. Many minority students grow up in less ideal situations or environments with parents who have little education. These situations or environments impact educational achievement and create a trickle down effect through generations. "Minority students do not learn as much as white students at the same point in their educational careers. By 12th grade, the average Black student can only do math and read as well as a White eighth grader" (Weiher & Tedin, 2006, p. 963).

Understanding why students drop out of school is a difficult task because it is influenced by a number of individual and institutional factors. Dropping out of school is not just a result of academic failure, but can be a result of social problems in school, too. These problems display themselves early in a student's academic career and require the need for early intervention. These problems are influenced by a lack of support and resources in families, schools, and communities. The social and academic problems at-risk students face must be addressed to reduce dropout rates.

Characteristics of Dropouts

All races and ethnicities of students drop out of high school. A major

misconception of dropping out is it is confined to a small, unmotivated group of young

people. People also assume that dropping out of school is a major problem of African and

Hispanic central city youth who have rejected the importance of education (Almeida,

Johnson & Steinberg, 2006). Another misconception is that there is little anyone can do

to get back on track those who leave school early.

About 20 percent of all students drop out of school and about 40 percent of

students in the nation's lowest socioeconomic group drop out. However, dropping out is

not just a problem of the poor. One in ten young people from families in the highest two

levels of income and education are also dropping out. Socioeconomic status outweighs

race as the key indicator for dropping out. African Americans in the lowest

socioeconomic group are less likely than their Caucasian and Hispanic peers to drop out.

Based on the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 2006, about 30 percent

of African Americans in the bottom group dropped out compared with 37 percent of

Hispanics and 41 percent of Caucasians. The problem of dropping out and its negative

consequences do affect African American and Hispanic communities more than

Caucasian communities. African Americans and Hispanics are overrepresented in the

lowest income groups (NELS, 2006).

Students with attendance problems experience difficulty in academic areas.

Absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem,

and employment potential (Focus Adolescent Services, 2000). It is clear those students

who miss a lot of school tend to fall behind their peers in the classroom. This, in turn,

leads to low self-esteem and increases the likelihood that at-risk students will drop out of school (FAS, 2000).

Students at risk for dropping out experience grade retention and low academic achievement. A high frequency of behavior problems is one of the strongest predictors of school dropout. Some students engage in aggressive behavior, delinquency, or drug or alcohol abuse (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, & Joly, 2006). Inappropriate behavior results in detention, truancy, and expulsion from school.

Parents who exhibit poor parenting skills, including lack of emotional support, lack of involvement in the child's school activities and inadequate supervision are strongly associated with the risk of students' dropping out of school (Weiher & Tedin, 2006). Low parental expectations regarding school can be associated with students' lack of interest in school. Also, students whose parents live on social welfare or frequently change jobs are at risk for dropping out of school.

Finnan and Chasin (2007) state the classroom climate and the interactions between teacher and student have an effect on academic achievement and the student's engagement in school and social activities. There are some classroom environments in which the rules are unclear and inconsistent. Some students who drop out perceive their teachers to be controlling, unsupportive and uninterested in them. The quality of the teacher-student relationship, in terms of attitudes and the behavior that may result, had an impact on the student's performance and persistence in school (Fortin, Marcotte, et al., 2006).

School counselors are in a good position to have a positive impact on the problem of high school dropouts. Because of problems that do not pertain to academics, many

students who are at risk of dropping out of school are frequently involved with community and school counselors (Stanard, 2003). Dropping out of school should be viewed as a process rather than an event, and counselors can provide interventions to address the dropout problem on multiple levels. Stanard (2003) says counselors can be instrumental in the development of school policies and procedures to ensure that these policies and procedures do not exacerbate the dropout problem.

<center>Ramifications of Dropping Out of School</center>

Students who drop out of high school experience social and economic failure. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, in prison, and living in poverty. The United States Justice Department reported in 2003 that two-thirds of prison inmates were dropouts. The average annual income of an adult high school dropout in 2002 was $18,800. Low income families are dependent upon the federal government to provide financial assistance to meet their needs. Again, this cycle repeats itself, thus increasing the uneducated population.

Obtaining a high school diploma has become a prerequisite for social and economic stability in the United States. Students who decide to leave school early are not equipped for the modern workforce. There is no consistency in employment, the burden of welfare is increased, and the risk of drug use and incarceration becomes greater (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders & Williams, 2002). Earning a high school diploma does not guarantee a job. However, it increases the chances for employment and a better life.

Dropping out of school continues to be an issue of national concern because of its connection with poor labor market prospects, higher rates of public assistance receipt, and higher rates of substance abuse and incarceration (National Center for Education

Statistics NCES, 2005). NCES reports that 10.5 percent of youth age 16 to 24 are not attending and have not completed high school. The rate for African American youth is 11.3 percent and 25.7 percent for Hispanic youth.

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on a subset of dropouts, General Educational Development (GED) certificate students. The GED certificate is the most widely recognized form of alternative secondary certification in the United States today. It is viewed as the functional equivalent to the traditional high school diploma. Smith (2003) says the GED program is a low-cost way to integrate hundreds of thousands of at-risk individuals back into the mainstream of society, while at the same time providing an efficient means for the educational system to appear to meet its goals of equality of educational opportunity.

Although a GED allows students to further their education, GED recipients are still at a disadvantage. Students who drop out of high school and acquire a GED do not fare as well in the labor market as students who stay in school and earn a high school diploma (Murnane & Tyler, 2000). The economic returns to GED attainment indicate that these returns are significantly below those of traditional high school graduates and not much higher than those of other dropouts. Stewart (1999) notes that teens who choose to drop out of school before graduating pay a high price in the job market.

Students who earn a high school diploma are much more likely to go on to college. Murnane and Tyler (2000) note that GED recipients tend to come from lower-income families than conventional high school graduates. Parents of GED recipients are less likely to have completed high school. As a result, they know less about how to enroll

in college and gain access to financial aid. In addition the GED test does not guarantee mastery of the skills needed in college coursework.

<center>Achievement Gap</center>

Closing the achievement gap has been an issue since Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka Kansas in 1954. Stover (2007) notes that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has brought all demographic groups into the picture. The adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements of NCLB were designed to expose achievement gaps between groups of students so that schools will spend more time trying to close those gaps. The AYP requirement serves a dual purpose. It is a means of closing achievement gaps and improving the performance of all students (Stover, 2007).

The achievement gap dates back to the administration of achievement tests given by the United States Army in World War I. Even then those tests that were extremely harsh, a gap in achievement was determined between African American and Caucasian recruits that is still present today. Funding disparities in schools who serve minority students and those who serve Caucasian students have been immense. When funding schools it is essential to look at the specific issues at each school and fund it according to individual school needs. Funding schools as if all populations have the same problems does not close the achievement gap.

Gardner (2007) believes that many teachers, schools and even communities have given up on minority students. Teachers go through the motions of educating these children, but really do not believe in them. When children sense that teachers do not believe in them, they experience difficulty believing in themselves.

The factors that cause so many minority students to underachieve are varied. Many come from a less ideal background of poverty. Some parents have negative experiences with school and teachers, thus becoming more reluctant to come to school, participate in school functions, and contact teachers with questions or concerns. Ultimately, some parents are left with a lack of confidence in the school and education system (Gardner, 2007).

Rudden (2001) states that minority students experience success at lower rates than Caucasians. Many minority students observe their parents struggling and listen to their parents discuss how difficult it is to get ahead. These students come to school and work as hard as their Caucasian counterparts, but fail to achieve at the same rate. Assumptions that minority parents do not care as much about education as Caucasian parents have been voiced.

It is obvious that the achievement gap and the problems that continue to grow reflect the attitude of our society. When the attitudes of the country begin to change and poverty becomes a national priority, we will see the gap in achievement begin to diminish. Racism must be recognized as the treacherous cancer that it is and a united front formed to take action against it is imperative (Barack, 2006).

Most studies and reports on the achievement gap have focused on the achievement scores between Caucasian and African American students on national tests. No Child Left Behind places focus at the school level and schools have to report how well racial and ethnic subgroups in each school are performing in relation to their Caucasian counterparts. Schools are also required by NCLB to break down test scores according to student poverty levels,

language, and disability status. Unfortunately, reaching AYP and improving state assessment scores have taken center stage, while closing the achievement gap has gained less attention.

Many minority students grow up in less ideal situations that result in reduced educational achievement. The parents of minority students have little education and lack the necessary resources to accelerate learning. The achievement gap varies in dimension. Weiher and Tedin (2006) say minority students do not learn as much as Caucasian student at the same point in their educational careers. Many African American and Hispanic twelfth graders perform as well as an eighth grader in math and reading. Minority students complete high school at lower rates and have lower scores on achievement tests than Caucasian students.

Effective teachers can boost student achievement, and students who have good teachers for many consecutive years, show gains in achievement (Haskins & Loeb, 2007). No Child Left Behind mandates states to provide every student with a highly qualified teacher in every subject area. Having highly qualified teachers in every classroom is of high importance. There is also an emphasis on closing the achievement gap between middle class students and their poor and minority peers.

Haskins and Loeb (2007) state that since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, a report by the United States Department of Education, public schools have been under criticism. Although the nation has been under several educational reforms, there are still many problems that persist today. Some of the issues that are still problematic today are high school dropout rates, achievement gap, and bad representation in comparison to international schools. These problems still persist and funding for public

education has doubled since 1983. Family background continues to have a negative effect on student achievement and plays a big role in the problems that impact our educational system.

Test scores is one method used to evaluate effective teachers. However, test scores only measure a narrow range of a student's academic abilities. Standardized testing encourages teachers to teach only the areas where students will be assessed. The characteristic subgroup of many students, such as socioeconomic status is not taken into account when reviewing test scores.

Students who are at-risk pose a threat to the high school dropout rate. Many teachers doubt they can do much to ensure the success of the at-risk student. However, there are hundreds of low-income, high minority schools across the United States where most students do well on standardized tests. Bell (2003) says that schools have closed or eliminated the achievement gap by getting students to read. Students cannot pass standardized tests if they cannot read. To improve reading for at-risk students, there must be a commitment to a school wide program and students must support each other's reading.

According to the Third International Mathematics and Science Survey, students' scores that place them in the bottom quartile are very good at doing the basics. Higher-order thinking skills should be promoted for at-risk students (Bell, 2003). Students should be exposed to many open-ended questions about lessons taught in the classroom. Wait time should be increased to allow students adequate time to process the question and provide a good response. Examples of challenging questions should be posted throughout the classroom so that students are aware of your expectations. Teachers

should always model responses and incorporate words that confuse at-risk students (Bell, 2003).

When at-risk students are tested on material taught in the classroom, they do not always perform well the first time. Many teachers are unwilling to reteach material that students missed on quizzes or tests. In order to better prepare at-risk students for assessments, daily review should be conducted and there has to be a variety of teaching strategies that accommodate all learning styles. Checking for progress or understanding should be immediate and constant to ensure the success of at-risk students.

