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From the Voices of Rising Stars: Examining Student  
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Alexa D. Edwards

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**FROM THE VOICES OF RISING STARS: EXAMINING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES  
IN ONE ACADEMIC OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR  
UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES**

**By**

**Alexa D. Edwards**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FROM THE VOICES OF RISING STARS: EXAMINING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES IN ONE ACADEMIC OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES**

**By**

**Alexa D. Edwards**

Far too often black males are defined by terms associated with criminality and juvenile delinquency, thereby establishing barriers to them receiving appropriate developmental and educational supports (Pittman, 2000). Quality research should work to challenge pessimistic conceptions of this group of students and seek to celebrate successful approaches and practices in schools and other academic contexts (Raywind, 2001). This study explored the views and perspectives of four African American male adolescents participating in an outreach program geared toward facilitating college expectancy and academic achievement. Seeking to gain an understanding of adolescent experiences in this program led to two primary research questions: What are the participant's general perspectives of the program and how do the participants see the program contributing to their academic and social development? By providing these young males a vehicle of articulation, insights were gained into their thoughts on the structures, practices, and strategies used in the Truth Tubman Douglas program that enhanced their future goals and personal attitudes and beliefs. Findings yielded information about staff-student fictive kin relationships, responses to high expectations, construction of cultural identities, establishing future goals, and the development of academic skills. Students are making meaning of and responding to their participation in programming outside of school and if the field of education is to acquire a holistic view

of the students it serves it must engage in thoughtful, comprehensive analysis that brings multiple educational practices and contexts to the forefront. It is expected that this research will inform both program facilitators on how to implement programs that directly address the articulated needs of those they serve and educators seeking to understand the educational experiences of these students beyond the classroom.

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## DEDICATION

To the loving memory of my late grandfather Johnny Dawkins whose everlasting wisdom and integrity guided me through every phase of this scholarly journey.

To my parents Cynthia and David for being the most supportive foundation I've ever known.

To my grandmother Barbara, who has always been a profound example of hard work and determination.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Evolution of Dissertation.....	1
Problem Statement.....	4
Study Purpose and Research Questions.....	9
Theoretical Position.....	13
Summary of Chapters.....	14
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
Academic Outreach Program.....	16
Explanation of Theoretical Frame.....	26
General Issues in Adolescent Development.....	27
Student Voice.....	38
Summary.....	42
CHAPTER III. METHODS.....	44
Purpose.....	44
Research Questions.....	44
Definition of Terms.....	45
Rationale for Qualitative Methods.....	47
Site Selection.....	48
The Rising Stars Component.....	49
Participants.....	50
Researcher Role.....	55
Data Collection Procedures.....	57
Data Analysis.....	67
CHAPTER IV. THE TRUTH TUBMAN DOUGLAS PROGRAM.....	76
TTD as Written.....	76
TTD as Articulated.....	80
Description of Staff Roles.....	81
Discussion of Goals.....	84
Program Weaknesses.....	90
Program Observed.....	92
Saturday Workshops.....	93
Staff Roles Enacted.....	96
Goals Enacted.....	99
Summary.....	106
CHAPTER V. THEIR VOICES.....	109
Introduction.....	109
Academic and Social Development.....	112
Family Connection: We Are Family.....	113

Acquisition of Academic Skills.....117

Cultural Identity Development.....121

Responses to Staff High Expectations.....134

Future Planning.....139

Summary.....143

CHAPTER VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....146

Study Purpose Revisited.....146

Summary of Findings.....147

Truth Tubman Douglas Program.....148

Student Perspectives.....152

Connection to Relevant Literature.....162

Limitations.....165

Implications.....167

Future Directions/Research Agenda.....170

APPENDICES.....172

REFERENCES.....182

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Summary of Observations.....65

Table 2. Data Collection Summary.....66

Table 3. Themes and Guiding Assertions.....111



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*“I have been criticized throughout the course of my career for placing too much faith in children’s narratives; but I have almost always found that children are a great deal more reliable in telling us what actually goes on...They are in this respect, pure witnesses...”*  
~ Jonathon Kozol, Introduction, *The Shame of the Nation*, pg.12

#### The Evolution of This Dissertation

My interests in the contextual factors that influence the achievement of African American students developed primarily as an undergraduate at Howard University. I worked as a research assistant at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), a center that studied and advocated for family involvement and programs to support the achievement of low-income students of color. After my work at CRESPAR, I spent a year at a charter school, teaching third grade. In that short time, I was exposed to many of the difficulties and challenges in educating and supporting African American students. I learned from my experience as both an researcher and educator that many students of color lack the contextual support needed to be successful in school. Some lack parental and family support, while others lack resources in their communities and neighborhoods outside of school. These experiences created questions about and an interest in how to be responsive to their needs. For example, would students thrive and perform better academically if they were positively being influenced by supports and elements in their environment away from school. I carried this interest into my graduate studies and planned to research the positive influence of peers, families, and communities on their academic outcomes.

From these questions, I developed an interest in academic support programs and conducted a small case study examining participant perspectives in a state-funded program housed in a large African American Baptist church. It was an educated hunch that led me to speculate that program participants would have something significant to say about their experiences in the program. The results and findings spoke to the ways that the program helped to develop African American students' dispositions toward future planning, leadership, and decision making. The research questions for this study were; what are the goals and objectives of this program, what are the youth participant's general perceptions of the program, and what are the participant assessments of the impacts of the program on their attitudes and beliefs? Students' responses pointed to the ways the program had helped them to develop leadership skills, formulate future goals, and, and make appropriate decisions about their behavior in school and at home.

Given these findings, I still had questions about the nature of student experiences within these types of academic/social settings. I wanted to find out more about students' general perspectives as well as how they felt these programs aided in their academic and social development. I sought out a larger program with a more developed infrastructure to examine some of these ideas further. The Truth Tubman Douglas Rising Stars Program (hereafter, the TTD program), located on the campus of a large land grant university emerged as a promising program for study. TTD's main objective was to provide resources for underrepresented minorities (African Americans, Latino (a) s, and Native Americans) to become college bound students.

This program served approximately 200-300 youth between the ages of 12-18 annually from around a large Midwestern state. Over eighty percent of the student

participants were African American while the remaining student population were Mexican and Native American students. It was funded by a higher education state initiative geared toward increasing the enrollment and success of students in the state's university system. The program was designed to increase the number of underrepresented minorities (African Americans, Latino (a), and Native Americans) in post-secondary education. This goal was pursued through a combination of program elements that inform and prepare students to deal with the challenges of pursuing higher education. TTD Rising Stars was staffed by four individuals who served in the capacity of Project Director, Assistant Director, two Program Coordinators, respectively, and ten college-aged students (four male, six female), served as youth mentors in the program.

Despite extensive letter writing campaigns, lobbying, and advocacy, TTD lost its state funding in the Fall of 2006, after my data collection and analysis was complete. Although they acquired federal funding to replace the funding they lost, they were not allowed to function under the same name and in the same capacity as they had previously. This speaks to a common challenge that many academic outreach programs contend with in maintaining the financial support to function long term, despite their fruitful efforts to help those students most at risk. Over its thirteen year history, TTD managed to serve thousands of students of color and provided support for them to succeed academically and for many to go on to become college graduates. When I began this work, I interviewed a graduate of the program to gain some background information on what the program was and how it operated. Stacie, a Mexican American college student summed up her experience in the program by saying,

“These people, they were putting a lot of time and investing a lot of time into you and it's like well if they believe I can go to college they believe I

can do something with myself, then I believe it, and they encouraged us to come back and help out with the program so it's like once a member you're kind of always a member type of thing..."

In the year that I spent as an adopted member of the TTD family, my sentiments were similar to Stacie's. As an African American woman and scholar, I felt permanently connected to the staff, students, and families, and shared a vested interest in their success. I realized that I too shared their vision of promoting collective achievement and developing students' resilience to overcome economic and social obstacles. At the opening ceremony for the summer residency program, Dr. S. the program director, approached me and said, "I'm so glad you're on board, we need the work that you will doing, so that people can know what we're about." I considered this to be an honor as well as a challenge. This dissertation has been inspired not only by my interest in examining student voice, but also by my commitment to Dr. S and the TTD family to tell their rich and fruitful stories. It was my intent to fulfill this commitment while also staying true to my scholarly obligation to produce an empirical study that contributes to the field of educational research.

#### Problem Statement

The need to address societal problems faced by our country's children and youth should mobilized developmental researchers to provide ecologically sensitive and valid approaches to understanding the diverse characteristics of different cultural groups (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbush, 1995). Given the demographic trends in the United States, as well as the increased interest in research that involves ethnic minorities, it would seem logical that development scientist would be at the forefront of examining how structural changes in education and society influence these groups. However the majority of

development research in general is not focused on these issues. In fact most of the research has ignored child and adolescent development within non-European, non-middle class perspectives. Current research continues to point to the need to include the voices of African American students in educational research and practices (Finn, 1991; Corbett and Wilson, 1995; Cook and Saither, 2002; Wilson, 2003).

Far too often, students of color are defined by terms associated with criminality and juvenile delinquency, thereby frequently establishing barriers to receiving appropriate supports (Pittman, 2000). Kincheloe, who authored *19 Urban Questions*, has encouraged abandonment of “one size fits all” standardized curricula and advocates taking “into account the unique situations and needs of particular students” (p. 20). This is not because they have a completely different set of needs than most adolescents, but that they may need resources that are more extensive and include longer terms of support with a wider range of services (James and Jurich 1999). To be urban and black has all too often become a signifier for poor, non-achieving, often violent, and living in bad neighborhoods with crumbling buildings and weak family values (Jun and Tierney, 1999). Reliable and valid research should work to challenge pessimistic conceptions of these students and seek to celebrate successful approaches and practices in schools and other academic contexts (Raywind, 2001). While it is important and appropriate to recognize the desperate social and economic conditions that affect all young people, it is also critical to study and understand how diverse groups of students speak to their issues and commit to achieving their learning goals. There should be examinations of the successes of these students, as opposed to their failures. The field of educational research

can gain an equal amount of insight by taking a more positivistic approach to these issues.

Adolescence is a very significant time in the social, emotional, physical, and academic lives of young people, particularly for students of color and those placed at risk for failure. This period has been characterized as a time of stress and storm or a period of heightened opportunity for growth and development for later adulthood (Lerner and Dowling, 2003), when people are most productive. Roth (2003) contends that “young people should be seen through a conceptual lens that regards them as resources to be developed, not problems to be managed” (pg.20). Academic outreach programs have been one of the primary catalysts for creating spaces that develop the assets of adolescents while providing them with necessary resources and support (Conchas and Clark, 2002).

These programs are especially significant for urban youth and/or youth that have been classified as at risk. Programs like TTD are attempting to provide services to minority youth that address their particular academic and social needs. It is significant to begin to explore the experiences of these youth as participants in these programs in order to broaden our knowledge on not only the programmatic impacts on their lives but also how we can best create and sustain these supports. This study will answer this call by exploring the experiences of students within one academic outreach program and attempt to shed light on how they see the program as contributing to their academic and social lives.

Larson (2000) has suggested that teens in youth activities and programs learn about how to make plans, overcome obstacles, and achieve desired ends. Heath (1999)

discovered through observations that youth participating in extra-curricular activities had acquired a language of agency that included increased use of what-if questions, conditional sentences, and other linguistic tools for identifying problems, solving them, and achieving goals. Outreach programs have provided youth with opportunities to develop social skills, including learning to work with others, developing leadership skills and other social competencies (Dubas and Snider, 1993). These programs help young people navigate the many obstacles of adolescence by offering continuous support from the adults around them, creating a sense of the opportunities before them, and providing a chance to develop the skills that will help them make the most of both current and future opportunities (Pittman, 2002).

Outreach programs are often cited as being most critical for students who lack support from their families and communities, however, they are also significant for students of color in general. African American students in particular, regardless of their class or risk status tend to share the same academic and social difficulties and thus could all benefit from the range of support. The premise underlying these programs is that young people have basic needs – for example, personal safety, a sense of belonging and contribution to the world around them, self-worth based on achievement, responsibility, and structure. In order for young people to mature into healthy adults, these needs must be met (Scales, Gillham, Reivich, Shatte, 2002).

Given what we know about the impact of academic outreach programs on the lives of students, research that examines the lived experiences and perspectives of these youth within these contexts is needed. There should be a sense of urgency in the examination of people in context. These experiences and perspectives should be studied

because it provides opportunities to explore their lives as they make meaning of social activity (Scribner and Cole, 1981). As indicated by Tierney (2002), “by contextualizing the student’s experiences, it provides insight into the emotions, needs and educational challenges faced by student’s participation in academic outreach programs” (pg.592). So much of the literature on youth programs is void of youth voices, as if programs are functioning with “faceless entities”. Within the field of academic support programs, an almost exclusive reliance on outcomes has often time forced the student’s emotional and social processes to the periphery. Much of the dialogue about educational contexts has become rigid and managerial thereby making the student voices and ideas remote (Finn, 1991). Corbett and Wilson (1995) suggest that the,

“under-representation of student’s voices in research and reform is less substantive and more practical and has to do with a mostly unexamined, generalized ascription of subordinate status to the student’s role. pg. 84”

However, the importance of youth’s interpretations of enrichment programs is now becoming increasingly critical to program stakeholders (Cook-Saither, 2002; Heath, 1993). In *Savage Inequalities* (1991), Jonathan Kozol observed, “We have not been listening much to children in these recent years of ‘summit conferences’ on education, of severe reports, and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, have been missing from the whole discussion” (p5). He has argued that the field of educational policy and research can gain enormous insight by focusing those who actually live the academic and schooling experience. Students are making meaning of and responding to their participation, in various academic contexts and if we are to acquire a holistic view of the students we serve, we should engage in thoughtful, comprehensive inquiries that include their perspectives. The current study will attempt to bring the perspectives and



insights of four male students to the forefront by highlighting their experiences with and response to this academic context.

This study also seeks to be respond to the prevailing achievement gap that exist between African Americans and other groups of students. The “achievement gap” is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and economically disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. This is one of the most pressing educational policy challenges that the nation faces. According to Cocoron and Adams (1997) the influence of the achievement gap has proven to have an even greater impact on African Americans. Their overrepresentation in special education, social conduct, and academic outcomes are among the lowest across all of students in schools. The No Child Left Behind policy continues to make demands on schools, families, and students, to perform to standards, while neglecting to recognize the unique ethnic, economic, and social situations of many students. Although many of the contemporary reform efforts have attempted to close the achievement gap, progress is still needed, particularly among students of color (Ferguson, 2000). One method that has been utilized by researchers to address this gap is an examination of the intersection of schooling experiences of African Americans and their achievement patterns (Connell, 1995). Although this study is not situated within the traditional school classroom, it does offer through a case study snapshot, the articulated experiences of four African American students within an educational setting.

#### **Purpose of Study and Guiding Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how four adolescent males viewed their academic and social worlds in relation to their participation in TTD. Student

perspectives may offer additional insight beyond staff members or other adults about the nature of the program and its influence. Although prior research that utilized surveys and questionnaires have been helpful in expanding our knowledge of college expectancy and low-income minority youth, minor attention has been given to understanding more specifically how they are negotiating, interpreting, and making sense of their participation. It is expected that this study will inform both program facilitators on how to implement programs that directly address the articulated needs of those they serve and educators seeking to understand the educational experiences of youth beyond the classroom.

The study is a response to prevailing historic patterns of the continued underachievement, low expectations, and sometimes biased depictions of the experiences of students of color, particularly African American students. It will highlight one instance of positive learning and development of African American adolescents. Ladson-Billings (2000) noted that “references to the educational needs of African American students are folded into a discourse of deprivation” (p. 206). Furthermore, “the educational research literature, when it considers African American learners at all, has constructed all African American children, regardless of economic or social circumstance, within the deficit paradigm” (p. 206). The current study utilized a more transformative approach in that it sought humanizing empirical research through student voice and highlighting the resiliency and positive perspectives of this group of students.

The study was guided by six primary research questions.

1. What is the structure and function of this program? (i.e. curriculum and staff roles, etc.)
2. What are the program’s goals and objectives?

3. How do they provide resources and support to the target population?
4. What are the participants' general perspectives of the program? What do they like and dislike?
  - a. How do they describe the elements of the program?
  - b. How do they make sense of supports or resources that have been most important?
5. How do the participants see the program contributing to their academic and social development?
  - a. How do they see the program developing their post-secondary education plans, if at all?
  - b. How do they see the program developing positive ideologies and skills, if at all?
6. What sorts of differences or similarities exists between what is learned in the program and the home environment?

For purposes of this study, the terms “structure” and “function” will refer to how the TTD program was organized and how activities were carried out. Supports and resources is operationally defined as the components of the TTD program such as, but not limited to study skills, networking, staff-student relationships, financial aid information, and encouragement toward high academic achievement. Academic and social development are defined as the characteristics, dispositions, attitudes, and beliefs acquired by an adolescent that supports his/her growth toward healthy intellectual (academic development) and social functioning (social development). Following Roesser, Eccles, and Sameroffs' (2000), I assume the position that development is associated with and influenced by particular instructional, interpersonal, and organizational elements of educational settings. My forthcoming discussion on the analysis of student perspectives as it relates to learning and development will align with this view. It will highlight the ways that the focal students through their interaction with staff and practices within this program are being developed and supported.

The first three questions focused on the character of the program. They offered the opportunity to explore the program's goals and objectives in relation to how the curriculum was enacted as well as general roles of the staff members. In addition, this set of questions examined how the program provided services to the students. Question four examined the four focal participant's general perspectives of the program and to examine how they discussed the various aspects of the program. The fifth question extended on the third question by seeking to understand how the students felt the program had influenced their academic and social development. The final question focused on whether (or not) and in what capacity the program aligned with the goals of the students' home environments. All six questions guided the design and implementation of this study; however the third and fourth questions, dealing with student's ideas and views were more centrally related to my intent to capture the voices of students and gain insight into their personal perspectives and experiences.

In order to answer these questions a qualitative case study was carried out using interviews and field notes from observed program activities as the primary data sources. This design was consistent with the theoretical assumptions mentioned above and for contributing the body of knowledge related to African American student achievement and adolescent development. As stipulated by Eccles, et.al. adolescent development results from the nature of practice and elements within educational settings. This study was designed to explore interrelationships of those elements and their influence on the development of African American students. A case study design affords the opportunity to examine how a particular phenomenon, in the case of this inquiry, participants' perceptions and experiences, is a salient piece of the context. In interpretive research, the

focus is on the social construction of reality as individuals interact in social settings (Geertz, 1973; Mehan, 1982; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methodology assumes that meaning is context specific and that definitions and frames are built over time through cultural practices (Bogden and Biklen, 2003). The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from this research were related to the richness of the case and the ability to obtain analytical validity.

### Theoretical Position

This study takes a socio-cultural and ecological position on child and adolescent development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory identifies five major levels of organization: the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's framework for analyzing the developmental process of adolescence suggests that growth is influenced by multiple systems operating in adolescents' lives. In essence the interaction between the various systems of school, community, and home provide locations for adolescents to acquire skills that help them to achieve academically. Ultimately, these overlapping systems shape the realities of individuals. In connecting this theory to the work in this study, youth's participation in a program can involve a process by which the setting, in this case a college outreach program, can impact an individual. Using this theory as a lens, youth are able to grow, socialize, develop, and learn when provided with the proper stimulus from their environment. They are not only given the opportunity to be influenced by their surroundings but also have a substantial impact on their surroundings as well. This is of central importance in attempting to examine the perspectives of youth participants.

In addition to an ecological approach, this study also seeks to utilize as a lens the socio-cultural theory of education and learning as a lens for understanding how adolescents may be influenced by participation in academic programs. This theory has been utilized to explain phenomena in teaching, schooling, and education. A key feature of this view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interaction (Scribner and Cole, 1981). Vygotsky (1978) argues that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual. We must also examine the external social world in which that individual life is developing. Through participation in program activities the students acquired and utilized and cognitive functions, which may be leading to the construction of meaning around college attainment. These young people are embedded within social events as they are interacting with the people, objects, and events within TTD. They are interacting and participating in the social events and activities and are therefore a central and intricate part of the

#### Summary and Description of Chapters

Providing supports and resources to African American adolescents requires understanding the complexity of the social context of which they interact. Their participation in multiple worlds can equip them with the necessary skills that influence their academic achievement. The research presented in this dissertation intends to fill in the gaps of knowledge within the field of education concerning how some African American students may be experiencing their time within academic setting beyond the traditional school building. Additionally, it anticipates bringing to the forefront ideas and perspectives of four male participants in the TTD program. I hope this research will

contribute to the body of literature related to how adolescents utilize their experiences in academic settings to create meaning and produce knowledge.

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters designed to describe the context, establish an educational and theoretical frame for exploring this topic, and most importantly to highlight the voices of four African American youth in relation to what they developed and learned within TTD. This introductory chapter of the text presents my evolution toward this research, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, guiding research questions, overview of study's design, and a summary of proceeding chapters. Chapter two explores four related bodies of research literature: 1.) The world of academic outreach programs, 2.) issues in adolescent development, and 3.) the status of African American student learning and development, and 4.) the role of student voice in educational research. In chapter three, I detail the methods employed to answer the study's research questions including the researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four describes the structure and function of the TTD program via written in artifacts, interviews with program staff, and observations of program activity. Additionally, chapter five introduces the four focal participants through their voices and presents results through the discussion and analysis of data. Finally, chapter six concludes the dissertation with an interpretation of findings and a discussion of the implication of this work for current and future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RELEVANT LITERATURE

*“The challenge of constructing research paradigms responsive to ethnic minorities and their communities and of identifying supportive interventions that can benefit diverse individuals is becoming a central focus for many social scientists.”*

*Handbook of Child Psychology, 5th Edition, pg.1150*

The previous chapter explained how my evolved interest toward this dissertation study, the problem it attempted to address, the study’s purpose, guiding research questions, and the theoretical framework that grounds this piece of research. The current chapter will present a historical and descriptive overview of academic outreach programs. Additionally, it will discuss in further detail the theoretical frame on which this study is based in relation to adolescent development. General perspectives in the field of adolescent development will be discussed. Also, the literature that has examined the adolescent development of African American students will be described. Lastly, the paradigm and theory concerning student voice in educational research will be highlighted.

#### Academic Outreach Programs

With the enactment of the Federal Higher Education Act of 1965, increasing the participation of low-income and minority students in higher education has become an important national policy goal. In an effort to dismantle the systematic institutionalization of inequity at the level of college attainment, the federal government established the creation of pre-college youth programs such as Upward Bound and Talent Search, helping more than one million socio-economically disadvantaged students complete high school and enroll in college (Meyers and Allen, 2000). Since the federal drive to increase the enrollment rates of low-income students into post-secondary



institutions of higher learning, participation rates in post-secondary education has grown from nearly fifty percent three years ago to nearly 66 percent at the close of the twentieth century (NCES, 2000a). Academic Outreach programs have become the primary vehicle to increase the participation of low-income students of color in post-secondary education. Programs like Upward Bound and Talent Search have paved the way for state, local, and privately funded institutions of higher education to develop their own college preparation programs (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>). Many of them put most of their effort toward increasing the educational opportunities of traditionally marginalized students (Owens, 2005).

Central to the philosophies of pre-collegiate outreach programs is the need to take a holistic approach in preparing minority adolescents for college success by providing them with curricula centered not only on academic support and performance enhancement, but on cultural enrichment, personal development and career explorations as well (Cahalan and Curtin, 2004). Owens (2005) contends that these programs embody “third space” communities for young people to express themselves in an affirming, positive, and empowering environments that necessitate and encourage academic achievement. More specifically outreach programs are the spaces that exist between the home and school lives of students. The spaces are constructed through adult and peer support networks, acceptance of students regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, or gender, invoking a sense of belonging, being valued and feeling connected. In these spaces, students are able to develop strategies to cope with the outside pressures from school and home/community by developing positive socio-cultural identities rooted in

academic success (Committee on Community Level Programs for Youth Executive Summary-CCLPY, 2002).

On the basis of her qualitative case study of eight students participating in Project Hope, Owens (2005) has argued, “It is my belief that much of the success of urban pre-collegiate youth programs can be attributed to their ability to create a sense of kinship or community among adolescents sharing similar economic situations.” (p.18)

Though more students are currently attending post-secondary institutions than, according to the 2000 Educational Commission of the States ([www.ecs.org/ccp](http://www.ecs.org/ccp)), low income, minority students are still struggling to gain access, and remain to be an underrepresented group in post-secondary institutions around the nation. Therefore programs that prepare these youth to pursue higher education are still needed. Early intervention programs provide a significant opportunity for “high risk” students to secure the available resources, funding, educational background, and guidance to enter postsecondary education (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore (1997). Beginning as early as kindergarten and throughout high school, encouraging students to enter college and receive a baccalaureate degree gives high risk students the much needed support and extra attention they need. Early intervention strategies can sometimes eliminate the boundaries between schools and colleges, discourage student dropout, and give students hope to pursue entrance into college and achieve their academic goals. (Brewer, 1990).

Many efforts across the country at both the state and local level have addressed the issue of post-secondary attainment--access to, enrollment in, and graduation from college, for urban and minority youth. However, little research has been compiled to determine participant responses to particular program components and structure (Tierney

& Jun, 2000). Thus, the solution to helping these students through the academic pipeline to post-secondary success is often limited to creation of a program with a set of specific components, such as college preparation courses, test preparation workshops, and help with filling out financial aid application forms (Bartolome, 1994). These resources alone can be valuable, but this type of regime often fails to take a holistic approach that incorporates the context that impacts the college attainment of these youth (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Among urban minority students factors such as poverty, moving during grade school, disciplinary problems and minority status all detract from academic achievement (McLaughlin and Tierney, 1993). Moreover, students who are disadvantaged in other respects often suffer from attendance at inferior schools and may receive less encouragement from parents and close friends to do well in school and move up the educational ranks. Policy efforts to boost educational attainment in rural and urban areas alike could be most fruitful if (educational stakeholders focused on ways to improve the educational climate and support of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. McLaughlin and Tierney's study suggests that such strategies should begin well before high school since most students have defined educational goals, high or low, by the time they reach the ninth grade. Extracurricular activities and special programs that involve students' parents, or others from the community may be useful in increasing these students' interest and success in school and college attendance (Pittman, 2000).

Given the characteristics and needs of urban minority youth particularly in relation to college aspirations, a host of outreach programs are working to provide the necessary resources to guide this group toward higher education. These college

preparation programs are attempting to bridge the racial and economic gaps in the college admittance, attendance, and graduation rates. College preparation is “more than a series of well-orchestrated mechanical and sequential services; it is an inherently complex and value-laden process” (Jun and Tierney, 1999). More attention may be warranted in order to understand the interaction between the academic, cultural, and political components of these programs. In turn, this could result in the creation of well-intentioned, well-planned, and well-implemented programs which have the potential to impact the post-secondary attainment and academic achievement of minority youth from low-income urban areas. This is not to suggest that some programs are not successful in planning and implementation. However, on a large scale there is always room for improvement within these spaces (McLaughlin, 2000)

For purposes of this study, I will define academic outreach programs as enrichment programs aimed at increasing access to college with the potential of completion of a degree, for low-income youths who attend public schools. The term enrichment is significant because it speaks to the role of these programs creating more academic and social opportunities for students as while making their lives more meaningful in the process. These programs are also often referred to as “pre-college outreach programs” in the literature. Tierney offers the following definition of university outreach programs.

“The programs take place during an individual's middle school and/or high-school years and are classes or activities that occur in addition to the regular school day. Frequently, the programs involve relationships between schools and postsecondary institutions. The backgrounds of most students who participate in such programs are frequently youth whose parents have not attended a postsecondary institution and who are frequently in schools that have a relatively low college attendance rate.” (Tierney, 2001 pg.1).

Academic outreach programs for minority youth living in low-income neighborhoods help them develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, and aspirations they need to enroll in higher education. A variety of empirical studies have been conducted to assess the impact of college prep programs on the lives of adolescents. For example, the Talent Search College Prep Program is a national program funded through the U.S. Department of Education's TRIO initiative that provides services to low-income students with the potential to be first-generation college graduates. A national longitudinal Chi-square analysis revealed that Talent Search participants were significantly more likely to enroll in postsecondary education than were members of the control group ( $p < .001$ ) (Brewers, and Landers, 2005). A study conducted on Upward Bound, one of the most nationally known college outreach programs found that students were four times as likely to graduate from college as their peers who did not attend this program. In addition, students who participated in the program expected to complete more schooling than similar students who do not. Second, the program had a positive impact on the number of academic courses participants took during high school (Myers, 1999). Over time, the strategies for expanding the college access, attendance, and graduation rates of these youth have grown in complexity, as have the funding sources, which now include the Federal and state governments, organizations, and colleges and universities (Newman, Smith, and Murphy, 1999).