Bell (2003) states that at-risk students should be made to participate. Many teachers call on students who raise their hands resulting in the neglect of students who participate the most. Calling on students at random to participate will ensure attention of all students. Maintaining checklists will ensure that all students have been given an opportunity to participate in each lesson. Getting students emotionally involved in the lesson creates an optimal learning environment. Students should be allowed to share how they feel about what is taught and develop a passion for each topic learned throughout the school year.

School Accountability in Mississippi

Accountability for students is essential in the efforts to raise student achievement. Therefore, Mississippi has strengthened student assessment, school accreditation and accountability standards to improve student achievement. Informing parents of what is expected of their children at each grade level is extremely important. An investment in education is mandatory to prepare our students for an increasingly competitive world.

The Mississippi Department of Education created a school evaluation and improvement system. The legislation required that each school in every school district be assessed based on student performance. Performance standards were set for every public school and school improvement was measured by student growth. School accreditation ratings were based on the percentage of students scoring proficient at each grade level and meeting annual student growth (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

Beginning in 2008 students in grades 3 through 6 will be tested using the Mississippi Curriculum Test 2 (MCT2), which assesses students' knowledge in reading, writing, and mathematics. At the secondary school level, students are tested in the subject areas of Algebra I, Biology I, English II and U.S. History. Equality is important in the accountability system, so only students who have been enrolled for 70% of the instructional year are included in the state's accountability system. Student performance on the grade 3 and grade 7 MCT2 is considered as part of an administrator's decision to promote or retain a student. High school students must pass subject area tests to graduate and are provided with five more opportunities to retest. Student achievement is reported by achievement levels defined as follows:

Advanced-students perform beyond what is required to be successful at the next grade, Proficient-students demonstrate mastery of skills required for success at the next grade, Basic-students demonstrate partial mastery of skills required for success at the next grade, Minimal-students perform below basic and do not demonstrate mastery of skills. (MDE, 2005).

The implementation of No Child Left Behind (NLCB) ensures there will be consequences for those schools that do not improve student achievement. NCLB also

stipulates that, within twelve years, all students perform at the proficient level in reading and mathematics (MDE, 2005). Mississippi students are measured against performance standards created by teacher committees who are also instrumental in the development of standards found in the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks. Schools that receive federal funding are expected to ensure that all students meet high standards. Schools that do not reach a certain level of progress toward the proficiency goal are labeled "school improvement" schools and receive special assistance form the MDE (MDE, 2005).

Each school in a school district has a report card providing information about the achievement of students, graduation rates, and teacher qualifications. Competent teachers play a significant role in student success. Research supports the link between teacher quality and student learning. NCLB required that every classroom be staffed by a highly qualified teacher by the end of the school year 2005-2006 (MDE, 2005). Highly qualified teachers must possess a college degree, acquire necessary pedagogical skills, and demonstrate content knowledge by passing rigorous state approved tests, such as the PRAXIS. Each school district must provide professional development for their teachers to ensure they are equipped with the necessary content knowledge to be effective in the classroom.

The Mississippi Teacher Center was created in 1994 to recruit and retain quality teachers. The goals of the center are to recruit new and former teachers into the teaching profession, retain quality teachers through its enhancement programs, promote the importance of the teaching profession through an annual marketing campaign and collaborate with school districts, colleges and universities, community colleges, businesses and communities to provide a quality education for all children (MDE, 2005).

The center is committed to providing school districts with services to help secure competent and highly qualified teachers.

Every objective in the 2006 Mississippi Language Arts Framework and the 2007 Mississippi Mathematics Framework has been assigned a Depth of Knowledge level. Depth of Knowledge (DOK) was designed by Norman Webb. Depth of Knowledge levels help educators understand the complexity of each objective and what students are expected to know and do. Objectives challenge students by expecting them to complete a sequence of steps, extend their thinking, synthesize information and produce significant work over time (MDE, 2007). It is crucial that teachers provide students with prior instruction when necessary in order to assess students on their academic performance.

The purpose of assigning DOK levels to each objective is to provide teachers with the level of complexity at which each objective should be taught. Nationally, Mississippi students standardized test scores' place them at the bottom. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers differentiate instruction to challenge and meet the needs of all students.

There are four levels in Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge. These levels are based on two main factors. One factor is sophistication and complexity. Sophistication will depend upon the degree to which simple knowledge and skills have to be recalled and the amount of thought processing required. The other factor is that students at each grade level have received prior instruction and an opportunity to learn the content.

Level 1 is recall of information such as a fact, definition, or a term. Level 2 is skill or concept and includes the engagement of mental processing. Students are required to make a decision as to how to approach a problem or activity. Level 3 is strategic thinking and requires reasoning, planning, and a higher level of thinking. Level 4 is extended

thinking and requires complex reasoning and thinking over a extended period of time.

The demands of the task should be extremely high and the work should be very complex.

Understanding by Design

Understanding by Design (UbD), developed by Wiggins and McTighe (1998), is a framework for improving student achievement. UbD works within the standards-driven curriculum to help teachers clarify learning goals, devise revealing assessments of student understanding, and craft effective and engaging learning activities (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Placing emphasis on the teacher's role as a designer of student learning is critical.

Understanding by Design is based on very important ideas. A primary goal of education should be the development and deepening of student understanding. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) state that students reveal their understanding most effectively when they are provided with complex, real opportunities to explain, interpret, apply, and self-assess. Many students who choose to drop out of schools do so because they cannot see the relationship between school and real life. A three-stage design process called "backward design" delays the planning of classroom activities until goals have been clarified and assessments designed. Student gains are achieved through regular reviews of data followed by specific adjustments to curriculum and instruction. Teachers, schools, and districts benefit by working smarter through the collaborative design, sharing, and peer review of units of study (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

Teacher Behavior as Relative to Dropouts

Regardless of background, what happens to students in school influences whether they will stay and graduate from high school. A teacher's words and behavior can be powerful and also a factor related to why students drop out of high school. Not only

demographic characteristics such as, family income and race, but specific experiences, policies, and individuals in high schools have a profound impact on students' decision to leave high school (Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005). Many of these students who decided to leave school early obtain a General Education Development (GED) and go on to college.

The American Council on Education reports that more than 945,000 United States adults took the GED test in 2001, an increase of nearly 32% from 2000. The Ohio Literacy Resource Center at Kent State Univerisity began an initiative to support GED graduates in higher education. A group of 25 students who dropped out of high school, obtained a GED, and attended Kent State University in Ohio were interviewed about their high school experiences. Almost every interview conducted in the research included stories related to negative experiences involving organizational barriers, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum practices, or instructional approaches (Golden, Kist, et.al., 2005). Many of the students expressed feelings of inferiority in high school in comparison to their experiences in college. They felt ignored and a lack of support from high school teachers and other staff. Other students felt as if they were just passed along through the system. Students in this interview perceived teachers as possessing the "power to really help or really tear down a person" (Golden, Kist, et al., 2005, p. 314). The relationship between high school teachers and students can be very impersonal where students are deprived of the one-on-one attention many of them still need to be successful.

Schools are central to the developmental process of students. Many students who face hardships at home rely on the school system for stability, support and guidance.

School is crucial for students in the transition to adulthood. Dropping out becomes harmful when students are cut off from important information, opportunities, and personal assistance before they establish connections to other social institutions. It is evident that students who drop out face higher unemployment rates, lower lifelong earnings, higher incidence of criminal activity, and a greater likelihood of health problems than students who complete high school and go on to college (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Teachers can provide students with emotional support and encouragement needed to be successful in school. Information and guidance about personal and academic decisions along with assistance in schoolwork are instrumental to improve student achievement. Croninger and Lee (2001) believe students who have developed a relationship with their teachers and other adults have more resources to draw upon and more likely to complete high school.

Most students who drop out of school leave between the 10th and 12th grades because the legal age for dropping out is 16 in most states. However, the decision to leave school does not originate during high school years. There is a "cumulative process of disengagement" that begins as early as first grade (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 551). Students who leave high school before graduating often express a lack of social and academic support as one reason for leaving. A feeling of disconnect develops despite the continued efforts to obtain help from school personnel.

Croninger and Lee (2001) state the importance of positive social relationships and the effect it can have on students' social and academic performance. Even when schoolwork is difficult and classroom expectations become challenging, students are still

willing to put forth more effort to be successful in school. These relationships provide students with the emotional support and encouragement they need when personal problems overwhelm them. Positive relationships keep negative outcomes from occurring. Being a reliable source to students can heighten confidence levels and improve their chances of acquiring a high school education.

Giving students a voice in classroom and curriculum decisions makes schools less domineering and more democratic. Schools that allow students to have a voice experience fewer discipline problems, more student engagement, and higher student achievement. A classroom should not be one-sided where teachers make all the decisions about what learning will take place and how learning will be conducted. A classroom that allows student voice promotes much teacher-student dialogue (Barack, 2006).

Teachers and students should negotiate the curriculum. Students should be allowed to share what they already know about a topic. There should be consensus about what is important and what will be learned. How new information will be learned should be determined by teacher and students, and ways to assess student learning should be discussed.

Black (2005) says that high school students who have dropped out of school have been "systematically silenced, not only in curriculum but also in how their schools are run" (p. 40). These students who feel they do not have a voice quietly disappear. Students who have been silenced tend to have low test scores, little interest in school, and a range of social, emotional, and behavior problems. These struggling students have a voice, but are seldom heard. School leaders and teachers must accept that student engagement and learning are the heart of school reform and student voice is its conscience (Black, 2005).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction was developed due to differences among learners, how students learn, differences in learning preferences and individual interests (Anderson, 2007). The main goal of differentiated instruction is to engage all learners and make them responsible for their own learning. It is extremely difficult to cater to the different needs of students during a time where there is increased pressure of accountability and standardized testing. Many students perform on the edge of their classroom and never fully engage in the learning process.

Differentiated instruction is not a new concept. Many years ago the one-room schoolhouse was a prime example of teachers differentiating instruction to meet the needs of their students. Using differentiated instruction allows teachers to tap into the potential of all students and maximize their capabilities. Teachers who differentiate instruction know that each child is unique. Students are allowed to work independently, with partners or as a team. The work environment lends itself to various learning preferences. All students are working toward a common goal of proficiency on curriculum objectives.

The Mississippi Department of Education (2006) provides some key understandings regarding differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is not just individualized instruction or another way to provide homogeneous grouping or a way to modify the same set of instructions and activities. Differentiated instruction is rooted in assessment, student centered, and incorporates whole-class, small group and individual instruction. The teacher's role in a differentiated classroom is to serve as a coach or mentor and give students responsibility for their own learning. Teachers in differentiated classrooms survey student interests and learning preferences, create different avenues for

students to gather information, and provide ways for students to communicate comprehension of information. Classrooms are learning communities where students feel welcomed, respected, and safe.

The key to differentiated instruction is that all students are given choices and matched tasks that are compatible to their learning styles. Students are not serviced through a "one size fits all" curriculum. Curriculum is differentiated in content, process, and product. Students have multiple options for taking in information, showing comprehension of information, and expressing what they know about a topic (MDE, 2006).