Outreach programs that offer a variety of approaches (such as tutoring, critical thinking courses, financial assistance, peer networking) and combine a variety of services have the largest impact on college access for minority youth in low-income neighborhoods (Filosof, Helena, Jones, 1998). Traditionally, however, programs have

tended to focus on one specific type of service because of time, expertise, and funding constraints. Some programs, for example, specialize in test preparation, counseling and academics, enrichment in a specialized subject, or learning based on cultural integrity. Others concentrate on providing a better education in general through systemic school change while others function only as supplemental school resource centers ([www.collegeoutreach.com](http://www.collegeoutreach.com)).

A primary component of the literature on academic outreach programs address elements of an “effective” program, and offers suggestions for how programs can improve. In their narrative overview of college outreach programs, Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore (1997), argued that some of the most effective college preparation programs seem to be of substantial duration and focus on “readiness” rather than “remediation.” To be sure, they begin offering students services and information about college and financial aid as early as possible, in order to influence long-term educational outcomes for the students. Although challenges associated with inequitable academic preparation exist as early as the fourth grade, most federal and state programs require services to begin no later than the seventh grade and to continue through the twelfth grade (Nettles & Perna, 1997).

Fashola and Slavin (1997) contend that “effective programs provide students with rich academic content as well as other supports to promote their intellectual development.” Among these academic supports are pipeline courses that include algebra, geometry, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics so that students gain the knowledge necessary for standardized testing; a transcript for a well-rounded, competitive college application; and the skills to succeed in college courses. Workshops and courses teach

how to take notes, how to study, and how to complete homework assignments (Fogel, 2004). Supportive networks, such as peer study groups and one-on-one tutoring, provide additional learning opportunities.

Programs such as I Have A Dream (IHAD) in San Francisco start as early as the third grade by increasing and supporting "Dreamers" success in school, enhancing the Dreamer's self esteem and view of the future, increasing parental support for and involvement in their children's education and helping the "Dreamers" reach their personal goals ([www.ihad-sf.org/program.html](http://www.ihad-sf.org/program.html)). Outreach programs have utilized many different educational strategies. One of the key elements of college preparation and academic outreach programs are their ability to provide students with the information and experiences necessary for post-secondary success such as study skills, financial support, and standardized test preparation.

Programs that focus on academic support typically use a wide variety of teaching strategies to offer students different types of relevant experience, including: direct teaching in a variety of content areas, summer enrichment programs, individual and group counseling, tutoring, college visits and courses, peer and adult mentoring, and motivational speakers (Heyward, Brandes, and Maseo, 1997).

Many students are now required to negotiate high school, college, state, and nationally-developed high stakes tests to ensure admittance to higher education. Thus, the most useful college preparation programs offer courses or workshops that focus exclusively on students' preparation for each required exam. Thus, programs for them should be geared toward learning and achieving, and provide students with

encouragement, understanding, and structural support for the logistical world of preparing for college, e.g., test taking, courses (Horn and Chen, 1998).

It has long been assumed that parent involvement is critical to program success and student achievement (Jun & Tierney, 1999). Current work of outreach program researchers provides additional empirical support for this assumption. Horn and Chen (1998), for example, found that students whose parents discussed education goals with them went farther in post-secondary institutions than those who did not. Some programs, therefore, require parents to sign contracts agreeing to support their children's attendance, assist with homework, and follow through on necessary paperwork for college admission and financial aid. Programs may also invite parents to nonacademic performances or ask for assistance in raising funds or providing supplies. In addition to parental support, peer support is also utilized by some college prep programs. They may achieve this support by fostering student communities through opportunities for interaction in academic and nonacademic activities.

Study groups also provide a space for peer tutoring as well as encouragement in academic aspirations (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999). This networking creates a long term support for students who have graduated from the program and may be enrolled in four-year institutions with fellow program participants. In addition to parents and peers, communities also play an intricate role in the structure of college prep programs. Mentors, role models, community leaders, and speakers motivate students and raise their self-esteem, expectations, and sense of accountability (Fogel, 2004). They help students realize that their college attendance is part of a community pattern, preceded by earlier



college graduates and to be followed by others heeding their example (Barnett, Gustin, and DuSel, 1996).

For minority students from low-income neighborhoods, success in school and college aspirations can sometimes be equated with a rejection of their identity and background (Deyhle, 1995). Fordham and Ogbu (1978; 1990) have theorized that Black students, particularly adolescents, face the "burden of 'acting White'" if they are academically successful, thereby leading to the apparent abandonment or particular negotiations of their identities. In order to deal with potential identity issues, some programs use students' cultures and backgrounds--race, class, and gender--in a positive manner in their curricula, teaching methods, and learning activities (Jun & Tierney, 1999). This in turn creates a vehicle by which students can feel positive about who they are culturally and still value high academic achievement (Carter, 2005). Having a positive sense of self and knowing the value of high achievement helps to create social capital for students preparing for college.

According to Gandara (2001) effective pre-college programs also create this capital by teaching social critical skills. In a society where inequities in college access still reflect racism, classism, and sexism, it has been proven useful to assist students in understanding the realities of the social and economic stratification that impacts on college admittance (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Students can be given opportunities not only to critique social structures, but also to be active agents in the fight against inequities.

Of the many supports offered to urban and minority youth, financial support is among the most significant. Because socioeconomic status is the greatest determinant of enrollment and persistence in college for all students, financial resources can not only

affect a student's decision to attend college but also help to develop a solid financial plan to remain in college after enrollment (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999). Therefore most programs include direct financial aid such as full or partial scholarships, stipends for attendance, or book grants (Heyward, Brandes, Kirst, and Mazzeo, 1997). Additionally providing assistance with filling out financial aid packets and meeting deadlines for scholarships, loans, and grants are crucial for securing necessary funding for college. Some programs work to help families negotiate the mass of paperwork, including reproducing tax forms and preparing applications.

#### Explanation of Theoretical Framework

In an attempt to understand the educational experiences of students, various analytical frameworks have been used, including the socio-cultural ecological perspective. Expanding on the ecological explanations of adolescent development, Epstein (1995) acknowledged the influential roles of community support, school, and family on the academic development of students. She pointed to the various ways that as students are influenced by factors in their contextual environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theoretical framework for analyzing human development, introduced in Chapter 1, frames adolescent development in terms of by multiple systems operating in adolescent's lives consisting of the different settings or microsystems of an adolescents daily life and the network of relationships that compose the adolescents community, culture, and society. The interaction between the various systems of school, community, and home provide the locations for adolescents to acquire the social capital needed to negotiate their worlds and achieve academically. Having social capital is not to be confused with positive youth development, but having social capital increases the chances of students

having positive developmental trajectories. According to the CCLPY (Committee on Community Level Programs for Youth Executive Summary, 2002), youth programs can become spaces that cultivate the positive socio-cultural, emotional, and academic development of adolescents. These programs serve as the milieu for establishing the connections between the traditional institutions of school, home and community for the adolescent to engage in these various developmental processes.

In an effort to provide further contextual understanding of adolescents and their developmental processes, the next sections of this chapter examine general issues related to their academic and social development in addition to describing these issues as they relate specifically to African American adolescents.

#### General Issues in Adolescent Development

Children must pass through several stages, or take specific steps, on their road to becoming adults. For most people, there are four or five such stages of growth where they develop specific capacities: infancy (birth to age two), early childhood (ages 3 to 8 years), later childhood (ages 9 to 12) and adolescence (ages 13 to 18), and early adulthood (19-25) (Roth and Gunn, 2000). You can begin to understand the adolescent group from its place on the growth sequence. This is a time for young people to decide about their future line of work and think about starting their own families in a few years. One of thing they must learn is to start making their own decisions. For example, adolescents can begin to decide what to buy with their own money or who will be their friends. Adolescents also need to be around other adults, both male and female, (families, teachers, peers) who can help facilitate healthy growth (DeAnda, 1995).

While adolescent development does not occur on a perfect continuum, it is convenient to talk about adolescent development in stages. Adolescents face the major task of creating stable identities and becoming complete and productive adults (Perkin, 2001). They take on this task in small steps along the way as they adapt to the changes they experience. The growth of one's intellect from concrete to abstract thinking makes adolescence an intense time of self-discovery. In their quest to define themselves and their relationship to the world, adolescents begin to ask themselves defining and explorative questions such as: Who am I, where do I fit, and how do I build relationships? Theorists and researchers agree that significant development occurs during adolescence in a number of areas such as identity, goal orientation, and achievement motivation. However, there are differing viewpoints about some aspects of adolescence (De Anda, 1995), including: (1) whether development is continuous or discontinuous with the preceding and following stages in the life cycle, (2) whether the period of adolescence is one of turmoil and stress for all or is relatively uneventful, at least for some, (3) whether it is critical for adolescents to accomplish specific developmental tasks during this time and, (4) whether internal or environmental factors have a more significant influence on the experiences and outcomes of adolescent development.

Three major theorists, Erikson, Freud, and Piaget, have had the most influence in how the field of education has generally viewed adolescent development. Freud developed a general theory of psychological development from infancy to adulthood (Freud, 1957). He believed that the mind of an infant consists only of primitive drives and instincts, such as the need for food and physical comfort, which he called the id. Freud believed that a single motive governs human behavior and the desire to satisfy

biological needs and thereby discharge tension (Freud, 1957). He defined stages of development in terms of the organs he thought were used to discharge tension at that age. From birth to adulthood, a child develops through these stages in sequence: oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. Failure to experience gratification for basic drives during a given stage could cause an individual to become "fixated" in that stage, stuck forever in that particular psychological mode (Jenkins, 1994). Freud believed that adolescence is fraught with internal struggle. He viewed the pre-adolescent "latency" period as a time when the child develops a balance between the ego and id. Upon entering the "genital" phase of adolescence, the child is bombarded with instinctual impulses that disrupt this balance (Mahl, 1969). The ego is torn between the strong impulses of the id and the restrictions of the superego. This conflict from his view makes adolescence a time of tremendous stress and turmoil.

While based on Freud's psychosexual concept of development, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory took a broader view of the factors that impact human development. He places importance on the social and cultural components of an individual's developmental experiences. Erikson (1968) proposes a series of developmental challenges ("crises" in his terms) that all people face and generally resolve in some way. Previous developmental outcomes set the stage for upcoming issues, but an individual does not become "stuck" in a phase, as Freud believed. Instead, the old issue is reworked in the context of current tasks. Like Freud, Erikson viewed adolescence as a time of turmoil and stress. He thought that the turmoil resulted from an identity crisis rather than a struggle between the id and ego. He saw adolescence as a necessary and productive period; as a time of life when one works to form one's own identity (Turiel, 1983).

Piaget described development in terms of sequential changes in how children think. He proposed that children grow through three periods of development, each distinguished by a different way of thinking (Stroufe & Cooper 1988). Piaget's views are often compared with those of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), who looked more to social interaction as the primary source of cognition and behavior. This is somewhat similar to the distinctions made between Freud and Erikson in terms of the development of personality (Piaget, 1990). The transition from concrete to completed formal operational thinking occurs in stages between the ages of 11-14. According to Piaget and other cognitive theorists, the predominance of egocentric thought during this period leads to some particular views and behaviors, including: self-consciousness, the imaginary audience: feeling as though one's actions and appearance is being constantly scrutinized or the personal fable: viewing one's thoughts and feelings as unique experiences, and feelings of invulnerability, leading to risk-taking behavior (Smetana, 1996).

### **Social Development**

Many perspectives and theories have described the social development of children and adolescents. The social development of adolescents takes place in the context of all their relationships, particularly with their peers, family members, and other adults. Different theorists have come to different conclusions concerning how exactly children develop across the various developmental contexts. Some theorists believe that children develop smoothly and continuously, but other theorists believe that children develop more discretely in a series of stages, each of which is fairly stable.

Erikson (1968) focused on how adolescents' sense of identity develops; how they develop or fail to develop abilities and beliefs about themselves which allow them to

become productive, satisfied members of society. Because Erikson's theory combines how people develop beliefs psychologically and mentally with how they learn to exist within a larger community of people, it's called a 'psychosocial' theory. Erikson's (1968) stages are, in chronological order in which they unfold: trust versus mistrust; autonomy versus shame and doubt; initiative versus guilt; industry versus inferiority; identity versus identity confusion; intimacy versus isolation; generativity versus stagnation; and integrity versus despair. For each stage, this theory explains what types of challenge children need to master that stage and become productive and well-adjusted members of society and the types of problems and developmental delays that can result when this stimulation does not occur. In the case of this study one particular stimulus of interest are the practices and network of the TTD program.

Erikson proposed that during the years of adolescence, individuals are typically at the fifth stage, identity vs. identity confusion. Identity development is a major developmental process that takes place during these years. During this time adolescents strive to discover who they are as a person. They attempt to understand themselves by exploring their true personal characteristics (i.e., outgoing, shy), their extracurricular interests (sports, literature, music), their relationships (family, romantic, and peer), and their vocational interests (i.e., computers, medicine) (Santrock, 1997).

Recent discussions of adolescent development have focused on issues of cultural and ethnic identity. Studies of identity as a construct have considered both individual and environmental influences on adolescent cultural identity development (Waller, 2001). Kanlou (2004) in his study utilized both individual and environmental factors to examine factors that contribute to the cultural identity development of urban students. He found

that the emergence of themes related to culture point toward an overt awareness of these types of elements particularly in adolescent participants. Another recent study of ethnic and cultural identity found that adolescents with positive feelings toward their ethnic group say they are happier on a daily basis than those who have a more negative attitude about their ethnic identity (Kiang, 2006). The study, involving 415 ninth-graders from Chinese and Mexican backgrounds, showed the protective effects of ethnic identity on daily psychological well-being. Beekhoven (2004), in her study of ethnic identity in freshmen college students found that due to different perceptions held by ethnic minorities about social acceptability, they are less likely to engage in diverse study groups. Thereby, putting themselves at risk for academic difficulties. As depicted above, the scope of research on cultural and ethnic identity development are in and of themselves very diverse.

Although, this study will refer to this process as cultural identity development, the literature also refers to this construct as ethnic identity. Definitions of ethnic identity vary according to the underlying theory embraced by researchers and scholars. The fact that there is no widely agreed upon definition of ethnic identity is indicative of the confusion surrounding the topic. Typically, ethnic identity is a construct where an individual is viewed by him/herself and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group (Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, and Franklin-Jackson, 2006). One may argue that White adolescents also explore and develop a cultural identity. However, the racism, discrimination, and oppression that most members of ethnic minorities encounter, as a result of living in a society dominated by the standards and norms of the White society, has an impact on the identity development of minority adolescents (Cross, 1994). Ethnic



minorities not only explore their cultural identity, but also explore their identity as a person from a culture who's "way of being" (i.e., physical appearance, style of dress, manner of speech, etc.) are different from that which society has proposed to be the superior or best "way of being".

Qualitative approaches to understanding identity development enable us to think of identity as an evolving story, with settings, scenes, characters, and themes, all woven together to form plots and narrative frames (Bennett, 2006). These narratives enable researchers to establish and redefine goals, and give us direction and telos. Their purpose is to give meaning. Narrative frames are used to tell stories from each culture. The culture in which a person is embedded influences the construction of their own personal stories). Personal plots are adapted from the repertoire of stories available in one's culture (French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber, 2006. Identity reflects the kinds of stories in the narrator's culture, and individual stories are embedded in the larger culture. One case study conducted by Owens (2005) of eight students participating in an urban Upward Bound program, was able to highlight through students narratives their ideas about their own cultural identity. In addition students shared how they perceived their identity interacted with their achievement as students.

Adolescents are ready and open to develop identity and other characteristics during specific stages; however, it doesn't happen without the influence of appropriate stimuli or contextual factors. Despite the stages, adolescent development is influenced by the social context of which they are involved. Similar to Erikson, it is my position that adolescents participating in academic programs develop skills and construct their identities in relation to elements of those academic practices. But they need proper

environmental stimuli to develop these abilities. For example, babies have the ability to grow in length and weight in amazing amounts during the first year, but if they're not fed and nurtured enough during that time, they will not have the tools and building blocks to grow and may not thrive. Similar to adolescents, if they are not given the proper support and resources within different contexts of their lives, they may develop the dispositions, characteristics, and competencies to become healthy adults. This is why it's so important for educators and researchers to understand how adolescents are growing and further what supports they need to develop properly.

### Academic Development

During the early adolescent period, adolescents experience deep cognitive, biological, and socio-emotional changes. How well adolescents organize their developing capacities in relation to the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their lives is essential to determining whether not they do well and are engaged in school (Eccles, Roesser, & Sameroff, 2000). The quality of opportunities that are afforded to them in their families, schools, and communities is also significant to promoting their developmental success (Erikson, 1968). The transition to middle school from elementary school creates a time for most adolescents to expand their intellectual abilities. Some experts estimated between 25% to 50 % of youth between the ages of 10-17 are at risk for negative academic outcomes due to high-risk behaviors (Carnegie Council, 1989; 1995). Due to changes in popular culture, more adolescents are becoming involved in risky sexual behavior, drug use, and violence. This has placed millions of students in jeopardy for low academic performance (McLaughlin & Irby, 1994).

According to Masten and Coatworth (1998), one of the primary indicators of healthy development is academic achievement. Schools and other academic settings provide supports to address these needs during adolescence. The theoretical frameworks of Erikson and Bronfenbrenner help to understand the needs of adolescents as it relates to their organization, interpersonal, and instructional experiences. They further help to understand why some students remain on track academically and some do not. Such analyses yields information on which educational practices, from the adolescent's point of view, influences academic adjustments and academic outcomes, thus making these practices the focus of school reform efforts. Though this study takes place within the context of an academic outreach program, it still highlights practices that can be implemented, particularly with African-American students to influence their academic outcomes. Similar to Magnusson and Bergmann (1998), this study seeks to utilize developmental perspectives on adolescence to understand what elements of the TTD program have been most significant to them and how they specifically see those elements as contributing to their acquisition of positive skills and ideologies.

#### Adolescent Development for African American Students

Over the past decade, various researchers (Busch-Rossnagel, Vargas, Knauf, & Planos, 1993; Graham, 1992; Harrison, Serafica, & McAdoo, 1984; McKinney, Abrams, Terry, & Lerner, 1994) have argued that the methods for studying ethnic minority youth and families have not captured the specific contextual and interpersonal dimensions that contribute to and are part of their development. For example, Padilla (1995) argued that certain cultural biases within current theoretical and methodological paradigms have led some to misinterpret development patterns that are normative among ethnic minorities.

Historically, studies of African American and Latino American children and youth have utilized comparative approaches in which their developmental patterns were compared to European Americans (Adler, 1982; Azibo 1988; Padilla, 1995). Oftentimes, these inquiries indicate lower or deficit developmental outcomes for ethnic minorities (Banks, 1993; Graham, 1992). According to Takanishi (1994), the use of comparative and deficit oriented methodologies have resulted in a very “monolithic” view of ethnic minority development and a general failure to explore differences within groups.

In response to these deficit models, contemporary research has moved toward a new paradigm in thinking about how ethnic minorities, particularly African-Americans learn, grow, and develop (Anyon, 1997). This research focuses on both positive and cross-cultural ecological models attempting to not only discover within group differences but also to shed light on the ways that African American children and adolescents are in fact achieving healthy developmental outcomes. In response to a shift away from comparative studies, many researchers have situated their work in qualitative methodologies that utilize conceptual categories from the cultural traditions of those involved, such as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2002) and Delpit (1995). Rogler (1989) has suggested that culturally-sensitive research needs to include an open-ended series of “substantive and methodological insertions designed to mesh the process of scientific inquiry with the cultural characteristics of the group being studied.”(pg.15).

These studies generally shift their lens to document the assets, strengths, and resiliencies that exist not only in students, but also in the environments in which they interact. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) have argued that education scholars can and must undertake work that speaks to the pressing public issues related to education.

Further they suggest that research should be transformative in that it serves to enhance social justice and democracy, while also advancing the field of educational research. This paradigm is especially significant for inquiries involving students of color as they have been historically marginalized the most.

This study fits within the aforementioned paradigm in attempting to characterize the perspectives of four African-American adolescents and the development of positive ideologies about their learning and educational experiences within one college outreach program. This inquiry showcases an endeavor that is providing a different yet parallel experience with traditional school for African American adolescents; subsequently, providing portrayals and descriptions of their learning and experiences in affirmative ways. The term “affirmative” simply refers to practices that provide positive acknowledgement and reinforcement.

Since the participants in this study are four African American males, I engage in a brief discussion about the educational status and experience of this group via contemporary literature. One factor that has been consistently associated with the achievement gap has been the disengagement of black males (Carter, 2003). Due to the lack of intellectual, cultural, and economic resources, they are often times prevented from developing the capacity to become productive and contributing members of their communities (Ferguson, 2000). Little evidence is available that provides an explanation for the causes of this underachievement and this is partially due to the lack of data on their educational experiences, particularly in the early grades prior to high school (Polite & Davis, 1999).

According to Heath and McKinnon (1988), lower levels of achievement appear to have the most negative influence on their social identity, cognitive ability, emotional capacity and social competence. Many researchers (Anderson, 2000; Jincks & Phillips, 1998; Noquera, 1996; O'Conner, 1999) point to disengagement early in their academic careers as a primary cause of these negative outcomes. Davis (2003) contends that black boys should be nurtured and cared for in a responsive environment and that a critical component to providing support is increasing schools' ability to contribute to their academic, social, and cognitive development. School experiences and learning opportunities are influenced by race and ethnicity. Yet the intersection between race and gender is often overlooked in educational research (Ferguson, 2000). Whether related to family background or lack of opportunities to develop, black males are disadvantaged by the misunderstood intersection between race and gender.

Recent discussion of the academic status of black males have, particularly related to the achievement gap, has captured the interest of many (Noquera, 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Smith, 2004). They are infused with descriptors such as "left behind," "epidemic of failure," and "worlds apart" which has led to a sense of urgency to address their problems. However, little attention has been given to their educational experiences and perspectives (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). The current study contributes to this disparity by illuminating the perspectives of four African-American males and their experiences in an educational outreach program.

#### Literature on Student Voices

Within the literature on student voice (Beaudoin 2005; Olsen 2004; Dorman & Adams 2004; Cook-Sather 2003; House 2000; Kordalewski 1999; Newmann 1994;

Wehmeyer & Sands 1998; Holdsworth 1996; Kohn 1993; Johnson 1991) many views of the concept of student voice have been proposed. The two major perspectives are related to (1) a focus on student voice as a way to engage students in the schooling process and (2) focusing on student voice to help inform educational research and practice. These perspectives will be described below.

Those who subscribe to the first view of student voice see it as more than simply listening to students. According to Johnston and Nichols (1995), student voice is the individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education. This definition helps to understand the power of students today. Engaging student voice may be the most powerful lever available to improve student learning in schools (Batty, Rudduck, & Wilson, 2000). This is due to their unique position in the practice of schooling and their ability to speak to what they are directly experiencing. Student involvement throughout the teaching process, from planning to evaluating teachers, can increase teacher and student efficacy, self-confidence, and retention (Dorman & Adams 2004). Despite the fact that people under 18 make up 26% of the U.S. population, they are routinely denied opportunities to participate and be heard (Lesko 1997). Giroux & Searls-Giroux (2003) contend that educators and educational researchers have an ethical responsibility to engage student voice because the democratic society of which we live demands it. It is their position that student voice should be as central to the practice of schooling and education as the voices of parents, teachers, policy makers, and researchers.

In one compilation of youth involvement case studies, several programs cited similar reasons for deepening youth involvement and voice in their programs (Golombek,

2002). Reasons included youth developing leadership skills, adults earning young peoples' trust, and increased engagement of young peoples' capacity to make a difference in their communities (Golombek, 2002). Another study found that through meaningful involvement young people experienced relevancy of learning, empowered voice, meaningful skill-building, and affirmation from adults and their peers (Zeldin & Price, 1995). Through the inclusion of their voices, engaged students make a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn and support what being offered by the school. They take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success grades, but in understanding the material and incorporating it in their lives (Newman, 1992). Empowered student voice in educational reform is increasingly identified as critical to the successful implementation of specific academic programs and projects (Erikson & Ellett, 2002; Wilson & Corbett, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Beresford, 2000). In response to these urgent calls for meaningful student involvement, some educators and community workers are infusing student voice into educational planning, research, instruction, and evaluation.

In addition to highlighting student voice for the purposes of engaging them in the educational processes of schools, student voice has also been discussed in relation to valuing and utilizing their perspectives to inform how we understand and reform schools. This study aligns with this perspective. By listening to the voices of four male adolescents attending an academic outreach program, I expected significant insights about the nature of the programs educational practices and the adolescents' response to and experience with these practices. Cook-Sather (2002), a leading researcher at the forefront of the discussion on student voice made this statement,



“Since the advent of formal education in the United States, both the educational system and that system’s every reform have been premised on adults’ notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced. There is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve. The inefficacy of this approach becomes increasingly apparent as we move into the 21st century. As the pace of life accelerates, the population becomes increasingly diverse, and the media through which we teach, learn, and work become more complex, more than ever before, we educators and educational researchers must seriously question the assumption that we know more than the young people of today about how they learn or what they need to learn in preparation for the decades ahead. It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education.” p. 3

Cottle (1973) suggested that the observation of schools and educational practice rests on the words and deeds of people involved with school. In his view, “It is the sound of voices a set of experiences and personal histories that tell finally what education is all about” (p. 604). Although the nature of schooling is constructed by structure and systematic patterns, its truest nature is found in those that speak about from their own circumstances, knowledge, and experiences. To be sure, notions about schooling cannot be perpetuated and built without the incorporation of the voices that constitute it. Cottle went on to suggest that whatever the particular movement in education may be, the development of personality, social relationships, and student perspectives should occupy a central position. This speaks specifically to this study’s effort to understand how students articulate for themselves how their interactions help them to learn and develop.

Educational research is in many ways undergoing an educational shift where qualitative research and methodologies are more valued than it had it been fifteen years ago. These types of inquiries are non-interventionist, field-focused, and interpretive in and use voice to craft narratives and to convey meaning (Eisner, 1993). This movement began to take shape and was exemplified by Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities*

(1991), Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School*, Alan Peshkin's *The Color of Strangers*, *The Color of Friends* (1991), and Harry Wolcott's *The Man in the Principal's Office* (1984). These books were all interpretive case studies in which the research brought to bear the voices of the actors. These research methods acknowledge the value of student voice and the contribution it makes to the epistemology of educational practice. This paradigm of educational research challenges pre-existing notions that described voice in educational research as a sign of extreme subjectivity. To be sure, this paradigm should not be promoted to replace, supersede, or substitute quantitative inquiries but rather to be an extension of and addition to.

#### Summary

This chapter has established an understanding of the historical and descriptive nature of academic outreach programs and how they support urban and minority students. Examination of the various theoretical trends in adolescent development has illustrated the notion of development in relation to the context of which a person is active. In addition to these major areas, an overview concerning the ways that the growth and development of ethnic minorities and African Americans has been conceptualized was presented. Lastly, the two major views, related to examining and understanding student voice were illustrated.

There is a need to conduct studies that bring to forefront the voices of adolescents as they relate to their learning and development. More specifically, research that illuminates the analyses of development for African-American students in a positive light is scant. The current study is one step to fill this gap. Similar to Owens (2005), this case study will bring to the forefront the views of adolescents who have spent time within an

educational program beyond the traditional school setting, and the ways they perceive the program to be influential to their academic and social lives. While her six focal students were male and female, this study presents an all male sample and seeks to make more specific connections between student views and traditional developmental theories. Educational research approaches that analyze and interpret the experiences of African-American adolescents contribute to the general body of educational research by adding to its cultural knowledge base. The ideas, themes, and theoretical trends discussed in this chapter demonstrate the possibilities for understanding the dynamic, multi-dimensional, and ever changing nature of adolescent development and experiences.

The next chapter will present the methodological design of this study, and provide a more detailed discussion of the research questions, procedural steps, the TTD Rising Stars Program, and the four focal participants.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

*“It is the messy complexity of human experience that leads researchers to case studies in the qualitative or interpretive tradition (Erickson, 1986).”*

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of 4 African American males, participating in one college-prep outreach program for underrepresented youth. The intent was to capture their stories and experiences within the context of this program that aimed to serve their academic and social needs. In conducting focused informal interviews, the complexity of their perspectives as well as the programs' influence on their lives was highlighted. This inquiry was guided by five focal research questions, the first two of which were preliminary in nature and served to provide a basis for answering the remaining questions. These first two questions allowed for the systematic exploration of the program and its function. They provided background information on the context of the program by framing the field of study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) refer to this process as “casing the joint.” The remaining three questions serve as the basis for grounding this inquiry. As with most qualitative inquiries, all of these research questions served as a grounding to start the conversations with participants about their perspectives of and experience with the program.