Diana Lawrence-Brown (2004), Assistant Professor of Bonaventure University in New York, provides research on students with learning disabilities or at-risk who can receive appropriate education in regular education classrooms. Differentiated instructional planning recognizes and supports the classroom as a community to which peers belong, where they can be nourished as individual learners (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). Differentiated classrooms are responsive to various learning levels of students. Teachers create different levels of expectations for students and create an environment where all students can be successful. Differentiated instruction is just as important for the student who finds school easy as it is for the student who finds school to be difficult.

Differentiation can be thought of as serving two broad goals. The first goal is to increase success of grade-level curriculum standards for all students. The second goal is to provide a curriculum that can be adapted for students who need it. Effective differentiated instruction starts with high-quality education lessons. Hands-on experiences, cooperative learning, real-life applications, and other multi-sensory

activities promote active learning. There is a connection between subject matter and students' interests with the incorporation of all learning styles. Vollstadt (2000) states another reason students say they are bored is that they can't see a relationship between their classes and their future. The ultimate goal is for students to experience high rates of success and low rates of failure.

The No Child Left Behind Act requirements have changed the focus on educational reform. The curriculum has become more rigorous and high-stakes assessments have become more demanding. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) calls for individualized education for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) report on planning differentiated instruction and integrating multicultural education to meet the needs of a diverse population of students in inclusive classrooms.

Van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) state the basic premise of differentiated instruction is "to plan curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of academically diverse learners by honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's learning capacity" (p. 12). Differentiation can occur within text, method, results, affect, and learning environment. Instruction can change or alter based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile. Implementing differentiated instruction with students with disabilities and at-risk students will allow students to experience success.

There is concern about the underachievement of students with disabilities, at-risk students and minority students. There is not an equal representation of all ethnicities in special education. This can be attributed to students and their family backgrounds. For these reasons, it is critical that schools create more inclusive classrooms that promote an

environment where instruction takes into consideration the importance of multicultural

education and differentiated instruction. Improving student achievement will take

teachers being responsive to all students' cultures and providing equity in their pedagogy.

Edwards, Carr, and Siegel (2006) explore differentiated instruction as a tool for

meeting academic needs of diverse learners in schools. The research was part of a

university teacher education program. Teacher candidates implemented differentiated

instruction to evaluate its effectiveness in the classroom. This study provided insight into

teachers' instructional practices, their attitudes toward these practices, and their

preparation to use differentiated instruction. Students are expected to perform at the high

standards set by school districts and states. School districts and states are held

accountable for student achievement measured by standardized test scores, so they

explore teachers' current practices and assess whether or not those practices

produce quality instruction.

Edwards, Carr, and Siegel (2006) propose that effective teachers consider their

students' uniqueness when planning, teaching, and evaluating lessons. Teachers create

lessons that begin where students are and engage them through different learning styles.

The more teachers learn about their students, the more they are able to create experiences

that promote learning. Students whose "academic skills fall outside the middle in one-

size-fits-all classes have fewer opportunities to learn, and hence, a poorer quality of

education" (p. 583).

Tomlinson and Germundson (2007) believe teaching well is like creating jazz.

Jazz blends musical sounds and teachers make music by merging elements to ensure a

memorable sound. This requires the teacher to recognize there are independent rhythms

in the classroom. Real teaching is the "servant of real learning" (p. 27). Teachers combine four elements: curriculum, connections with students, instruction, and assessment to reconfigure the minds of students (Tomlinson & Germundson). These four elements combine to create a sound of a teacher working in a setting that is tuned in bothto each individual student and his/her ideas. Knowing each individual student and his/her interests motivates students to work hard and instruction becomes a vehicle for learning among diverse individuals.

Hawkins (2007) reports of a group of schools (elementary, middle, high school) in Rhode Island that used differentiated instruction along with other strategies to try to narrow the gap between special-needs students and regular education students. After surveying these schools, a number of practices were used to reduce the achievement gap and improve student achievement. Special needs students were included in the general classrooms where high expectations were established for all learners. Highly qualified staff members who were responsive to student needs were provided professional development on best practices. Many forms of assessment and differentiating instructional practices to address student needs were used. Parents were involved in student learning and safe learning environments were created.

Cusumano and Mueller (2007) tell about Holland Elementary School in the Fresno Unified School District that wanted to improve student performance levels. The needs of their diverse learners had to be addressed. This school decided to use differentiated instruction as the best practice to lead students to success. Through various training and professional development, the school was able to implement a number of activities and strategies, including modeling best practices of differentiated instruction by

literacy coaches, differentiated instruction training by content, process, and product, grade-level learning teams, and training to interpret benchmark data. Through restructuring, monitoring, and reflecting on results, this school has made higher student achievement a reality.

George says that "differentiated instruction must form the core of the classroom experience for students in a democracy that works" (2005, p. 186). Differentiated instruction classrooms serve as the nexus for the educational success of every type of student. This allows students and teachers to view differences among students as assets that strengthen the classroom. Individual growth is the emphasis in a well-differentiated classroom where all students feel challenged and successful. Teachers in differentiated instruction classrooms expect all students to be successful.

Changing a student's instructional style is easier said than done. For years, teachers have been the "answer book" for their students. Traditionally, teachers dominated whole class instruction and created an environment where students depended on the teacher to do everything for them. Today, teachers should assume the role of classroom facilitator of learning. Differentiated instruction becomes the strategy that allows new roles and relationships in the classroom (George, 2005).

There is an increasing diversity of students. Teachers face many difficulties in planning and adapting lessons to allow for differentiation. In order to experience teaching success in a differentiated instruction classroom, teachers must begin where students are. Students should be engaged in instruction using different learning modalities. Students compete more against themselves than others. Teachers provide ways for each student to

learn and use his/her time flexibly. "Teachers become diagnosticians, prescribing the best

possible instruction for each student" (Holloway, 2000, p. 82).

Van Sciver (2005) uses the analogy of a little league baseball coach who analyzes

a pitcher's performance for educators who want to improve students' achievement scores.

The pitcher's goal is to throw strikes, but there is always the opposing batter. In

education, this batter is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Students are placed into different

and unique subgroups. However, students are not taught in these subgroups. They are

disbursed with students from all categories sitting in the same classrooms at the same

time creating very diverse classrooms. This is when differentiated instruction is

incorporated to address various learning styles. A coach has many pitchers with his/her

own challenges with delivering the ball to the plate, but the goal is the same for every

pitcher, to speed the ball by the batter and into the catcher's glove. In the classroom, it is

very similar. The goal is to have all students master specific content.

Despite the demands placed on teachers to ensure the success of all students,

teachers who love to teach will always find ways to excel at what they do best. Teachers

must continue to reach new levels of expertise, adjust lesson plans, improve instruction,

and manage classrooms. McBride (2004) reports that differentiated instruction is crucial

in improving student performance. The one strategy fits all approach does not work in a

real classroom. It is now appropriate to create lesson plans to address individual needs so

that each student is prepared for standardized tests. Differentiating instruction will ensure

that each student feels success and not become academically frustrated. When students

experience continuous failure in school, they become disengaged and some choose to

leave school early before graduating.

Providing one-on-one attention in any grade is key to helping at-risk students obtain a diploma. It is clear the high school dropout problem is not going anywhere. Smaller class sizes coupled with more individualized instruction will increase the likelihood of more students graduating from high school. Keeping potential dropouts in school can happen, but it will take hard work from the teacher and student and a lot of personal attention from the teacher.

Many high school students are leaving school because they are bored. Barack says that tailoring lessons to a student's real life may be one of the best weapons a school district can possess (2006). It is essential that students are taught lessons they can apply to their lives. Peter Hart Research Associates conducted a survey polling 467 dropouts, ages 16 to 24, about their high school experience. A shocking 81 percent wished for more "real-world learning," such as teachers better explaining how education can lead to a good job (Barack, 2006).

It is evident there is a change in the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student population, but that is not the problem. The problem lies in the way teachers are responding to that change. The type of response to this change could negatively or positively affect the self-esteem and academic success of these diverse students. Teachers must find ways to work with students from diverse backgrounds. The school culture has to be parallel with home cultures to promote success in all students. Brown (2007) says that the improvement of academic achievement is based upon the effort teachers make to ensure their classroom instruction is conducted in a way that is responsive to students' home cultures. A student's culture will affect the way a student learns and teachers must show an appreciation for students' cultures.

Effective teachers are identified by their character traits, what they know, what they teach, how they teach, what they expect from their students, how their students react to them, and how they manage their classroom (Brown, 2007). Teachers who are culturally responsive use experiences of diverse students to improve classroom instruction. An essential part of effective classroom instruction is allowing students of diversity to make the connection between themselves and subject matter. Therefore, transforming the curriculum to address the needs of all students is extremely important.

Instructing Minorities

Educating students of various ethnic backgrounds require different instructional approaches, and every personal, emotional, and social aspect must be taken into consideration. However, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954 was instrumental in bringing about change in the way public schools operated. This case addressed whether segregating children in public schools based on race deprives minority children of equal education opportunities. Many African American students are placed in lower academic tracks at a quick pace, which results in mis-education.

Only about half the minority students in the United States graduate from high school. The No Child Left Behind law allows states to report only overall graduation rates without a breakdown of minority subgroups. Many times the minority situation is concealed and students who are low-performing are pushed out of school.

How teachers interact and instruct students in the classroom is important to student learning. One key factor for African American students to obtain personal, economic, and social success is to acquire a formal education. The struggles of African Americans to achieve excellence in education are linked to classroom instructional

experiences. What African American students bring to the classroom should promote a change in the classroom for them to be successful.

Research shows that the performance of African American children is enhanced when teachers incorporate stimulating activities into their lessons (Young, Wright & Laster, 2005). African American children often experience high stimulation at home, church, and in the community. When these children enter school, they are expected to sit in their seats all day and are given work that is not stimulating. Learning activities that include physical movement and oral expression will have a positive impact on the achievement of African American children. It is not as if African American children do not want to learn, but learning requires teaching a student the way he or she learns.

Saddler (2005) says that African American students, especially African American males are three times more likely to be in a class for the educable mentally retarded than are Caucasian students but are only one half as likely to be in a class for the gifted or talented. African American students tend to enroll in vocational tracks taking fewer academic courses that are rigorous. National data shows that fourth grade African American students fell behind their Caucasian peers in reading. Eighth grade African American students represented 61 percent of the students who scored below basic in math.

The purpose of schooling is to communicate and maintain the existing culture. Schools must be able to respond to changes in society by revising curricula as needed. In the case of Brown v. Board of Education, the court ruled that it was harmful to separate African American students from other students of similar age. Separating African American students would create feelings of inferiority and could leave permanent scars.

In many instances, the public justifies the failure of African American students with parents who are not interested in their children's education. The historical structure of schools and the influence they have on each culture are not overlooked.