#### **Research Questions**

In order to ascertain students' general perspectives of the program, what elements of the program were most significant for them, and how they made sense of the program's contribution to them academically and socially, I designed methods to specifically answer the following research questions:

1. What is the structure and function of this program, e.g., curriculum and staff roles?
2. What are the goals and objectives?
3. How do they provide resources and support to the target population?
4. What are the participant's general perspectives of the program? What do they like and dislike?
  - a. How do they describe these elements of the program?
  - b. How do they make sense of supports or resources have been most important?
5. How do the participants see the program contributing to their academic and social development?
  - a. How do they see the program developing their post-secondary education plans, if at all?
  - b. How do they see the program developing positive ideologies and skills, if at all?
6. What sorts of differences or similarities exist between what is learned in the program and the home environment?

#### **Definition of Terms**

*Goals and Objectives* The term goal is typically defined across various bodies of literature as a broad statement of what is to be achieved or accomplished. Additionally, objectives normally refer to a specific outcome or timetable of completion of a certain goal. For purposes of this study both these terms goal and objective will refer to the central aims of the TTD program. Throughout this narrative, they will be used interchangeably, as opposed to separately. For example, one of the primary aims of the program as displayed in the program brochure it to expose students to information on the

admission requirements and financial aid options of two and four year institutions. This concept can easily be defined as both a goal and objective if viewed as 1) a final outcome or 2) an ongoing process of disseminating information via the program curriculum.

*Structure and Function* The terms structure and function refer to how the TTD program is organized and how activities are carried out. It was expected that these terms would provide a lens for understanding the general nature of the program via roles played by staff, the curriculum, and procedural steps.

*Supports and Resources* The purpose of the TTD program was to provide students with tools and information to support their academic achievement and preparation for college. Supports and resources will be used to refer to components of the TTD program such as, but not limited to study skills, networking, staff-student relationships, financial aid information, and encouragement toward high academic achievement.

*Academic and Social Development* For purposes of this study academic and social development were defined as characteristics, dispositions, attitudes, and beliefs acquired by an adolescent that supports his/her growth toward healthy intellectual and social functioning. Similar to Roesser, Eccles, and Sameroffs' (2000), I used as a premise the conceptualization of adolescent development being associated with and influenced by particular instructional, interpersonal, and organizational elements of educational settings.

The first three questions were exploratory. They allowed for systematic examination of the program's goals and objectives in relation to how the curriculum was enacted and general roles of the staff members. In addition, this set of questions aided me in acquiring an understanding of how the program carried out its services to its students.

Question four sought to gain knowledge about participant's general perspectives of the program and particularly to examine how they described elements of the program most significant for them. The fifth question built on the third question by attempting to understand how the students felt the program had influenced their academic and social development. The last question focused on whether or not and in what capacity the nature of the program compared or contrasted with the home environments of the students. It is important to note that while the methodology of this study was designed to answer all five research questions, the third and fourth questions will be more central as they are focused more on student perspectives.

This chapter will describe the layout and methodological approach to my study. It will begin with a rationale for utilizing qualitative methods. Next, a description of the setting/site will be rendered as well as a description of participants and the participant selection process. Then, I will discuss data collection methods and analysis as related to each of the five central research questions.

#### Rationale for Qualitative Methods

This study was qualitative in nature. This type of design is appropriate in providing support for particular theoretical assumptions and contributing to a particular body of knowledge (Yin, 1989). Given the nature of research questions and the small sample of students, a quantitative design would not have been possible. This small sample of students allowed for building a more ethnographic case and acquiring a more in depth understanding of students' experiences and perceptions, which goes a step beyond categorical, numerical, survey responses. To be sure, the validity,

meaningfulness, and insights that were expected to be generated from this inquiry were related to the richness of the case and the ability to obtain analytical validity.

The results from this inquiry were expected to be informative about the experiences of students and the function of a university based college prep program. A case study design afforded the opportunity to examine how a particular phenomenon, in the case of this inquiry, perceptions and experiences, were a salient piece of the context. In interpretive research, the interest is in social construction of reality as individuals interact in social scenes (Geertz, 1973; Mehan, 1982; Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative methodology assumes that meaning is context specific and that definitions and frames are built over time through cultural practices (Bogden and Biklen, 2003). The primary goal of this study was to understand how participants made sense of their participation in the selected program. Although, portraiture was not used as a primary methodology, many of the same inductive strategies were utilized. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002), “portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions...” (pg. xv).

#### Site Selection

The Truth Tubman Douglass program was selected as the program site. Located on the campus of a major Research I university, it is funded by a state higher education initiative. It serves approximately 300-400 youth between the ages of 12-18 annually from around the state. This program was designed to increase the number of



underrepresented minorities in post-secondary education. This goal is pursued through a combination of program elements that inform and prepare students to deal with the challenges of pursuing higher education. In an effort to reach these goals the program has contact with participants at various points throughout their middle and high school careers. The program is divided into four major components; Outreach, Visitation, Rising Stars, and Summer Residency. The Outreach component consists of student teams going out into the middle school informing youth about college and motivating them to attend. The Visitation component involves a one-day trip to a college campus where youth are exposed to the college life, the admissions process, and currently enrolled college students. Rising Stars is the ongoing continuous component that takes place from August through April and involves a series of workshops and seminars that range from Social Activism to Time management. The last component, summer residency, is a four-day live-in experience where youth go to a college campus and gain hands on exposure to college type courses and residence life.

#### The Rising Stars Component

This study focused on the Rising Stars component because of the nature of its curriculum, practices, and duration. It is important to note that TTD was largely modeled after typical college prep programs with a heavy emphasis on preparing young people for post-secondary education. This site was selected for three primary reasons, 1.) the close proximity and connection to the university, 2.) the characteristics (i.e. ethnicity, gender, income status, etc.) of the population of participants it served and 3.) the college prep curriculum that grounded the services and resources offered. Based on prior work, interests in and exposure to contexts that provide alternative academic services to

minority youth this site and setting were appropriate for examining all the aforementioned research questions. The Outreach component, Visitation component, and Summer Residency component were parts of the program implemented once over the course of a year in the program. None of these components lasted in duration longer than one week. The Rising Stars component was ongoing and continuous over a seventh month period, and provided an opportunity to get a somewhat longitudinal perspective of program practice.

Rising Stars was implemented via monthly Saturday workshops and included topics such as cultural day, career development, and study skills. Students were required to attend at least six workshops over the course of a school year to be considered a Rising Stars participant. More detailed information about the nature of Rising Stars will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Participants

### Participant Selection

A verbal request for participants along with a brief description of the study was made twice, once during the first week of the Summer Residency program orientation, and again during the kick-off workshop of the Rising Stars component. The program director offered extra program credit for their participation. After the first request seventeen families of sixth and seventh grade students signed up to participate. The second request yielded six families of eighth and ninth grade male students. Due to the need to focus on older adolescents, the second group of participants was contacted directly to confirm their participation. Four families followed up from the second contact and agreed to participate through verbal and written assent/consent forms.

The primary participants in this study were four African American boys between the ages of 13-15. Two were in eighth grade and two were in ninth grade at the time of this study. These adolescents were residents of urban and suburban areas across a large Midwestern state. All students in the sample had participated in at least one full year of the program prior to the study. In addition, they had attended the college visit component, at least three Saturday workshops offered throughout the school year, and the one week summer residency program. Based on my judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of the data that would be collected against the ways that data would be utilized, the homogeneity in the ethnicity of the sample, and the particular research questions, I was satisfied that four participants would be sufficient enough to support both emergent claims of and claims related to preexisting theory. In addition, I was confident that this sample size would lend itself reasonably to implementing a deep, case-oriented analysis, which grounds most qualitative inquiries. To be clear, this sample does fail to be representative of and homogenous with the entire TTD student population in that it is not inclusive of females. It is then reasonable that findings and assertions yielded from this study can be used to frame experiences of male participants.

While the focus of this study was on the four youth participants and their perspectives, graduates of the KCP program as well as program staff served as key informants to 1.) triangulate responses from youth participants and 2.) to add additional insight on the structure and function of the program. As a result of preliminary fieldwork and casing the space of the program, it became evident that there were past participants of the TTD program, either enrolled at the university or who continued to work for and/or advocate for the program. It was reasonable and appropriate that these key informants,

although their perspectives were former, had a considerable amount to contribute both at the level of understanding the program and also at the level of understanding youth experiences within this site.

### Participant Description

(All names are pseudonyms and will be used throughout.)

*Charles* was a thirteen year old eighth grader at the time of this study. He attended a middle school in a large suburban area of a major Midwestern city. As I articulated by him, he made “fairly good grades” consisting of A’s and B’s and a few C’s. His favorite subject in school was social studies and he liked reading and learning about history. He “really liked R&B” and his favorite artists were Luther Vandross and Stevie Wonder. He loved football and when observed in his peer group, seemed somewhat shy and reserved. Charles has aspirations of being a writer, entrepreneur, or architect and he points to having friends as being an important part of his life. Based on informal conversations with him and his parents, he could be disorganized at times and had trouble turning in assignments and staying focused. Although, he had a quiet disposition he was outgoing and receptive to meeting and talking with people. He considered himself a visual and physical learner that learned best when he could “make his own formula for it”, or in other words do it his way. He was the second oldest of four children, and had a very keen sense of humor. In addition to participating in KCP he also attended a social studies camp during the summers.

*Jamal* was a fifteen year old ninth grader at a suburban high school. He is Charles’s older brother, and the oldest of four children. He played football at school and

also liked basketball, although by his account he was “not very good at it”. Unlike his brother he preferred rap over R&B, and his favorite artists was Kanye West.

He made A’s and B’s in school but felt that if he put his mind to it he could do a lot better. Jamal and his brother had been TTD participants for two years prior to the start of the study. Jamal liked to think of new ways to do things and he also liked to use his hands to build and create things. Jamal, unlike his younger brother was not shy, but not necessarily outgoing either. It takes him a while to warm up to people he is unfamiliar with. In talking about his school experiences, he expressed concern about being at his new high school and talked in depth about his preference to be back at his previous high school with his old friends. By his own admission and via informal conversations with his parents, Jamal was having difficulty adjusting to his new suburban school and new peers. He was very articulate in discussing the difference in these two academic settings that were vastly different.

*Eric* was a thirteen year old eighth grader at the time of this study. He attended a large urban middle school. He was the youngest of three children in his family and also the only male. He talked about his interest in football and basketball, but said that he more often than not “stays inside and play video games.” His favorite type of music was Rap and he also listened to Jazz. His favorite rapper was Ludacris and his favorite subject in school was science. Eric’s first name was Lawrence, but he preferred to be called Eric because “that is what his friends and family call him”. His family had participated in TTD for six years prior to the study and both of his sisters were alumni of the program. Eric liked meeting new people and pointed to this as one of the main reasons he liked coming to TTD. He was very close with his family and was treated as the baby of the

family, by both his older sisters and his parents, especially his mother. He considered himself to be a “pretty good” student and he made A’s and B’s. Similar to Charles and JAMAL, he liked different ways of learning and preferred to look at things from a “different perspective.” His goals for his immediate future were to make better grades so that he can get into one of the more prestigious high schools in his city. Eric was very articulate about social issues that impacted African American men and African Americans in general. In addition, He was very savvy about media and other political issues like the war in Iraq.

*Keith* was a fourteen year old ninth grader at a predominately black high school in a different urban area than Eric. He was the third oldest of six children (three boys and three girls.) Unlike the other boys, Keith was not from a middle class background, and lived in an inner city area. He played the Bass drum in his school’s concert band. His favorite type of music was gospel, and at the time of the study he was very active in a Christian study group at school. His family participated in TTD for three years prior to the study and his dad was a very vocal parent participant both within the program and in their local community. Keith was fairly shy and seemed to only open up around family (as observed during home interview). He considered himself to be an average student that made “ok grades”. Keith was very articulate about the conditions at his school and his experiences with other African American peers. He wanted to eventually attend the university where TTD was held and get a Bachelors and eventually a master’s degree in business or English. Keith has a very inquisitive nature and more than the other three students, saw me as a mentor and reached out to me beyond our time spent during the study.

## Researcher's Role

My application of confidentiality, objectivity, and genuine appreciation for diverse socio-cultural values and experiences enabled me to establish relationships built on trust among students and their families, as well as program staff. It is my belief that these relationships strengthen my voice as researcher within the literature on academic outreach programs and their impact on the academic, social, and emotional development of adolescents. There were three different ways in which my role as the researcher had to be negotiated throughout the duration of this study. The first dealt with establishing a balance between the participant and observer roles. One of the biggest challenges in doing this type of work is establishing and identifying my role as researcher. From initial contact with program staff and participants, I decided to take on more of a participant-observer role in the program. This was primarily due to the need for me to establish myself as someone genuinely concerned about the sustenance of the program and the youth that it served. I placed myself largely (with the exception of observing Saturday workshops) on the medium of the participant-researcher continuum. It was less beneficial to become a full participant 1.) because of my own demanding schedule as a full-time graduate student and 2.) because of my need to develop a zone of flexibility to be able to step back and objectively collect and analyze data.

A second way the role of researcher was negotiated was through researcher vs. "our doctoral student". Throughout my time in field the program staff referred to me as "our doctoral student." The term "our" within this context alluded to within group membership in this context. Due to the communal nature of this space, membership was equated with taking some type of active role in the program. While this title and position

was beneficial for getting acclimated and developing relationships in the program, a critical task was not allowing the role as within group member to overshadow my role as researcher. This included but was not limited to physical location (i.e. sitting away from activities as they were occurring) and selective assistance, choosing only task that required minimal participation (i.e. passing out pamphlets, directing students and parents to designated areas). A final way this role was negotiated was through mentor vs. researcher. Primarily due to how I was initially introduced as being a part of the program, all of the participants viewed me as a mentor doing work for the program. I attempted to control for misunderstandings by continually explaining my educational background and the purpose of the study. By the end of the study all of the boys were aware and knowledgeable of my role as researcher and the purpose of our time together.

In addition to negotiating my role as researcher, it is important to note that being African American provided me with access and may have influenced the ways in which the staff, students, and parents interacted and engaged with me within this space.

As discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), personal reflexivity' involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life, and social identities shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. It is important to note that my scholarship as an African American woman, my ethnic identity, and commitment to efforts that support students of color all influenced how I engaged with participants and interpreted the collected data. This reflexive process allowed me to not only learn about my own epistemological beliefs, but to also to critically examine collected data at various points throughout the analysis.



## Data Collection Procedures

The data for this study was collected over an 8 month period (October 2005 through May 2006). Decisions about data collected were based on the relevance to inform the research questions. Data collected included field notes from observations of the monthly Saturday workshops, relevant program artifacts (workshop agendas and materials, brochures, schedules, newsletters, etc.), and audio taped interviews of student participants and program staff.