The concern over the state of African American youth, especially male youth has increased. Failure describes the education of African American males. Lack of achievement is magnified by overrepresentation in special education, high suspension rates, expulsions, high dropout rates and low college attendance rates (Davis, 2006). These African American males who attempt to identify themselves are weakened by environmental factors that expose them to violence, abuse, a criminal record and under-achievement in school.

Davis (2006) explains a national program called Youth Build that offers job-training and life-skills assistance to high school dropouts with 145 sites located around the country. A total of 24 African American students were interviewed about their experiences in school and after they decided to leave school. Before enrolling in Youth Build, many of these African American men lived a life of drug dealing, drug use and other criminal activities. In the interviews many of them mentioned critical incidents in their family, such as death, divorce, evictions, and violence. Many of them expressed concerns of being treated like adults in school when they were still young boys. Some of them stated they felt their behaviors were misunderstood by female teachers who felt their behaviors were defiant, aggressive and intimidating.

Disengagement from school is developed early on in the primary school years and continues to worsen as students progress through secondary school. The Youth Build program's main goal is to provide ways to equip these males to be productive citizens in

American society. Information on how boys create personal meaning for their academic lives is limited. It will be important to try and understand experiences of African American males from their perspectives.

In the state of Maryland, the need for mentors for African American male students is very necessary. African American students comprise 38 percent of the state's public school population. Only 1,229 African American boys of 32,000 took an Advanced Placement exam in 2005 (Aratani, 2007). Six of every 10 suspensions involved an African American student. In this state there is a disproportionate number of African American students placed in special education and courses that do not prepare them for college. African American men make up only 8.5 percent of Maryland's college population.

Since 1977 there has been a decrease in college enrollment among African American males. African American males are more likely to be placed in special education classes and classified as mentally retarded or learning disabled. Caucasian peers tend to score higher on standardized tests and have higher grade point averages. When investigating the presence of African American males in advanced placement or honors courses, the numbers are little to none.

In Noguera's (2003) article on the academic performance of African American males, he states there is a relationship between educational performance and the hardships African American males face within the larger society. It is understood that environmental and cultural factors will have a marked influence on human behaviors, including academic performance. These factors can also affect the way African American males perceive school and how they will behave and perform in school. Ethnic and

socioeconomic backgrounds will have a bearing on how students are perceived by adults who work within schools.

Educational systems must pay close attention to the attitudes and styles of behavior that African American males adopt and display in reaction to the social environment. How these males see themselves within the context or meaning of school will directly influence their performance in school. The location of African American males within school, in special education classes, in the principal's office, and the roles they play at school suggest they are good for playing sports or rapping. Debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club are stringently out of reach (Noguera, 2003). Although the negative behavior of African American males contributes to poor academic achievement, they are also more likely to be channeled into less demanding roles and discouraged from challenging themselves by adults who are supposed to assist them.

One out of every 3 African American children is raised in poverty. There are greater risks for African American males in terms of health, welfare, and education. However, some African American students discover ways to overcome the pressures placed on them and choose academic success. These students manage to navigate through this difficult terrain and maintain academic achievement without succumbing to social pressures.

In Noguera's (2003) research of northern California high schools, he has obtained consistent evidence that most African American students value education and want to succeed in school. In a survey of 147 African American high school males, 90% agreed on the importance of education. Less than 20% of these males felt they were treated fairly

by their teachers. If students believe their teachers do not care about them and their performance in school, the probability of them succeeding in school is greatly reduced. After breaking down the data from the survey by class and race, poor students indicated a high level of distrust in teachers.

Of the public schools in California, there are 22 schools where African American students compose 50% or more of the student population and have test scores of 750 or higher with 1,000 being the highest score (Noguero, 2003). Effective schools possess certain characteristics that improve student achievement. Effective schools have a clear sense of purpose and high expectations. The commitment to educate all students is evident. The learning environment is safe and orderly and strong partnerships with parents are created.

Understanding the cultural forms of African American males and the ways they respond and adapt to their social environment is imperative. Without understanding, it will be impossible to influence the attitudes and behaviors of African American males. Adults sometimes experience difficulty communicating effectively with youth. Many adults are aware of the chasm that separates them from youth, yet adults take actions intended to benefit young people without ever investigating whether the interventions meet the needs or concerns of youth (Noguera, 2003).

Obtaining a high school diploma is an important prerequisite for economic and social stability in the United States. Young adults who do not possess a high school diploma are not equipped for the modern workforce. Many go from job to job, depend on welfare, and are at high-risk for drug abuse and incarceration. A high school diploma does not guarantee a job, but it increases the chances for employment and a better life.

Summary

With revisions to the Mississippi curriculum and increased rigor in state testing, the dropout problem is a priority for Mississippi public schools and has heightened the need to address this issue through research. Choosing to leave school is not an impulsive act, but a gradual process. Educators play a significant role in students' decision to leave or stay in school. Daily student teacher interaction in the classroom will impact students' lives and educational decisions they make in the future. Meeting the needs of students through different instructional approaches will ensure the academic success of all students. Hall and Hall (2003) state when teachers build relationships with their students through expressing faith in their ability to succeed, valuing them, and treating them as individuals, at-risk students become empowered to make life-altering changes. Those students who choose to drop out of school must be provided with other avenues to become productive citizens.

The next chapter will discuss the methodology of this research. Participants (high school dropouts/completers) in the study and the procedures for gathering data from participants will also be addressed. This research will provide information related to the use of differentiated instruction and the influence teacher behaviors have on the success of students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a framework for the methodological approach used to address whether or not differentiated instruction and teacher behavior influence students' decision to drop out of school or persist. The following areas are discussed in this chapter: participants, instrumentation, measurement of variables, data collection and analysis.

Participants

The participants in this research study were students enrolled in college freshmen courses or GED programs in a state located in the southeastern region of the United States. This was not a study of dropouts, but a subset of dropouts, GED students. The ages of the participants were 16 to 21 years. The participants in this study were a representative group of high school dropouts and high school graduates. All participation was voluntary. For those potential participants who were less than 18 years of age, parental permission was obtained before participant assent was requested.

Instrumentation

The researcher created an instrument that consisted of thirty-one items for use in this study. To determine the validity of the instrument, a group of experts was selected. The group of experts consisted of school administrators and school counselors. A group of GED students enrolled in a high school GED program were selected to complete the

questionnaire to determine reliability. The group of experts suggested clearly defining

differentiated instruction and teacher behavior by adding more statements about

differentiated instruction and teacher behavior to be rated by participants. After

consulting with the group of experts, suggestions were taken into consideration and

revisions were made. After adding more statements to the subscales differentiated

instruction and teacher behavior, a group of GED students completed the questionnaire

for reliability. It was important the GED students could read and understand the wording

of the questionnaire to get accurate responses. After the GED students completed the

questionnaire, the researcher reviewed the pilot questionnaire to help determine

reliability. The instrument was determined to be a reliable construct. After the revised

instrument was piloted, administration of select colleges was contacted via letter

requesting permission to conduct the study on their campuses. Questionnaires were

distributed by the researcher to the three college campuses and their GED programs.

<div align="center">Measurement of Variables</div>

The variables that were measured in this study included dropout status, indicated

by a response of yes or no to whether or not the participant dropped out of high school.

Participants provided gender and ethnicity. Information reported differentiated

instruction and teacher behavior on participants' decision to drop out or persist was

measured. The influence of gender and race on differentiated instruction and teacher

behavior of participants was also measured.

Questions one through seven gave some basic background information on each participant. The participants provided the researcher with information about age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants had to stipulate whether they were a freshman in college or a GED student. If the participant was a GED student, the participant provided information about what grade he/she dropped out of high school and chose from a list of reasons why he/she dropped out of high school. Questions eight through twenty-one were actually a list of statements that pertained to differentiated instruction. Questions twenty-two through thirty-one were a list of statements that pertained to teacher behavior. Each participant rated each statement based on their high school experiences with teachers and teacher instruction. Participants rated the following statements about differentiated instruction based on their experiences while in school using a 5-point verbal frequency scale: Never, Very little, Sometimes, Quite a bit, Always.

Data Collection

Administrator permission from the select college was requested. Subsequently, approval was sought from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After IRB approval, questionnaires were administered to participants and data collection began.

Questionnaires were delivered to each campus and given to a designee. An informational cover letter was attached to each questionnaire explaining the purpose of the study. The cover letter explained that the respondents' answers would be kept in the strictest of confidence, their questionnaires would be completely anonymous, that the

information ascertained by the researcher would only be used for research purposes, and

that their questionnaires would be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Only

questionnaires completed by students between the ages of 16 and 21 were used in

this study. Once the students completed the questionnaires, questionnaires were returned

to the questionnaire administrator and were immediately placed in a box. The box was

sealed until the researcher received all questionnaires. The researcher collected fifty

questionnaires from a subset of dropouts via the GED programs, and eighty-five

questionnaires via first year freshmen.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS, statistical

software with which a logistic regression test was conducted. The responses to the

questionnaires were entered into SPSS and a logistic regression test was used to analyze

the data. The researcher compiled the results and presented an analysis of the data

collected to determine if differentiated instruction and teacher behavior significantly

influenced students' decision to drop out or persist. The following hypotheses were

tested.

Hypothesis one stated: Differentiated instruction is significantly related to dropout status.

Hypothesis two stated: Teacher behavior is significantly related to dropout status.

Hypothesis three stated: Gender is significantly related to dropout status.

Hypothesis four stated: Race is significantly related to dropout status.

Hypothesis five stated: There will be an interaction of race and gender with differentiated

instruction and teacher behavior with regard to the relationship to dropout status.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the compiled results and the analysis of

the data to determine if differentiated instruction and teacher behavior significantly

relate to first year freshmen and GED students' decision to drop out or persist. The

participants provided information about their experiences with teacher instruction and

teacher behavior their last year in high school. The results of the tests of the hypotheses

are presented in this chapter in narrative and tabular form.

Descriptive Data

The data presented and analyzed in this study were reported through

questionnaires completed by eighty-six first year freshmen and fifty GED students. The

first year freshmen were students enrolled at three community college campuses from a

southeastern state. The subset of dropouts was students enrolled in a GED program at one

of these community college sites. The study focused on responses of participants who

were ages 16 to 21 years. The sample for this study consisted of 63.2% Caucasian, 30.1%

African American, and 6.6% other. Participant gender was 58.8% female and 41.2%

male.

One hundred thirty-six participants answered the questionnaire. Eighty six were

first year college freshmen and fifty were GED students. There was no missing data from

the questionnaire. The questionnaire measured responses from the participants in a GED

program or their first year of college. Questions one through four provided the researcher

with data pertaining to status, age, gender, and race. Questions five through seven

supplied the researcher with dropout status, age at time of drop out, grade, and reasons

for dropping out. Some of the major reasons for dropping out of school among the GED

participants were failing grades, grade retention, behavior, attendance, and poor

relationships with teachers.

Questions eight through twenty-one measured participants' responses to

statements pertaining to differentiated instruction. Questions twenty-two through thirty-

one measured participants' responses to statements about teacher behavior. Participants

rated questions eight through thirty-one using a horizontal frequency scale of Never-1,

Very little-2, Sometimes-3, Quite a bit-4, and Always-5. Questions eleven, thirteen,

sixteen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-three, twenty-six, twenty-eight, and thirty-one were

recoded to allow for these negatively-worded statements. After recoding negative

statements, a Cronbach's alpha was conducted for each of these two subscales (Teacher

Behavior and Differentiated Instruction) to test for reliable constructs. The Cronbach's

alpha for the teacher behavior subscale was .851. In maintaining all original items,

the reliability coefficient was lower than necessary for the Differentiated Instruction

subscale. However, when recoded items were deleted, a reliability of .700 resulted.

Differentiated Instruction

There were fourteen items comprising the variable in the subscale of

differentiated instruction, The items with the highest and lowest mean were questions

eight and eleven. Question eight had the highest mean of 4.2059, representing that the

way most participants in this study received instruction was through whole group

instruction. Question eleven, which had the lowest mean of 2.4412, reflected the relative

amount of help participants received in learning. Questions eleven, thirteen, sixteen,

eighteen, and nineteen were negative statements, and therefore were recoded/reworded to

produce positive statements. Overall, there was considerable variability in the

participants' rating with each statement of differentiated instruction as happening "quite a

bit" to "very little", as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Mean and Standard Deviation of Differentiated Instruction

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q8 My teachers taught to the whole class.	136	1.00	5.00	4.2059	.88709
Q17 My teachers expected me to learn.	136	1.00	5.00	3.9706	1.16709
Q12 My teachers explained directions to me.	136	1.00	5.00	3.7500	1.19722
*Q11My teachers did not help me learn. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.4412	1.33203
*Q19My teachers did not meet my learning needs. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.5221	1.34422
*Q13My teacher did not give examples. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.5882	1.29655
Q14 My teachers tested me in different ways.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2279	1.28793
*Q16 My teachers did not challenge me. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.7794	1.37540
Q9 I worked with students in small groups.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2132	1.05696
Q21 I was bored in school.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2059	1.28304
Q15 Lessons were connected to real-life.	136	1.00	5.00	3.0662	1.20617
*Q18 I did not have choices in learning. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	3.0368	1.35760
Q10 My teachers worked one on one with me.	136	1.00	5.00	2.9265	1.09296
Q20 My teachers had me complete a survey to find out how I learned best.	136	1.00	5.00	2.4632	1.32725
Valid N (listwise)	136				

*Recoded items show original mean.

Teacher Behavior

There were ten items comprising the subscale of teacher behavior. Table 2 shows

questions twenty-five and thirty-one had the highest and lowest means. Question twenty-

five represented the highest mean of 3.8259. Out of the items listed, participants most

often noted that teachers "sometimes" encouraged them to do well . Question thirty-one

addressed students' experiences with not feeling successful in school. With a relatively

low mean of 2.3529, feeling successful in school was common among most participants.

Questions twenty-three, twenty-six, twenty-eight, and thirty-one were negative

statements, and therefore were recoded/reworded for data analysis

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Mean and Standard Deviation of Teacher Behavior

|	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q25 My teachers encouraged me to do well.	136	1.00	5.00	3.8529	1.20818
Q27 My teachers wanted to help me.	136	1.00	5.00	3.7206	1.10682
Q22 My teachers made me feel welcomed.	136	1.00	5.00	3.6618	1.18772
*Q31I did not feel successful in school. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.3529	1.32514
*Q28 I did not feel I belonged in school. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.4338	1.37546
*Q23 My teachers did not respect me. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.4412	1.33203
Q24 My teachers made me feel safe.	136	1.00	5.00	3.5441	1.26998
*Q26My teachers did not listen to me. (recoded)	136	1.00	5.00	2.5368	1.18577
Q29 I had a voice in the classroom.	136	1.00	5.00	3.3456	1.31306
Q30 My teachers made me feel special.	136	1.00	5.00	3.0147	1.34432
Valid N (listwise)	136				

*Recoded items show original mean.

Test of Hypotheses

In testing the hypotheses, the original sample size was reduced. Specifically, for the item indicating race, eight of the participants reported something other than African American and Caucasian. Therefore, these eight cases were deleted before running analyses. Hypotheses one, two, three, four, and five were tested using a single logistic regression. The .05 level of significance was used to determine whether or not each hypothesis should be supported. The naïve model correctly categorized 63.8% of freshmen and GED students. The Chi-Square results indicated a significant model when classifying membership, $\chi^2(4) = 70.817$, p < .001. By using all predictors (differentiated instruction, teacher behavior, gender, and race), the model correctly categorized 86.6% of freshmen and GED students, which was an improvement over the naïve model of 63.8%. The Wald statistic indicated teacher behavior was significantly related to dropout status ($p = .035$). Differentiated instruction was also significantly related to dropout status ($p < .001$). Race was not significantly related to dropout status ($p = .896$). Gender was not significantly related to dropout status ($p = .701$). Figure 1 supports and indicates there was no significant interaction between race and gender with levels of experience with differentiated instruction. Figure 2 illustrates there was no significant interaction between race and gender with levels of experience with teacher behavior.
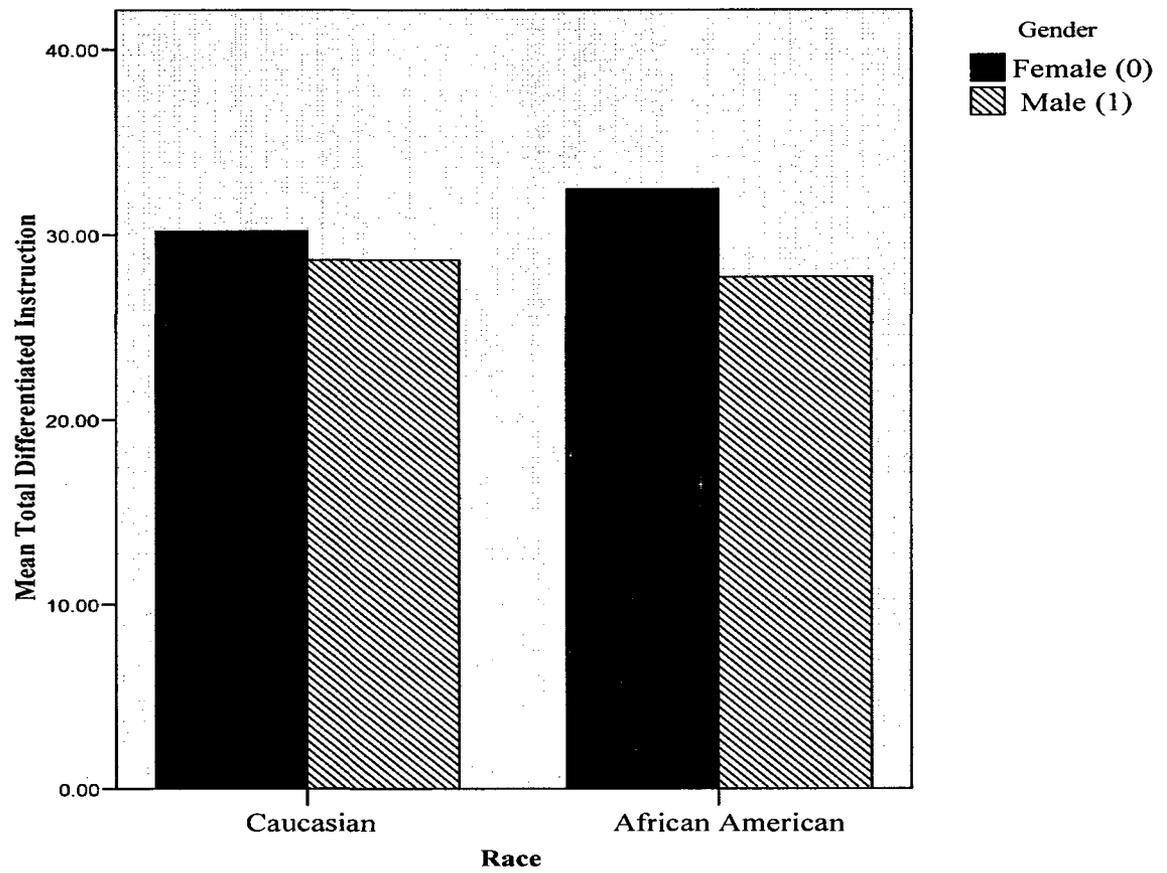
Figure 1. Total Means of Differentiated Instruction for Caucasian and African American
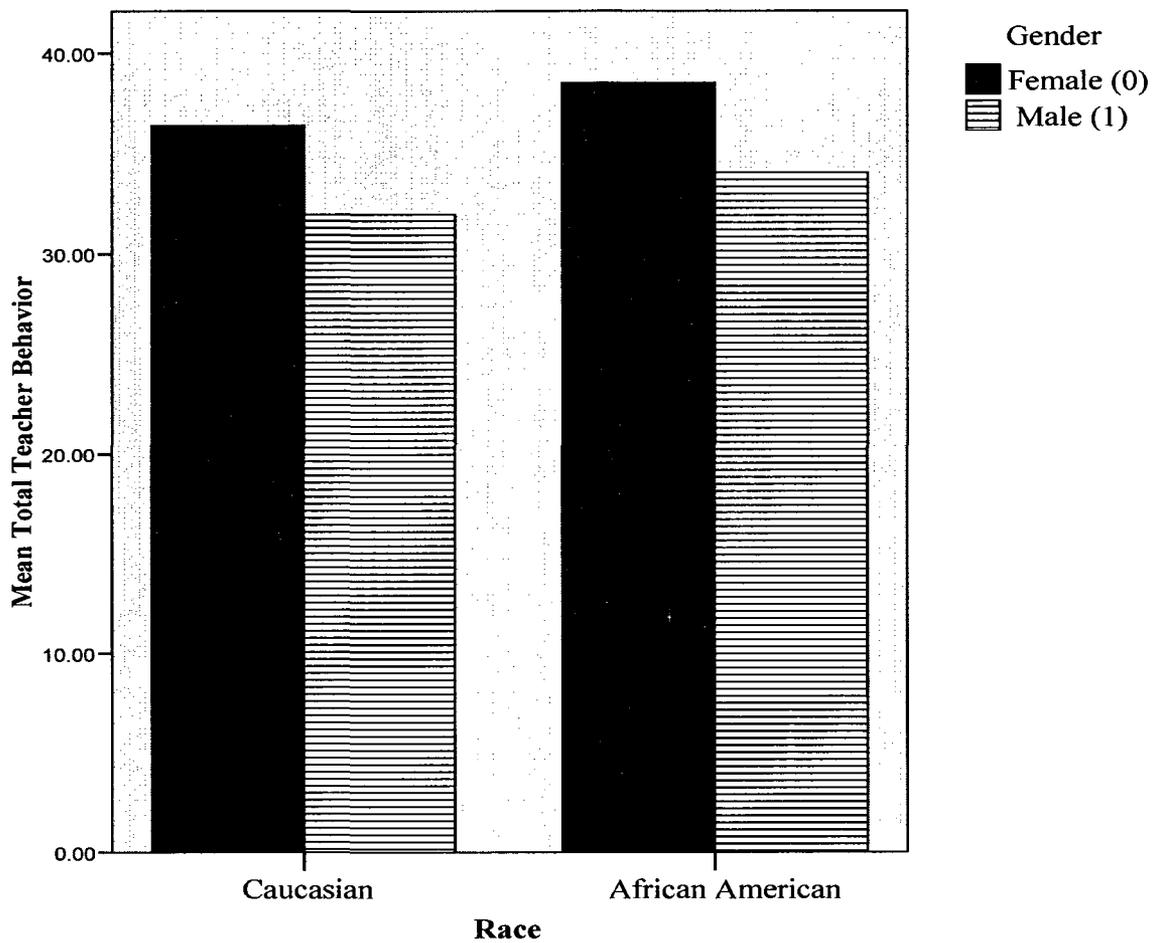
Students

Figure 2. Total Means of Teacher Behavior for Caucasian and African American Students

Based on the findings and within the limitations of this study, the results of testing the hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis One (H1)

H1 stated: Differentiated instruction is significantly related to dropout status. The logistic regression analysis revealed that differentiated instruction is significantly related to dropout status. Therefore, hypothesis one was supported

Hypothesis Two (H2)

H2 stated: Teacher behavior is significantly related to dropout status. The logistic regression analysis revealed that teacher behavior is significantly related to dropout status. Therefore, hypothesis two was supported.