### *Data Collection: Interviews*

For qualitative researchers, the unstructured, open-ended interview “offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Sliverman, 2000, pp. 822-23). Although participants were asked a series of pre-determined questions, the interviews in this research study were semi-structured because participants were free to digress and discuss issues beyond the selected questions at any time. In addition, I asked other questions that were not included in the original list in order to pursue emergent points of interest and that allowed the exchanges to evolve in a conversational manner. In my position as an insider-outsider researcher, comfortable relationships with the research participants were critical to my establishment of rapport. I made a conscious effort to follow the protocol recommended by Lofland (1971) suggesting that as field workers, qualitative researchers must remember to take notes regularly and promptly; write everything down, no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time; try to be inconspicuous as possible in note taking; and frequently analyze field notes.

Three one hour interviews with each of the four participants were conducted across the seven month data collection period. The primary goal of this study was to

explore whether or not and in what ways the program had influenced student's academic and social development. Therefore, questions were asked related to whether the program had contributed to the acquisition of skills that would lead toward characteristics such as but not limited to high self-esteem, cultural affirmation, and college attainment. These interviews attempted to assess each participant's general perspectives on the program as well as their personal experience throughout their participation. (*See Appendix A-C for complete protocols.*) Prior to the beginning each interview I reviewed what I would be asking and my commitment to ensuring confidentiality. I would reiterate that their voice was their voice and that there were no right or wrong answers, simply honest responses. The approach helped to relax the participants and reduce nervousness. For African Americans it is a common cultural understanding not to share personal "business" with others, let alone have it tape-recorded. Thus my own cultural connections and relationship to the TTD program facilitated the easing of feelings of discomfort associated with providing their views and perspectives.

The first interview (see Appendix A) asked general questions related to their past experience with the program as well as their overall perceptions. The nature of these questions were introductory in nature, and were asked to primarily get the boys' first initial responses to how they thought about the program and parts of the program that were most significant for them. These responses were pursued in more detail and clarified in the second and third interviews. Questions posed in the first interview included, but were not limited to the following.

- How long have you participated in the KCP Rising Stars Program?
- Have you participated in this program?

- Do you have friends or family members that participate?
- What have you liked or enjoyed most about KCP Rising Star?
- Were there things that you maybe didn't like so much about the program? If so what were they, and why?
- What has been your favorite activity in the program?
- What do you think the purpose of KCP is?

The second interview (see Appendix B) attempted to ascertain their current thoughts about topics associated with the Saturday workshops and their lives beyond the program. These topics were activism and advocacy, cultural identity, learning styles, family connectedness within the program, definitions of success, social awareness, and expectations held by staff. In addition, this interview revisited topics that surfaced during the first interview, specific to each participant. Keith was asked about his views of how KCP talked about the importance of college, the significance of African American student achievement, how TTD helped him to think about his purpose, and the importance of being open. Charles was asked about his comments related to TTD helping him to make better grades, the meaning of TTD "helping you to fight back", some students "being smart but not having opportunities," and the comparison of resources in his past and current school. Jamal was asked to follow-up on statements made about his potential to do good work and ways that he could improve, importance of "making friends" in the program, his social view of black males, i.e., "we know what we're worth but we're not viewed like that," and his definition of success. In his second interview Eric was asked to expand on his responses about black males being in prison, the importance of "getting to know people in the program", his future goals, the significance of having

African American leaders that can “lead us into a new future”, and his comments related to TTD helping him to learning “academic stuff”. General questions included the following.

- What is this notion of “We are family” that is present in KCP, what are your views on that? Do you feel connected to KCP and if so how is this helpful for you? Have you developed friendships and relationships within KCP?
- KCP talks a lot about knowing what type of student you are and how you learn best. Describe who you are as a student. What do you think about your own academic ability?
- How often do you use these learning style skills that are taught by the program?
- What do you all think the significance of African American student achievement is, or is it important?
- What have been some of the things that KCP has taught you about academic achievement and how does that fit or not fit with what your parents tell you about achievement?
- What do you think the social and academic needs are of young people around your age are?
- Describe your idea of success? What does it mean to be successful?

The final round of interviews (See Appendix C for protocol) served to corroborate and compare thematic patterns that emerged from the first and second interview. The primary purpose of the third interview was to get final responses from students, revisit initial statements about the program, and to ask questions related to the set of themes that arose from the previous two rounds of interviews. Questions dealt specifically with

concepts such as identity development, future planning, leadership, the needs of adolescents, perception of black males, relationship with TTD as family, and high expectations of staff. These concepts will be defined below in the Analysis of Student Interviews section. Questions from the third round of interviews included, but were not limited to the following.

- What is a rising star? What do you think it means to be a part of TTD and what makes you different from young people who are not apart of the program?
- Talk more in general about how this program is helping (influencing) you? Are there any drawbacks? Are there ways that the program may not be so helpful?
- We've talked about utilizing skills from KCP in the classroom but are there other things that happen in the program that influence you in school?
- How important are the relationships you build here in KCP?
- What do you think is important for or needed for young people like yourself to be successful?
- Ultimately do you think KCP has or will help you accomplish your goals? Why and in what way?
- How has KCP helped you make plans for you future and do you think this is important? Why or Why not?

The program director, assistant program director, and program coordinator were interviewed once about the structure and function of the program and their views on how the program worked to influence its participants. (*See Appendix D for the complete protocol.*) Each interview lasted at least an hour. Two were conducted at the program office and one was conducted immediately following a Saturday workshop. In these

interviews, I was interested in finding out from the staff what their views of the program were, what the goals and objectives of TTD were, and how they attempted both collectively and individually to transfer those goals. Given the collegial relationship I had built with the staff, and their perception of me as someone with a genuine concern and commitment to the program, these interviews were informal. Thus, staff felt comfortable in revealing their thoughts, ideas, and personal perspectives on the program. Questions included but were not limited to these.

- How did you come to be involved with KCP? How long have you been involved and in what capacity?
- How long has this program been here at Michigan State?
- What do you perceive as the major goals and objectives of the program?
- How do you think those goals are carried out in program activities?
- In what ways have you personally tried to transfer these goals and objectives to the youth participants?
- How do you attempt to align program activities and program curriculum with the goals and objectives?
- Are there components of the program that you feel are particularly significant for the youth? If so, what are they?
- In what ways does KCP attempt to address the academic and developmental needs of the participants? What do you perceive these needs to be?

One former female student, who had graduated from the program and was currently enrolled in the university hosting this program, was interviewed as a key informant prior to interviewing youth participants. *(See Appendix E for the complete*

*protocol.*) By this informant providing background information and insight into her experiences and thoughts on the program, it helped to inform relevant topics and issues to utilize in the interviews with the four focal students. Additionally her responses aided in constructing a comprehensive view of the program. She was asked the following questions.

- How long did you participate in the KCP Rising Stars Program?
- Did you have friends or family members that participated or are currently participating?
- What did you like or enjoy most about KCP Rising Stars?
- What did it mean to be a KCP participant?
- What types of ideas and values aligned with being KCP?
- In your view, what did KCP teach you if anything about going to college and planning for college?
- What did they teach you about culture and identity (specifically about your own culture or about other cultures)? Have these things helped you to think about how you identify or view yourself as a person or student?
- What resources and support (i.e. summer workshops, speakers) helped you the most, if at all?

*Data Collection: Observation Field Notes*

Monthly Saturday workshops were monthly workshops geared toward topics in three major categories; academic, self-developmental, and cultural. They covered areas like test-taking strategies, study skills, peer pressure, and socio-critical skills. Workshops typically lasted four hours and were designed for the benefit of students and parents.

In attempting to answer the question regarding how the program provides resources and supports to participants, it seemed logical to position myself within this particular practice to collect substantive data on how activities were being carried out. Additionally, field notes of major program activities provided yet another layer of data to support and triangulate youth responses. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005) field notes help to give the audience a “verbal depiction of the site-an ethnographic sense of being in the world we call our case”. The specific case in this study was participant perspectives and experiences.

These programs were observed and field notes were taken of the content and activity that took place. I attended eight Saturday workshops and spent a total of thirty-one hours in the field. Field notes included both descriptive and reflective statements on the structure and function of this programmatic activity. I was particularly observant of staff student interactions, curriculum topics, implicit and explicit exchange of values, and student attitudes and behaviors. I paid particularly attention to ways that staff spoke to goals and objectives of TTD. The following table (Table 1) is a record of each workshop along with its title, description, date, and duration of observation.



Table 1:

Summary of Observations: Rising Stars Component

Workshop Title	Date	Observation Time
"Celebrating Our Victory"	10-08-05	5 hrs.
"A Tribute to Rosa Parks: Becoming an Activist"	11-12-05	4 hrs
"Study Skills: Three Stages of Learning"	12-10-05	4.5 hrs
"Technology Day"	01-20-06	3.5 hrs
"Cultural Day"	02-04-06	5 hrs
"Science Day"	02-25-06	4 hrs
"Career Day"	03-25-06	3 hrs
"Vet-A-Visit & Preparing for Summer"	04-15-06	4.5 hrs

Data Collection: Artifacts

Most of the program artifacts were collected during initial entry into the field. These documents consisted of the program brochure, monthly newsletter (The Rising Star) and the introductory packet mailed to new students which included an application, description of the program, and welcome letter. The program website was utilized as a data source particularly for gaining information on the structure and function of the program. In addition to these artifacts, the monthly newsletter and the college prep materials (distributed at the Saturday workshops) were collected.

Table 2. below is divided in to three main columns that lays out each research question, the data sources that were used to answer those questions, and third the method of data collection.

Table 2:  
Data Collection Summary

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>
What is the structure and function of this program? (i.e. curriculum and staff roles, etc.)	Field Notes Staff Interviews Program Artifacts: brochure, newsletter, workshop agenda and meeting materials	Observations of Saturday Workshops, Individual interviews, Content analysis of program documents from workshops and the program office
What are the goals and Objectives ?  How do they provide resources and support to the target population?	Field Notes Staff Interviews Program Artifacts: brochure, newsletter, workshop agenda and meeting materials	Saturday Workshops, In-person audio taped interviews, Collected program documents during workshops and from the main office of program
What are the participant's general perspectives of the program? What do they like and dislike?  How do they describe these elements of the program?  What supports or resources have been most important?	Student Interviews	All interviews (w/e 1) were conducted in-person in the homes of participants. Each interview was audio-taped.
What are their perceptions on the extent to which this program contributes to their academic and social development?  How has the program aided in developing post-secondary education plans, if at all?  How has the program aided in developing pro-social ideologies and skills, if at all? How	Student Interviews	All interviews (w/e 1) were conducted in-person in the homes of participants. Each interview was audio-taped.
What sorts of differences or similarities exists between what is learned in the program and the home environment?	Student Interviews	All interviews (w/e 1) were conducted in-person in the homes of participants. Each interview was audio-taped

## **Data Analysis**

All data was labeled and organized by date and by activity type. A content analysis was conducted on program artifacts in order to understand the structure and function of the program as indicated in questions above. The analysis of this data was inductive in nature and grounded in particular pieces of data that were sorted and organized to understand the dynamics and dimensions of participant perspectives. In making decisions about analyzing data, the constant comparative method seemed most appropriate for this type of qualitative inquiry. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1981), this method "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed" (p. 58). As social phenomena are recorded and classified, they are also compared across categories. This allows the researcher over time to discover relationships in pieces of data. This process undergoes continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process, continuously feeding back into the process of category coding. "As events are constantly compared with previous events, new topological dimensions, as well as new relationships, may be discovered" (Goetz & LeCompte, p. 58).

Qualitative analysis "transforms data into findings" (Patton, 2002, p. 432). Data analysis requires that the researcher capture the complexity of reality and make convincing sense of it (Strauss, 1989). It is therefore significant that the researcher be guided by participants' interpretations, the researcher's interpretation of the participant responses, and the data analysis of the study.

Four different data analysis charts were created for program artifacts, field notes from Saturday workshops, student interviews, and staff interviews. These charts included

all data points grouped by category. Groups and clusters of data became the basis for this organization and conceptualization. This process was inductive and categories emerged out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection.

#### Analysis of Artifacts

A content analysis was conducted on program artifacts to understand the goals and structure of the TTD program. In order to answer the questions related to the goals as well as the structure and function of the program, read through the program brochure, participant application packet, program website, and 5 monthly newsletters. I specifically looked for content that described both the nature of the program as well as how the program functioned in relation to activities, schedules, and roles played by staff and students. I looked for and examined patterns and trends across documents and created a list of all descriptive statements about the program's goals and structure. The most frequently cited words and phrases across documents were; enrollment in two and four year institutions, post-secondary education, increase opportunity, increase enrollment of underrepresented minorities, and is designed to.

#### Analysis of Field notes

Field notes of program activity also served to answer research questions one and two regarding the goals and objectives and structure and function of the program. The first two workshops ("Celebrating our Victory" and "Tribute to Rosa Parks") involved exploratory observations. To be sure, there were no pre established patterns, ideas, interactions that I looked for. I was careful in letting the first two workshops serve as a grounding for the rest of the observations. After the second workshop a list of categories emerged that included advocacy and activism, social preparation, high expectations, goal

setting, TTD as family, learning style, and cultural pride. These categories were then used to identify other interactions, attitudes, and behaviors during the remaining five workshops. Ideas and statements that arose were put into one of the aforementioned categories.

In addition to the attitudes, statements, and views discussed during Saturday workshops, action taken by staff to implement program were also coded. This was due to the acknowledgement of the roles of the faculty being central in understanding how Saturday workshops function. To be sure, this social context was significantly more dynamic than the roles of the staff, but this examination draw me closer to understanding the implementation. This coding scheme was broken into three different categories; speaking, interacting, and managing. Speaking involved any incident where staff addressed the large group in the auditorium. Interacting involved incidents where members of the staff were observed interacting with students and parents. For example, Samantha, the program coordinator, would sit at a table during sign in at every workshop and greet the students and their parents, asking them about school and other programs they were involved in. A third category that illuminated program function was managing. This involved occurrences when staff members were involved in some type of guidance activity related to the logistical maintenance of the workshops. For instance, Kurt was often seen talking to staff of the facility where workshops were held for issues such as unlocking small break out rooms, getting lunch vouchers for participants, or assisting student mentors with management of their break out sessions.

### Analysis of Staff Interviews

Staff interviews were not conducted over multiple time frames, therefore they were coded once for themes that emerged across all three interviews. Staff interviews were analyzed to assess ideas and perceptions on the goals and objectives of the program as well as the nature of how the TTD program functioned. These themes included, staff function; the ways that staff saw their role in the program, student descriptions; comments on the needs of students served by the program, family connectedness; responses about staff members work to create a family oriented space, high expectations; statements on working to instill confidence in students by having high expectations for their success, and cultural identity; responses on helping students to think positively about their cultural identity. All of these themes were utilized in making an analysis of the TTD program from the view of staff. Assertions and more detailed interpretations are forthcoming in the next chapter.

### Analysis of Student Interviews

As the interviews were the primary source of data, particularly for students, the analysis of this verbal data was more extensive than the staff interviews, content analysis of artifacts and the examination of field notes. Three rounds of interviews with the students served to answer the remaining three focal research questions: (1) What were the participant's general perspectives of the program, how did they describe these elements, and how do they make sense of the supports and resources that have been most important for them?; What sorts of differences and similarities exist between program and home? Interview responses were also analyzed to answer how the participants saw the program contributing to their academic and social development and their post-secondary education

plans, if at all. The data from student interviews were coded to ascertain preliminary themes.

A primary component of data analysis for student interviews involved defining categories. According to Dey (1993), categorizing is a crucial element in the process of any qualitative analysis, and thus a natural creation of categories occurs with the process of finding a focus for the analysis, and reading and annotating the data. Having three rounds of interviews allowed for the systematic examination of perspectives over the course of the study. In addition, they helped me to develop a relationship with each participant that would make him feel more comfortable enough to share their views about themselves and the program in some detail.

As mentioned above the first interview was exploratory and helped to create the first set of categorical themes. This interview phase yielded six themes; advocacy and activism, cultural identity, the development of academic skills, society's perception of black males, and the importance of African American student achievement. Student responses related to activism involved all statements and comments about definitions of "speaking out" and "fighting against" situations that were "unfair." Comments provided by participants on cultural identity involved their statements about whether or not TTD addressed culture and identity, and if so what aspects stood out for them. Society's perception of black males emerged out of the conversation on culture and how society viewed certain groups of people. One participant in particular talked about these issues and his comments were then analyzed to create a separate category for this theme. All four boys when asked about what they had learned from TTD, commented on the extent to which they had learned certain skills such as test taking and study skills. These

comments became the basis for the acquisition of academic skills theme. Lastly during the first round of interviews participants talked about the ways the program had helped them to think about their achievement in relation to the accomplishments of the larger black community. These comments laid the groundwork for establishing the theme of African-American achievement.

A second round of interviews was conducted to clarify participants' comments that were not completely clear in the first interview and to corroborate and support pre-existing themes that had emerged in that interview. Follow-up questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of comments connected to themes from the first round. Students were also asked specifically about their relationship with staff, how they thought about what it meant to be successful, and their plans for the future. Based on the responses of participants in the first interview, questions were posed to explore the boys' reactions to staff high expectations and the program's support for their academic and social needs. By comparison with first-round findings, this round of interviews also helped to discern emergent themes beyond those already classified. The second round of interviews added six additional themes; program staff's high expectations, connectedness to staff as family, leadership, articulation of adolescents needs, definitions of success, and future planning.

The third round of interviews served to follow-up on and refine categories that emerged in the first and second interviews. For instance, when Jamal stated, "success is getting into a good college, graduating, and being the best that you can be and doing something to show what you're worth", in the second interview, it was clear that he was defining for himself what it meant to be successful. Eric also stated that success for him



was “getting a good education”. Therefore, in the third interview all comments or responses related to what it meant to be successful were placed into the category of *Definitions of Success*. This was the case for all of the aforementioned themes.

The essential task of categorizing was to bring together data bits that were apparently related to the same content. It was then important to establish rules that described category properties and that could, ultimately, be used to justify the inclusion of each data bit assigned to a category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability and validity. For example in the first round of interviews the theme of academic skills and learning styles emerged. In the second and third round of interviews all statements and responses related to the types of skills students learned as a result of participating in Saturday workshops, were included in this category. To be sure, a representative unit of data from Keith for this category went as follows, “Like a test. We have those tests and they told us like to go through the whole thing and read all the questions and I do that, and it helps, its’ better.”

Comparisons were then made within categories, looking for similarities or differences within the data. The process of constant comparison stimulated ideas that lead to both descriptive and explanatory categories that answered research questions related to 1.) the structure and function of the TTD program (staff interviews) and 2.) perspectives of students (student interviews) on their participation in the program.

Of the twelve themes, six surfaced from the data to be the most substantiated and corroborated. These six categories were the most salient and served more appropriately to answer the questions related to their experiences in the program. To be sure, the voices of students were more deeply expressed through the constructs of family

connection, academic skills, future planning, cultural identity, significance of African American student achievement, and staff responses to high expectations. Family connection stemmed from comments made by students relating to fictive kinships that existed between themselves and other TTD students and staff. Further, academic skills were responses related to different educational strategies students had learned such as test-taking and study skills. Future planning involved all of those statements expressed by students that involved their plans for their immediate and long term future. Cultural identity was grounded in views of that exhibited a sense of self as well as the connection between identity and goal orientation. Units of data for the significance of African American student achievement were related to explanations for why high academic performance was important for their community. Lastly, all comments related to how students were responding to staff members expectations for them to excel academically were put into the responses to staff high expectations. As a final step, data from the categorization chart were transformed into examples and illustrations that lead to several guiding assertions. These assertions and themes will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

This chapter presented the methodology and rationale for the study's design. It described the selection process and provided demographic narratives of the participants. A description of the data collection techniques and data analysis procedures was also provided. Finally this chapter sought to highlight and define emergent themes from the data. These themes formed the basis for the findings of this research investigation. The next two chapters present a comprehensive description of the research setting (TTD

program) and the perspectives of the four focal participants relative to their participation within this context.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SITUATING THE VOICES: THE TRUTH TUBMAN DOUGLASS PROGRAM

*“You value yourself, you value your intellect and that is something that I want our young people to understand because there is a lot of peer pressure at home and out there to dumb yourself down, but you value what you can give, that you too have a right as an individual to have access to quality education and whatever resources that are out there that are going to help you to be successful.”~ Dr. S, Program Director*

The Truth Tubman Douglas Rising Stars program was a university outreach program designed to increase the numbers of underrepresented minorities in post-secondary institutions around the state of Michigan. This dissertation examines the perspectives of four students who had participated in this program to understand how they were making sense of the extent to which this program was influencing them both socially and academically. This chapter will provide an introduction to the program and help to situate the student voices highlighted in the next chapter. Utilizing three streams of data; program artifacts, staff interviews, and field notes from program activities, the goals, objectives, and program practices will be discussed. A description of the TTD program will begin with an account of the program as written in program artifacts. Next, this description will be expounded on through the voices of the staff as they discuss their perspectives of the nature of the programs goals and activities.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will conclude with an interpretive account of the program functions via observations of a specific program activity, Rising Stars (Saturday Workshops).

#### TTD AS WRITTEN

The results of a content analysis on the program brochure, four monthly newsletters, student application, and the program website, yielded basic information

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<sup>1</sup> The Truth Tubman Douglas program will be referred to throughout in past tense because at the time this study was being written and recorded the program had lost funding and was no longer in operation.

about the primary goals of the program and major program components. As consistent across all artifacts, the goal of the King, Chavez, Parks (TTD) program, named for the late civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and Rosa Parks, was to increase the enrollment of students who are underrepresented in higher education. These groups included but were not limited to; Mexican American, African American, and Native American. The program served approximately 200-300 youth between the ages of 12-18 annually from around a large mid-western state. Over eighty percent of the student and parent participants were African American while the remaining student population consisted of Mexican and Native American students. The staff consisted of five primary positions: Director, Assistant Director, two Coordinators, and a Secretary. At the time of this study TTD was funded by a higher education state initiative and was housed on the campus of a large Research I university.

The program brochure described program goals as having two primary components. These two elements are to (a) provide information on and (b) check student comprehension of five core indicators: (1) the state's 2 and 4 year education systems, (2) opportunities afforded by a college education, (3) availability of financial aid, (4) requirements for college admission, and (5) requirements to prepare for college. Other program documentation stipulated that the goals of the TTD program are pursued through a combination of program elements that inform and prepare students to deal with the challenges of pursuing higher education. In addition, dividing the program into components allowed the program to maintain a system that enabled new students to participate and eventually become integrated into a long term support network with returning students. The program is divided into four major components; Outreach,

Visitation, Rising Stars, and Summer Residency. The Outreach component consists of student teams going out into local middle schools informing youth about college and recruiting program participants. This activity was completed in two-hour blocks and provides students with information about TTD, college prep courses, goal setting, and career exploration. The ultimate goal of this component is to lay the foundation for the remaining parts of the program. Once students have been exposed to the Outreach, the next step involves arranging a visitation to the university. The Visitation component involves a one-day trip to a college campus where youth are exposed to college life, the admissions process, and currently enrolled college students. Students are given the opportunity to visit departments on campus and gain more information on various fields of study and possible career paths. This component of the program is limited to fifty per visitation group.

Upon completion of the visit, students are given the opportunity to become a TTD Rising Star via an application process. Rising Stars was the ongoing continuous component that took place from August through April and involved monthly Saturday workshops and seminars. Workshop topics were divided into three categories: academic, self-developmental, and cultural. Academic topics included test-taking strategies, study skills, and time management, while developmental topics included, self-esteem building, managing peer pressure, and teen violence. The cultural element provided students with various information in order to help them develop an appreciation of different cultures and traditions. For example they would get local activist groups such as the NAACP to come and speak to students about their work. The goal of the Rising Stars component was to help students develop and fine tune skills that will be essential to their educational

success. This particular program component was the focus of this study because it offered the opportunity to observe program activity over time. The nature of Rising Stars Workshops will be discussed in more later in this chapter. The last component, summer residency, was a four-day live-in experience where youth spent time on the campus and gained hands on exposure to college type courses and residence life. During this time students are required to take classes and workshops and are provide opportunities to network with peers. The primary objective of this component is to tie in many of the academic and social concepts discussed throughout the year. Students are provided opportunities to practice skills such as time management (i.e. getting to class on time) and peer mediation (i.e. interacting with peers in group activities) during their stay on campus

In addition to programmatic artifacts specific to this TTD site, the state provides general information about statewide TTD programs to citizens with a descriptive summary of the program, its' mission, and it's function. As listed on the state government website the information is as follows:

The TTD (Psuedonym) Program was created by the Michigan State Legislature in 1986 as part of the larger Truth • Tubman • Douglas Initiative. The legislative intent is to stem the downward spiral of college graduation rates for students underrepresented in postsecondary education. Michigan's Truth • Tubman • Douglas College Day Programs introduce schoolchildren underrepresented in postsecondary education to the potential of a college education. Although there have been improvements in the access, retention and graduation rates of these students, they have not achieved parity in graduation rates compared to their share of the state's population.

The TTD Program mission is to provide an opportunity for these students to discover first hand the potential of a college education and to expose students to the information, knowledge and skills they need to prepare themselves for college entry and success. University-based College Day programs focus on serving all students in the 30 public school districts,

public school academies and charter schools with the highest percentage of target students as reported by the Michigan Department of Education.

The Truth • Tubman • Douglass Initiative provides oversight and technical assistance to the College Day programs. Twice per year, the Truth • Tubman • Douglas Initiative hosts statewide meetings of College Day Coordinators to provide opportunities for programs to share successful efforts, keep abreast of educational reform and to provide useful suggestions for program improvement. TTD Program coordinators and their colleagues at the university also are invited and encouraged to attend other Truth • Tubman • Douglas Initiative -sponsored activities, such as the “Equity in the Classroom” conference held annually.

#### **TTD: AS ARTICULATED**

Academic programs on paper are not always the programs that exist and function.

As getting the reader one step closer to a description of the authentic program and its function, I present data gathered from staff interviews. Staff offered additional insight about the goals, objectives, and nature of TTD program practice. Three of the four staff members were interviewed; the Project Director, Assistant Project Director, and one of the two Program Coordinators. An in depth coding scheme yielded two major ways staff discussed the program. First, they described the program from a descriptive and functional viewpoint, giving an account of the role they played and the academic and social needs of the students they served. Second, staff members discussed what they perceived to be the major goals of the program. These goals included; to provide networking opportunities for students and parents, to create a family oriented environment, to provide exposure to college and university life, to instill a sense confidence in students, and to promote self-awareness and acceptance through the celebration and acknowledgement of student’s culture. This section will highlight all of these themes by illuminating units of data that align with each.



## Description of Staff Roles and Students

Program staff described what their roles were in relation to the function of the program as well as how they tried to personally transfer the goals and objectives. All three staff interviewed agreed that due to small staff numbers and the nature of the work they do, the program was a collaborative effort. They all work together to make sure that activities, workshops, and programs are carried through successfully. When asked about the organization and function of the staff, Dr.S, the program director said,

“We all like have a different emphasis area here based on the notion that we have a very small staff, and so small staffs mean that we have to come together, the one thing that I looked for in staff members when I hired them were people who one, thought outside the box, who were creative, who were highly motivated , and who were able to think on their feet and on their own.”

This suggests that program staff saw themselves as part of a team that came together to collectively implement the program and accomplish task as they emerged. In addition to working collaboratively, staff members reported also being designated certain components to work on individually. Martin, the assistant program director, responded, “We have probably in the last eight years broken the program down in components and so everybody is in charge of a component...” He goes on to say,

“Well everybody has a different aspect. Joanne is the idealist, she has many great ideas, delusions of grandeur in some places, um Dr.S is the person that looks at some of the studies and some of the current trends, me I’m the devil’s advocate, Sam tends to be pretty creative and we all sit down and try to hash things out.”

Staff members were asked directly about how, given their role in the program they personally worked to transfer goals and objectives to students. The responses included sharing personal stories with students in an effort to establish a trust and

connections, and memorizing student names so that they felt cared for and understood.

Sonia said,

“I wasn’t ashamed, I wasn’t afraid to say you know my mom was on welfare, my mom was on food stamps, at the time as a kid I was embarrassed by it you know that as a kid you know what I mean you don’t understand that until you are a lot older. And so I found it very easy for me to talk about it. You know my father left, so you know I felt that it was very easy for me to tell my story, and I felt like when I told my story, that made the kids comfortable enough to say well this is what I’ve been through as opposed to not talking to anybody or feeling like they couldn’t speak to anybody and that’s what I did.”