Hypothesis Three (H3)

H3 stated: Gender is significantly related to dropout status. The logistic regression analysis revealed that gender is not significantly related to dropout status. Therefore, hypothesis three was not supported.

Hypothesis Four (H4)

H4 stated: Race is significantly related to dropout status. The logistic regression analysis revealed that race is not significantly related to dropout status. Therefore, hypothesis four was not supported.

Hypotheses Five (H5)

H5 stated: There will be an interaction of race and gender with differentiated

instruction and teacher behavior with regard to the relationship to dropout status. The logistic regression analysis revealed there is no interaction of race and gender with differentiated and teacher behavior. Therefore, hypothesis five was not supported.

Because of the commonly-reported difficulty in interpreting the results of Logistic and its lack of detailed information, an additional analysis was performed. MANOVA was conducted, which was more easily interpretable. The MANOVA confirmed and supported the logistic regression findings.

The relationship between differentiated instruction and teacher behavior must also be addressed. One concern is that the two variables that are significantly related to dropout status (differentiated instruction and teacher behavior) are also related to each other. Collinearity diagnostics, however, indicate tolerance statistics are all greater than 1. Whereas some might suggest that one of these variables be omitted from the analysis, because it is not possible from the analyses to identify which of the two (differentiated instruction or teacher behavior) is the most strongly related to dropout status, both these were retained in the analyses.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship differentiated

instruction, teacher behavior, and dropout status. The focus of the study was

questionnaire responses provided by participants rating various statements about

differentiated instruction and teacher behavior.

There has been a renewed interest in the number of students leaving high school

before graduation. The legislation and Department of Education has mandated a school

accountability model. Each school district in the state must create a Dropout

Prevention Committee and meet to discuss ways to decrease the dropout rate in their

district.

The ultimate goal of this study was to spark the interests of school administrators

and teachers in seeking ways to meet the needs of all students and therefore decreasing

the dropout rate. Identifying learning styles of each student and differentiating instruction

to ensure student success will improve student achievement. By providing data that

shows a significant relationship does exist between differentiated instruction, teacher

behavior and dropout status, school districts will use this data to confirm the need for

creating an individual prescription for each student.

Summary of Procedures

The study sample for this research was eighty-six college freshmen and fifty GED

students enrolled in select colleges and GED programs. The ages of the participants were

sixteen to twenty-one years of age. The GED and freshmen students were a representative

group of the population of a subset of dropouts and high school graduates.

Prior to the collection of data, a Human Subjects Review Form was submitted to

the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee for approval. The request for

permission to conduct this study was submitted to administrators of the select colleges

in a southeastern state of the United States. Permission was granted.

The questionnaires were completed by first year freshmen at the select colleges.

A designee administered the questionnaires collecting fifty from GED students and

eighty-six from freshmen students. The one hundred thirty-six participants constituted the

sample data used for the hypothesis testing. A logistic regression was used for data

analysis.

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

Hypothesis one suggested differentiated instruction is significantly related to

dropout status. Analysis of the data using logistic regression to test H_1 revealed a

significant relationship between differentiated instruction and dropout status. The

main goal of differentiated instruction is to engage all learners and make them

responsible for their own learning. It is extremely difficult to cater to the different needs

of students during a time where there is increased pressure of accountability and standardized testing. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to educate students through various instructional methods to ensure student success. Differentiated instruction allows the teacher to meet the needs of all learners by providing student centered instruction, incorporating a blended use of whole class, small, and individual instruction, and accommodating multiple learning styles (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006).

As stated in the literature, our youth have changed, but we have not changed to meet the needs of today's youth (Azzam, 2007). The key to differentiated instruction is that all students are given choices and matched tasks that are compatible to their learning styles. Van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) state the basic premise of differentiated instruction is "to plan curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of academically diverse learners by honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's learning capacity" (p. 12). Edwards, Carr, and Siegel (2006) propose that effective teachers consider their students' uniqueness when planning, teaching, and evaluating lessons. The more teachers learn about their students, the more they are able to create experiences that promote learning.

George says that "differentiated instruction must form the core of the classroom experience for students in a democracy that works" (2005, p. 186). Differentiated instruction classrooms serve as the nexus for the educational success of every type of

student. This allows students and teachers to view differences among students as assets that strengthen the classroom. Individual growth is the emphasis in a well differentiated classroom where all students feel successful. Teachers in differentiated instruction classrooms expect all students to be successful. The research stated here is consistent with the findings of hypothesis.

Hypothesis two suggested teacher behavior is significantly related to dropout status. The research that follows is consistent with the findings of this hypothesis. Messages that relay a lack of concern by not responding to students' needs and problems give students a sense of hopelessness when it comes to school. As stated in the literature, students who have developed a positive relationship with their teachers and other adults have more resources to draw upon and more likely to complete high school (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Finnan and Chasin (2007) support the findings of this hypothesis. They report that the classroom climate and the interactions between teacher and student have an effect on academic achievement and the student's engagement in school and social activities. Some students who drop out perceive their teachers to be controlling, unsupportive, and uninterested in them. The quality of the teacher-student relationship, in terms of attitudes and behavior that may result, had an impact on the student's performance and persistence in school (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer & Joly, 2006). The academic and social climate of a school is important. Orfield also supports the findings of this hypothesis in reporting that "school social capital as reflected in positive relationships between students

and teachers reduce the risk of dropping out" (2004, p. 143).

Students who feel they do not have a voice quietly disappear. Students who have been silenced tend to have low test scores, little interest in school, and a range of social, emotional, and behavior problems. These struggling students have a voice, but are seldom heard. School leaders and teachers must accept that student engagement and learning are the heart of school reform and student voice is its conscience (Black, 2005).

Hypothesis three suggested gender is significantly related to dropout status. The findings of this hypothesis was not consistent with the research of this study. Although gender was not significantly related to dropout status, research says that gender has shown to correlate with dropout rates (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). Black (2005) states that gender is one of several demographic variables that have been shown to predict withdrawal from school.

Hypothesis four found race is not significantly related to dropout status. The literature is consistent with the findings of this hypothesis. A society consists of all races and ethnicities, and each individual has something to contribute making the world extremely diverse. All races and ethnicities of students drop out of high school. A major misconception of dropping out is it is confined to a small, unmotivated group of young people. Almeida, Johnson, and Steinberg (2006) say that people assume that dropping out of school is a major problem of African American and Hispanic youth who have rejected the importance of education, even though the findings in the present study do not support

this claim The literature suggests incorporating stimulating activities into lessons and taking different instructional approaches when teaching minorities (Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005). Vanderslice (2004) states about 65 percent of America's population growth in the next two decade will be among minorities.

Hypothesis five found there was no significant interaction of race and gender with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior with regard to the relationship to dropout status. Research is consistent with the findings of this hypothesis in that students who drop out of school do not vary among gender, race, or socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2004). Students who are at-risk pose a threat to the high school dropout rate. However, there are hundreds of low-income, high minority schools across the United States where most students do well on standardized tests (Bell, 2003).

Cusumano and Mueller (2007) stress addressing the needs of diverse learners. Race and gender do not have to predict dropout status if the cultural needs of all students are met. By implementing various activities and strategies through differentiated instruction, higher student achievement can become a reality. With No Child Left Behind, students are placed into different subgroups. However, students are not taught in subgroups. They are disbursed with students from all categories sitting in the same classrooms at the same time creating very diverse classrooms. It is evident there is a change in the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student population, but that is not the problem. The problem lies in the way teachers are responding to that change.

Conclusion

This study substantiated the relationship between differentiated instruction, teacher behavior and dropout status. The reoccurring problem of students dropping out of high school justifies this study and further research to address the issue. The study of high school dropouts will continue to be important because each day, a student somewhere drops out of high school.

Sample size is always a concern, but does not appear to be a significant limitation in this study. Limiting the study to a particular age group and race had no bearing on the study. The questionnaire was created by the researcher. The response scale may have been confusing because of double negatives. A revision of the questionnaire could include a scale limited to not at all true to very true. There was a strong correlation between differentiated instruction and teacher behavior. Although questionnaire statements defined characteristics of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior, there was still some correlation between the two.

This study is important because it provides more information about an ongoing problem; a problem that has heightened the awareness of legislators, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents. It is a problem that is not limited to a certain group of people, but it affects the livelihood of many.

The study is important because students are dropping out of school every day. When a student graduates from high school and chooses not to further his/her education,

the opportunity is still there to attend college at a later date. Students who drop out of high school face more obstacles when the desire approaches to further education to obtain a trade or skill for better employment because he/she lacks the foundation for better opportunities. Therefore, many of these students become discouraged and give up pursuing a better life. These same students turn to the government for welfare assistance, to the streets for fast money, or a dead end job with no future.

Although all hypotheses were not supported, the researcher hoped to find there was a significant relationship between race, gender, and dropout status. Many of the experiences the researcher had as a counselor with students expressing the desire to drop out of school was with male African American students. These students struggled in certain subjects and excelled in others. While observing these students in their classes, the researcher's attention was turned to the teachers' behaviors and delivery of instruction. Many of the classes these students were failing were classes where teachers stood at the overhead projector and never moved until the class ended. Students were bored and disengaged from the lessons.

When the research of differentiated instruction and its relationship to dropout status began, the researcher was told there was no significance to this study. With observing students in classrooms where teachers' instruction never changed, the need to conduct a study to gather data pertaining to students' experiences with teacher instruction and teacher behavior grew. Finding there was a significant relationship between

differentiated instruction, teacher behavior and dropout status was a pleasant surprise, but a reassurance to the researcher's beliefs about this study.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Study</div>

This study concentrated on student experiences with differentiated instruction and teacher behavior based on whether or not the student dropped out of high school. Further examination of differentiated instruction, teacher behavior, and dropout status is justified. Research might identify other aspects of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior not listed in the questionnaire to further define each subscale. The replication of this study in about five years would also be in order because differentiated instruction is still new and teachers have not yet become comfortable with implementing differentiated instruction.

Dropping out of school is said to be a cumulative process of disengagement from school. A future study could be gathering data from participants as low as elementary school that could provide insight as to how young students are when they become disengaged from school. The data would also inform teachers of the need to differentiate instruction to keep all students engaged in learning.

School district administrators face accountability for all teachers and students. Standardized test scores indicate student performance and teacher effectiveness. A future study could be surveying teachers about teaching styles to determine if teachers are differentiating instruction to ensure student success.

Another future study could be teacher classroom preparation. Many students

graduate from college as educators, but are they really prepared for the classroom?

Student teachers undergo supervised classroom teaching, but are the changes in students

and the curriculum addressed? Knowing students and understanding the curriculum is

important to student achievement.

The results of this study can be used to assist school district administrators and

building principals in emphasizing the need for all teachers to differentiate instruction

daily. Creating an individual learning prescription for each student will provide students

with a sense of success. Student success in school will ultimately lead to high school

graduation. The data results will be confirmation for teachers who have become stagnant

and perceive their way of teaching to be effective.

<p align="center">Recommendations for Policy and Practice</p>

Again, the dropout problem will continue to be an important issue because each

day, a student somewhere drops out of school. School districts in the state of Mississippi

have been mandated to organize and maintain an active dropout prevention committee.

The committee consists of teachers, administrators, and counselors. The results of this

study would be ideal information to present to dropout prevention committees as a means

of supporting the need to address interactions of teachers and students in the classroom.

Colleges and universities can utilize the results of this study to better prepare

teachers for the classroom. Revisions in courses required to obtain teaching degrees could

include classes on implementing differentiated instruction and awareness of teacher

behaviors in the classroom. This training and preparation while in college could possibly improve teacher retention by providing prospective teachers the tools to successfully educate all students, and not reach burn out early in their teaching careers.

School boards approve employees recommended for hire as teachers. Part of the induction process could be scheduled training sessions on differentiated instruction and teacher behaviors throughout their first year of employment. Novice teachers could be partnered with teachers effective in implementing differentiated instruction in their classrooms. During training sessions, emphasis will be placed on meeting the needs of all students to ensure student success, regardless of background.

Superintendents can use the results of this study to share with school principals the importance of their teachers differentiating instruction to meet the needs of their students. Students do not wait until high school to become disengaged or disinterested. It can start as early as elementary school. This study can serve as a basis for the need for each principal to fully understand the characteristics of a differentiated instruction classroom. Principals will know what to look for in teacher observations and provide appropriate and meaningful feedback to teachers to refine instruction as necessary.

Principals and teachers can use the study results to collaborate on ways to improve student achievement. Principals and teachers can discuss the academic and social needs of each student, thus allowing each teacher to become a diagnostician prescribing instruction for each student. Through positive, open dialogue between

principal and teacher, everyone is a winner working toward a common goal, student achievement. Collaboration between universities and local school districts on effective strategies to prepare teachers for the classroom and a diverse student population can only improve student achievement.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO ADMINISTRATORS

2226 Switzer Road
Gulfport, MS 39507

June 29, 2008

Dear Administrators,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research at the University of Southern Mississippi and am studying the influence of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior on students' decision to drop out of high school or persist. I am very interested in the issues that surround students making the decision to drop out of high school and eager to gather as much information as possible to better serve students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school.

The accompanying questionnaire will be used to gather data from students enrolled in both your GED program and first year freshmen enrolled in college courses. The survey will provide information regarding students' experiences with their high school teachers. It is my hope that the data gathered from the survey will serve as a catalyst for change in our approach to at-risk students.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; however, the inclusion of data representing your college is critical to this study. The actual administering of the questionnaire would be handled by your instructors, with the students themselves completing the questionnaire for which all responses will remain anonymous. An informed consent document will be provided along with the questionnaire to every potential participant.

I am asking your consent to contact your instructors to invite their participation in this study. If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study, you may contact me at 228-697-8692. My dissertation chairperson is Dr. Ronald Styron and he can be reached at 601-266-4580 or Ronald.Styron@usm.edu. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Vera S. Robertson

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARENTS

June 29, 2008

Dear Parent,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research at the University of Southern Mississippi and am researching students' experiences with teachers in high school. I am interested in gathering information from students who dropped out of school and those who stayed and graduated. The information I receive from the questionnaire will be used to help me assist teachers in making changes in their approach to at-risk students.

I am asking your consent to allow your child to participate in this study. Your child's participation in this study is by choice. However, the information your child can provide will be very helpful in this study. **Your child's name and any other personal information will not be used in this study.**

If you have any questions concerning your child's participation in this study, you may contact me at 228-697-8692. My chairperson is Dr. Ronald Styron and he can be reached at 601-266-4580. Please sign below if you will allow your child to participate in this study and have your child return it to his instructor. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Vera S. Robertson

My child _____ has permission to participate in this

study.

ParentSignature_____

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO INSTRUCTORS

June 29, 2008

Dear Instructors,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research at the University of Southern Mississippi and am studying the influence of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior on students' decision to drop out of high school or persist. I am very interested in the issues that surround students making the decision to drop out of high school and eager to gather as much information as possible to better serve students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school.

The accompanying questionnaire will be used to gather data from students enrolled in both your GED program and first year freshmen enrolled in college courses. The survey will provide information regarding students' experiences with their high school teachers. It is my hope that the data gathered from the survey will serve as a catalyst for change in our approach to at-risk students.

The questionnaire is very brief and should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your students' participation in this study is voluntary; however, the inclusion of data representing your college is critical to this study. You will be handling the questionnaire, with the students themselves completing the questionnaire for which all responses will remain anonymous. For those students who are minors, an informed consent document will be provided along with the questionnaire to every parent.

I am thanking you in advance for your time and cooperation. Please return all surveys in the self-addressed stamped envelope within two weeks. If you have any questions, you may contact me at 228-697-8692. My dissertation chairperson is Dr. Ronald Styron and he can be reached at 601-266-4580 or Ronald.Styron@usm.edu. Again, thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Vera S. Robertson

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO STUDENTS

June 29, 2008

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research at the University of Southern Mississippi and am studying the influence of differentiated instruction and teacher behavior on students' decision to drop out of high school or persist. I am very interested in the issues that surround students making the decision to drop out of high school and eager to gather as much information as possible to better serve students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school.

First year freshmen and GED students will be asked to complete the questionnaire. The accompanying questionnaire will be used to gather data from you based on your experiences with teachers you had your last year in high school. It is my hope that the data gathered from the survey will serve as a catalyst for change in our approach to at-risk students.

The questionnaire is very brief and should take approximately 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary; however, the inclusion of data representing your experiences is critical to this study. Your instructor will handle all questionnaires. You will complete the questionnaire for which all responses will be anonymous. By returning this questionnaire, you are indicating your consent to participate. If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study, you may contact me at 228-697-8692. My dissertation chairperson is Dr. Ronald Styron and he can be reached at 601-266-4580 or Ronald.Styron@usm.edu. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Vera S. Robertson

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questionnaire.

1. Are you a freshman or GED student 21 or younger? yes_____ no_____
   If yes, go on and complete survey. If no, stop and return to instructor.

2. Age _____

3. Gender: female_____   male_____

4. Race: Caucasian _____ African American _____ Other: _____

5. Did you drop out of high school? _____yes _____no (If no, go on to question 8.)
   If yes, at what age did you drop out of high school? _____

6. In what grade were you when you dropped out of high school? _____

7. Why did you drop out of school? (Please check all that apply.)
   I:
   _____ had failing grades
   _____ repeated a grade(s)
   _____ got into trouble a lot at school
   _____ did not like school
   _____ did not like teachers
   _____ had teachers that did not like me
   _____ had too many absences from school
   _____ did not get along with peers
   _____ became pregnant
   _____ became a parent
   _____ had to work
   _____ was bored
   _____ did not feel safe at school
   _____ could not keep up with school work
   _____ had other family reasons
   _____ got married
   Other_____

Think about all the teachers you had your last year in high school. These statements refer to the way your teachers taught. Please rate the following statements based on experiences you had with high school teachers your last year in high school. You will use a scale of **never** (My teachers never did this.), **very little** (Once in a great while, my teachers did this.), **sometimes** (Now and then my teachers did this.), **quite a bit** (Many times my teachers did this.), and **always** (My teachers did this all the time.). Place an X on only one blank for each statement.

	Never	Very little	Sometimes	Quite a bit	Always
8. My teachers taught to the whole class.	___	___	___	___	___
9. I worked with students in small groups.	___	___	___	___	___
10. My teachers worked one on one with me.	___	___	___	___	___
11. My teachers did not help me to learn.	___	___	___	___	___
12. My teachers explained directions to me.	___	___	___	___	___
13. My teachers did not give me examples.	___	___	___	___	___
14. My teachers tested me in different ways.	___	___	___	___	___
15. Lessons were connected to real-life.	___	___	___	___	___
16. My teachers did not challenge me.	___	___	___	___	___
17. My teachers expected me to learn.	___	___	___	___	___
18. I did not have a choice in the way I learned.	___	___	___	___	___
19. My teachers did not meet my learning needs.	___	___	___	___	___
20. My teachers had me complete a survey to find out how I learned best.	___	___	___	___	___
21. I was bored in school.	___	___	___	___	___

Think about all the teachers you had your last year in high school. These statements refer to teacher attitudes and behaviors toward their students. Please rate the following statements based on experiences you had with high school teachers your last year in high school. You will use a scale of **never** (My teachers never did this.), **very little** (Once in a great while, my teachers did this.), **sometimes** (Now and then my teachers did this.), **quite a bit** (Many times my teachers did this.), and **always** (My teachers did this all the time.). Place an X on only one blank for each statement.

	Never	Very little	Sometimes	Quite a bit	Always
22. My teachers made me feel welcomed.	____	____	____	____	____
23. My teachers did not respect me.	____	____	____	____	____
24. My teachers made me feel safe.	____	____	____	____	____
25. My teachers encouraged me to do well.	____	____	____	____	____
26. My teachers did not listen to me.	____	____	____	____	____
27. My teachers wanted to help me.	____	____	____	____	____
28. I did not feel I belonged in school.	____	____	____	____	____
29. I had a voice in the classroom.	____	____	____	____	____
30. My teachers made me feel special.	____	____	____	____	____
31. I did not feel successful in school.	____	____	____	____	____

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **28101302**
PROJECT TITLE: **The Influence of Differentiated Instruction and Teacher Behavior on Students' Decision to Drop Out or Persist**
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **09/01/08 to 11/01/08**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Vera S. Robertson**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **10/13/08 to 10/12/09**

_____
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

_____10-16-08_____
Date

APPENDIX G

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM MGCCC

We make a positive difference in people's lives every
day. ▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆

May 15, 2008

To Whom It May Concern,

Upon approval from the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, Vera Robertson has my approval to contact our instructors for permission to distribute a questionnaire to ▆▆▆▆▆tudents in their classes. I understand all potential student participants will be provided an informed consent document along with the questionnaire. Further, all data collected from the students will be completely anonymous and any data collected from minors will be preceded by signed parental permission to participate.

Sincerely,

Vice President for Student Services

APPENDIX H

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Differentiated Instruction and Teacher Behavior

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My teachers taught to the whole class.	136	1.00	5.00	4.2059	.88709
My teachers expected me to learn.	136	1.00	5.00	3.9706	1.16709
My teachers encouraged me to do well.	136	1.00	5.00	3.8529	1.20818
My teachers explained directions to me.	136	1.00	5.00	3.7500	1.19722
My teachers wanted to help me.	136	1.00	5.00	3.7206	1.10682
My teachers made me feel welcomed.	136	1.00	5.00	3.6618	1.18772
Q31Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.6471	1.32514
Q28Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.5662	1.37546
Q23Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.5588	1.33203
Q11Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.5588	1.33203
My teachers made me feel safe.	136	1.00	5.00	3.5441	1.26998
Q19Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.4779	1.34422
Q26Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.4632	1.18577
Q13Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.4118	1.29655
I had a voice in the classroom.	136	1.00	5.00	3.3456	1.31306
My teachers tested me in different ways.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2279	1.28793
Q16Rec	136	1.00	5.00	3.2206	1.37540
I worked with students in small groups.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2132	1.05696
I was bored in school.	136	1.00	5.00	3.2059	1.28304
Lessons were connected to real-life.	136	1.00	5.00	3.0662	1.20617
*I did not have a choice in the way I learned.	136	1.00	5.00	3.0368	1.35760
My teachers made me feel special.	136	1.00	5.00	3.0147	1.34432
Q18Rec	136	1.00	5.00	2.9632	1.35760
My teachers worked one on one with me.	136	1.00	5.00	2.9265	1.09296
*My teachers did not challenge me.	136	1.00	5.00	2.7794	1.37540

Descriptive Statistics for Differentiated Instruction and Teacher Behavior

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
*My teachers did not give me examples.	136	1.00	5.00	2.5882	1.29655
*My teachers did not listen to me.	136	1.00	5.00	2.5368	1.18577
*My teachers did not meet my learning needs.	136	1.00	5.00	2.5221	1.34422
My teachers had me complete a survey to find out how I learned best.	136	1.00	5.00	2.4632	1.32725
*My teachers did not help me learn.	136	1.00	5.00	2.4412	1.33203
*My teachers did not respect me.	136	1.00	5.00	2.4412	1.33203
*I did not feel I belonged in school.	136	1.00	5.00	2.4338	1.37546
*I did not feel successful in school.	136	1.00	5.00	2.3529	1.32514
Valid N (listwise)	136				

REFERENCES

Almeida, C., Johnson, C., & Steinberg, A. (2006). Making good on a promise: What

policymakers can do to support the educational persistence of dropouts. Jobs

for the Future, Boston, MA.

Anderson, K. M. (2007). Tips for teaching: Differentiating instruction to include all

students. *Preventing School Failure, 51,* 49-54.

Anderson, S., Medrich, E. & Fowler, D. (2007). Which achievement gap? *Phi Delta

Kappan, 88*(7), 547-550.

Aratani, L. (2007, May 17). Finding ways to better school African American boys.

Retrieved May 22, 2007, from http://www.washingtonpost.com.

Azzam, A. M. (2007). Why students drop out. *Educational Leadership, 64,* 91-93.

Barack, L. (2006). Dropouts: School's boring. *School Library Journal, 52* (4), 20-21.

Barton, P. E. (2006). The dropout problem: Losing ground. *Educational Leadership, 63*

(5), 14-18.

Bell, L. I. (2002). Strategies that close the gap. *Educational Leadership, 60* (4), 32-35.

Black, S. (2005). Listening to students. *American School Board Journal, 192* (11), 39-

41.

Blackledge, D. D. (1997). The relationship between school dropouts and selected factors

and Characteristics. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern

Mississippi.

Bracey, G. W. (2006) Dropping in on dropouts. *Phi Delta Kappan, 87,* 798-799.

Brown, M. R. (2007). Educating all students: Creating culturally responsive teachers,

classrooms, and schools. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 43,* 57-62.

Christenson, S.L., & Thurlow, M.L. (2004). School dropouts: Prevention considerations,

Interventions, and challenges. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 13,*

36-39.

Croninger, R. G., & Lee, V. E. (2001). Social capital and dropping out of high school:

Benefits to at-risk students of teachers' support and guidance. *Teachers College*

Record, 103 (4), 548-581.

Cusumano, C., & Mueller, J. (2007). How differentiated instruction helps struggling

students.*Leadership, 36,* 8-10.

Davis, J. E. (2006). Research at the margin: Mapping masculinity and mobility of African

American high school dropouts. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in*

Education, 19, 289-304.

Davis, L. E., Ajzen, I., Saunders, J., & Williams, T. (2002). The decision of African

American students to complete high school: An application of the theory of

planned behavior. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94,* 810-819.

Education Vital Signs (2007). Graduation rates: Dealing with the dropout crisis.

Retrieved May 1, 2007, from http://www.asbj.com/evs.

Edwards, C., Carr, S., & Siegel, W. (2006). Influences of experiences and training on

effective teaching practices to meet the needs of diverse learners in schools.

Education, 126, 580-592.

Finnan, C., & Chasin, G. (2007). Accelerating the learning of low-achieving students:

The Transformation of a dropout. *Phi Delta Kappan, 88,* 625-629.

Focus Adolescent Services (2000). Youth who drop out. Retrieved February 7, 2006,

from http://www.focusas.com/Dropouts.html.

Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P., Royer, E. & Joly, J. (2006). Typology of students at

Risk of dropping out of school: Description by personal, family and school

factors. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 21,* 363-383.

Gardner, D. (2007). Confronting the achievement gap. *Phi Delta Kappan, 88,* 542-546.

George, P. S. (2005). A rationale for differentiating instruction in the regular classroom.

Theory into Practice, 44, 185-193.

Golden, S., Kist, W., Trehan, D. M., & Padak, N. (2005). A teacher's words are

tremendously powerful: Stories from the GED scholars initiative. *Phi Delta

Kappan, 87,* 311-315.

Goldentyer, D. (1994). *Dropping out of school.* Princeton, NJ: Steck-Vaughn.

Hall, P.S., & Hall, N.D. (2003). Building relationships with challenging children.

Educational Leadership, 61, 60-63.

Hardy, L. (2006). Children at risk. *American School Board Journal, 193,* 17-21.

Haskins, R. & Loeb S. ((2007). A plan to improve the quality of teaching. *Education Digest, 73,* 51-56.*

Hawkins, V. J. (2007). Narrowing gaps for special-needs students. *Phi Delta Kappan, 64,* (5), 61-63.

Holloway, J. H. (2000). Preparing teachers for differentiated instruction. *Educational Leadership, 58* (1), 82-83.

Lawrence-Brown, D. (2004). Differentiated instruction: Inclusive strategies for standards-based learning that benefit the whole class. *American Secondary Education, 32,* 34-62.

MacPherson, K. (2004, February 26). Minority high school graduation rate just 50%. *Pittburgh Post-Gazette.* Retrieved April 3, 2007, from http://www.post-gazette.com

Martin, E. J., Tobin, T. J., & Sugai, G. M. (2002). Current information on dropout prevention: Ideas from practitioners and the literature. *Preventing School Failure, 47,* 10-17.

McBride, B. (2004). Data-driven instructional methods: "One strategy fits all" doesn't work in real classrooms. *The Journal, 31,* 38-39.

Mississippi Department of Education (2005). Mississippi's accountability system. Retrieved May 22, 2007, from http://www.mdek12.us

Mississippi Department of Education (2006). Key understandings regarding

differentiated instruction received May 22, 2007, from http://www.mdek12.ms.us

Mississippi Department of Education (2007). Understanding depth of knowledge in the

Curriculum frameworks and assessment. Retrieved May 22, 2007, from

http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ACAD/osa/.

Murnane, R.J. & Tyler, J.H. (2000). The increasing role of the GED in American

education. *Education Week, 19,* 64.

National Center for Education Statistics (2005). "The Condition of Education 2005:

Indicator 19 Status Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity." NCES 2005-094.

Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS, 2006).

Noguera, P. A. (2003) . The trouble with black boys: The role and influence of

environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African

American males. *Urban Education, 38,* 431-459

Orfield, G. (Ed.). (2004). *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis.*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Rudden, L. (2001, December 6). Minorities dropping out at alarming rate. *New York*

Amsterdam News, 92(49), 13.

Rumberger, R. (2004). Why students drop out of school. *American Journal of Education,*

107 (1), 131-155.

Saddler, C. A. (2005). The impact of Brown on African American students: A critical

theoretical perspective. *Educational Studies, 37,* 41-55.

Sherrow, V. (1996). *Dropping out.* Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

Smith, T.M. (2003). Who values the GED? An examination of the paradox underlying

the demand for the General Educational Development credential. *Teachers*

College Record, 105, 375-415.

Stanard, R. P. (2003). High school graduation rates in the United States: Implications for

the counseling profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 81,* 217-221.

Stearns, E., & Glennie, E. (2006). When and why dropouts leave high school. *Youth &*

Society, 38, 29-57.

Stevenson, R. B., & Ellsworth, J. (1991). Dropping out in a working class high school:

Adolescent voices on the decision to leave. *British Journal of Sociology of*

Education, 12, 281-292.

Stewart, G.B. (1999). *The other America: Teen dropouts.* San Diego, CA: Lucent Books.

Stover, D. (2007). NCLB-act II. *American School Board Journal, 194,* 20-23.

Tomlinson, C. A., & Germundson, A. (2007). Teaching as jazz. *Educational Leadership,*

64(8), 27-31.

Vail, K. (2004). Remaking high school. *American School Board Journal, 191*(11), 30-

36.

Vanderslice, R. (2004). Risky business: Leaving the at-risk child behind. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 71(1), 15-21.

Van Garderen, D., & Whittaker, C. (2006). Planning differentiated instruction, multicultural instruction for secondary inclusive classrooms. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 38,* 12-20.

Van Sciver, J. H. (2005). Motherhood, apple pie, and differentiated instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86,* 534-535.

Vollstadt, E.W. (2000). *Teen dropouts.* San Diego, CA: Lucent Books.

Weiher, G. R., & Tedin, K. L. (2006). Minority student achievement. *Review of Policy Research, 23,* 963-967.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). Understanding by design: A summary. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from http://www.grantwiggins.org/ubd.html

Young, C. Y., Wright, J. V., & Laster, J. (2005). Instructing African American students. *Education, 125,* 516-524.