Sonia’s use of sharing her life experiences is similar to what Gill(2000) calls life histories. According to the literature on educating and teaching students of color, this would be considered a culturally responsive practice. Anderson (1988), discussed the use of shared narratives in facilitating achievement for African American students in the segregated south. Life histories, whether spoken or written, are helpful because they contain not only reflections on educational experiences, but also indications of the cultural context in which learning and teaching take place (Leavitt, 1994). Although, TTD is not a traditional school setting or classroom, it seems that this type of shared story telling is consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning in that we are able to see through Sonia’s use of shared stories, a way in which meaning is constructed around building trust and communal relationships. Further, in regards to how he personally tried to accomplish the goal of building relationships with the students, Martin said,

“I memorize all the kids name, know something personal about them, find out things that they’re interested in and try to link them up with other people who have similar interests. I just want them to know that nobody

makes it alone. Everybody needs some help, everybody needs some support.”

His notion of connecting students to a support network speaks to the extent to which TTD in practice was more of a communal setting. This concept will be discussed later in relation to the goal of creating a family based setting. It is important to note, that in addition to seeing this as a major goal and objective in and of itself, family connectedness was a vehicle and framework through which staff members worked to carry out other programmatic goals and objectives. The creation of a family based setting was only introduced in interviews and conversations with staff and although central, was not indicated in written materials and program artifacts.

In addition to discussing their roles in enacting goals and objectives, staff members also described the population of students they served in relation to what they felt their primary needs were. These needs were exposure to campus life, more attention, developing communication and public speaking skills, as well as writing skills. Staff reported that they had observed many of the students entering into the program not being academically prepared to make plans to attend college and be successful academically. Specifically, Dr.S said, “The issue was we were seeing students coming in who were not academically prepared. Staff recognizing and acknowledging the needs of students and seeing as a primary goal to expose to them to college life intersected with the program documents and artifacts. The written material put forth the exposure to college as one of the primary goals.

One of the things is I recognized was that they were coming in with very little skill and exposure to college.” Sonia further states, “Academics, well I think a lot of times these students need tutoring they need the extra time, they need the extra attention.”

While the needs of students are discussed in relationship to the areas where they are lacking, Martin, contends that the reason the TTD program is so important is that it targets youth who are “middle of the road”, students who are not on the furthest end of the spectrum, but not completely where they should be. She felt that TTD helped to provide services to students who were not high performers, but those who would be considered average. This is consistent with not only the demographic description of students attending academic outreach programs as discussed by Tierney (2004), but also what their primary needs are. According to Tierney’s theory, these programs work as academic triages, primarily tending to the needs of African American and Latino students who despite their average abilities, still lack necessary skills, attention, and resources to be successful.

#### Discussion of Goals

The first goal of TTD discussed by staff is to expose students to aspects of college life and provide them with opportunities to explore what is possible through a college education. In many ways they felt this was the most significant goal of the program. When asked specifically what he considered to be the most important goal of TTD, Martin responded by saying, “In my view the biggest goal that we accomplish is we expose kids to post secondary education. I mean that’s the biggest thing.” Given that many of the students served do not have family members or parents who have attended college, staff saw as a primary goal for the program to stand in the gap and provide experiences that mirror what it would be like to be a college student. Dr.S said,

“What we’re designed to do is to assist students to look at the opportunities that are available through a college education. And so our primary role is to provide students the opportunities to see role models,

visit campus, through talking, through motivational exercises, helps students to realize what is out there and what is available.”

Not only was this goal consistent with the program artifacts, but staff members seemed to see this as a central and guiding focus of the work they engage in with the program. Staff members saw this as a mechanism by which students who wouldn't normally have a chance to experience college first hand, could have a simulated college experience.

Another primary goal of TTD as articulated by the staff was working to instill confidence in students by having high expectations for their success. Members of the staff felt that it was a necessary and critical element of their work was to make sure that students in the program understood that they were capable of not only academic achievement, but also of obtaining a post-secondary education. In order to help students to understand this, they themselves had high expectations of the students and made that known whenever possible. They especially wanted students to understand that they as individuals had something to contribute to both their communities and to the larger society. They held high expectations for students' success. While high expectations for success were not a formal piece of the program curriculum, it was implemented explicitly through program staff's speeches, activities, and interactions with the students. Ultimately, high expectations of students were inherently a part of the program's culture. Sonia said,

“...whether it's rising stars, whether it's visitation, or outreach, whatever it is, we push so hard that idea that yes you can go to college and we don't just say it we do it, like you know all of our focuses for Saturday programs, whether it's academics, time management, learning skills, we're showing you how to do it.”

These types of expectations are similar to the culturally responsive pedagogy as discussed by (Irvine and Armento, 2001; Gay, 2000; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rist, 1971; Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Effective and consistent communication of high expectation helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1970). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful. Ladson-Billings (1994) asserts that this type of culturally responsive practice is especially significant for African American students. She states, “When students are treated as competent, they are likely to demonstrate competence. Culturally responsive teaching methods do not suggest to students that they are incapable of learning. (p. 123)” This type of philosophy concerning the ways in which we educate and interact with youth is central to the practice of affirming and validating who they are.

This point is further explicated in the following response from Martin,

“I believe that everybody has gifts and I think a lot of people don’t focus on that. They don’t give themselves credit. One of the things that we used to say when I first started is we take kids from where they’re at and we try to elevate them to where we want them to be. You need somebody to help you understand that and help you find out what your gift and your talent is.”

Martin is emphasizing here not only that children have talents that are beneficial, but that he sees as a task of the program staff to push students toward acknowledging those gifts in order to help them accomplish goals.

Along with having high expectations for student’s success, program staff also saw as a central goal of TTD to aid students in thinking about their cultural identity. The first perspective dealt with helping students to understand their self worth, particularly in

relation to the history and heritage of other African American figures. When asked how they specifically tried to develop positive cultural identities in students, Dr.S responded,

“Cultural day always stands out for me because it gives me an opportunity to teach children about the rich heritage that they have. Even if they’re in foster care, there’s a lil something about them that makes them special and so we get an opportunity to talk about that. We also get an opportunity to talk about a sense of history, if they’re not getting it at home or wherever they might live we’re giving them that at that point.”

Dr.S references a Saturday that is set aside during Rising Stars to focus on aspects of culture by celebrating the accomplishments and achievements of local and national people of color and to highlight the history of African American, Hispanic, and Native American cultures. As highlighted previously in the program artifacts, the staff engaged in practices and plan activities that were aimed at enhancing the cultural knowledge and perspective of student participants and even more so their self worth. Martin corroborates this when he said, “We really spend a lot of time especially over the summer trying to get them on a positive note and getting them to realize what they’re going to be up against as they get older. So we talk about how you gotta be yourself. I try to get kids to understand their worth.”

Taking this notion a step further, Dr. S, speaks of staff’s need to prepare students to be the next generation of leaders for the black community. Although the program provided services to Mexican and Native American, Dr. S was African American and often spoke from that cultural perspective. This does not however narrow the focus of TTD to an African American focus. She said, “it’s about my belief in these students to know that yes however we cook the cookie, you are the next generation and I’m not going to be here forever...”

A fourth goal of TTD as expressed by program staff was to create a family oriented space within the program and among participants. They report doing this by creating a sense of inclusion, social responsibility, networking, and shared experiences among all participating members. Staff members were asked about their general feelings about the notion of the TTD family and their responses revealed not only how they conceptualized this element, but also how they attempted to build and maintain this as a central function of the program. Martin revealed that he originally initiated this concept of family based on his own personal experiences and felt that it would be a significant concept in order to build relationships and set the tone among staff and participants.

“Yeah. I made it that way. I’m the one who came up with that idea. The reason why is kind of like my own personal thing. I was raised by my mom and I have a sister and she taught us that you know you meet a lot of people in your travels but you only have one family and family is not necessarily blood relatives, I mean that is your family but not necessarily, so family more or less comes down to who you choose and who has your back and with our staff I always tried to push that in terms of staff training, get people together and it would improve the way that they dealt with the kids and so after that we just kind of pushed it on down to the kids and it has caught on.”

Martin’s concept of family resonates with definitions and ideas of “fictive kinship” discussed by researchers across multiple disciplines. Ebaugh and Currey (2000) define fictive kinship as relationships that are based not on blood ties, but rather religious ritual or close friendships. Fordham and Ogbu (1986), discussed this concept in relation to African American students deciding not to engage academically in an attempt to maintain ties to a fictive kinship with other African American peers, and also to avoid acting white. Unlike Ogbu and Fordham who suggest that fictive kinship leads to a collective identity that can negatively impact schooling outcomes of children of color, the responses



of staff members suggest that they are facilitating these connections as a social network to support and encourage academic achievement. In discussing how the notion of family is significant, Martin goes on to say,

“I think first and foremost, the biggest thing that they need is to know that somebody cares, and that’s where I think our success lies. You know I think we need to find a way to bottle that because I think that’s why most of these people come, they feel included and like we care. It’s almost like a group mentality like oh I’m apart of this. We give these kids a membership card which has absolutely no value and they carry these cards with them every where they go.”

This response speaks to not only how and why a sense of family within this context is significant but how the program is utilizing membership cards as a way to transfer connectedness to the participants. Sonia also gives an example of how the staff work to build this type of community when she states, “I think here with TTD this is what we do, you know our job is to bond and connect with these kids even if it has to be on an individual basis, you know we will make the time, this is what we do.” This evidence shows that within TTD, staff are working to develop social connections with students by making efforts to engage with them on a more personal and individual level and see this as an essential component of the work they do within the program. Dr.S. when describing her take on what family meant for TTD, supported this view and pointed to how students and participants respond to this element. She commented,

“The camaraderie that we have not just among the staff but among the participants and the staff’s enthusiasm as they give back to these students, and I think students feel like the staff really cares about them and they see them as individuals not just a group of students, but they see them as individuals, and I think students get that and I think that’s what keeps them coming back.”

In connecting the concept of family and its significance to the historical experiences of African Americans, Dr.S also explains through a very poignant example of how creating the sense of kinship and extended family ties has been prevalent and significant for African Americans, due to the need to survive socially. She said,

“You know a long time ago we weren’t even allowed to read, there’s a wonderful Disney picture called Night John, it was about a slave that was brought to the plantation and it really showed how a little slave girl learned how to read. Do you know when they found out she learned how to read they sent her to another plantation? But Night John had taught her how to do it and he lost his fingers. You could get hung or get your fingers chopped off , or be sent away, and that’s why we have that long tradition of calling each other auntie, cousin, we never knew who they were, but you developed a family type structure in that cabin.”

Although this comment emerged from a discussion on the concept of family in TTD, it can also serve as evidence of the previously articulated goal of helping students to think about their cultural identity, by acknowledging the history and experiences of people of color. From this comment we are able to see what frames of reference this staff member may be using to one, make sense of program goals, and two to create relevant activities.

Overall, staff discussed four goals that they saw to be primary as well as ways that they personally tried to carry out these goals. These processes included exposing youth to the college experience, instilling confidence in students via high expectations for success, assisting students with developing positive cultural identities, and creating a family oriented environment and building a network among program participants.

### Program Weaknesses

In addition to staff discussing their roles, the needs of the student participants and program goals, they also highlighted areas where they considered the program to be weak and needed improvement. Two areas were reported by staff members as places were TTD

could improve; attitudes of staff and activity topics. In terms of attitudes of the staff, both Martin and Sonia indicated that there could be some improvements in the ways that staff members, particularly student staff members carried out their tasks. Sonia stated,

“Well I know that one thing is for sure as far as staffing with TTD, we tend to get very comfortable, and there have been people who have worked for us as far as student staff that are very comfortable with the job because yes they’re working with kids and yes all they have to do is interact with them but then they kind of just sit around.”

Martin responded similarly when he said, “In terms of staff , yeah we could improve on our staff. We’ve got an excellent group of people, I call it my biggest dysfunctional family. But, I think sometimes people forget why we’re here.” He too was referring to student staff members whose primary purpose in the program was to interact with participants and facilitate breakout session during Saturday workshops. Their role as observed will be discussed in further detail in the next section. We also see in Martin’s comment that, even when discussing improvements of the program, staff make reference to the family oriented space of which he sees all of them as member. In relation to topic subject and content, staff members reported that they felt some of the topics used were either outdated or not appropriate for the population of students they served. Sonia commented,

“Yeah you know a lot of the topics that we do are kind of old, or they’re outdated and they need to be updated, and we talk about that a lot, but we never do it. The kids I know get bored a lot of the times when they’re like didn’t we do this last year, didn’t we do that? So you know again in order to maintain that quality as a program I think we need to update a lot of our topics.”

The analysis of this comment revealed that this particular staff member, whose role is to coordinate program activity, not only points to limitations in the topics chosen

but also recognizes this as being a measure of quality in program functioning. Martin also discusses weaknesses in the topics and content. However, he addressed the appropriateness of topics for the population of students who attend the program. He contended that program topics are not substantive enough and that the ability of students to interpret certain types of information has been underestimated by the staff. To be sure, he stated,

“I would change a lot of the programs that we do for Rising Stars because sometimes we give them a little more fluff and I tell them all the time do not underestimate these kids. I think we even underestimate our kids sometimes so we give them this remedial stuff when we could be taking them to a whole other level.”

It is also important to note that while not mentioned by the other two staff members, one staff member also pointed to a desire to increase the frequency of Saturday workshops during the month as a way to reinforce ideas that are transferred to the students. She indicated that given more funding, she would definitely increase the monthly workshops and have two per month as opposed to one.

#### PROGRAM AS OBSERVED

The previous section discussed findings about the nature of program functioning and goals and objectives as articulated by staff members. This section will examine and highlight findings along this same continuum utilizing field notes of program activity that depict the program from an outsiders (me the researcher) view. Observing seven months of TTD's Rising Stars component (7 Saturday Workshops), provided an opportunity to examine in more detail the roles played by staff members and general function of this part of the program. This section will begin with a description of typical Saturday Workshop activities. Next, the roles of program staff during this activity will be

illuminated. Lastly, there will be a discussion on the major goals that were enacted. There were four different elements regarding program goals and function that were observed. These elements included, staff members focus on encouraging students to be community advocates and getting them to understand the nature of activism; helping students to understand who they were culturally, conveying to students their high expectations for their success, and reinforcing the use of family as a method for creating connectedness among participants. An emergent element only observed during Saturday workshops was the promotion of activism and advocacy as it relates to fighting injustice.

#### **Saturday Workshops: An Overview**

Each Saturday began at approximately 8:30 a.m. students and parents filed into to the lobby where they signed in, providing the program with attendance documentation to keep on file. Sonia and student mentors worked at the sign-in desk. The area around the sign-in desk often was the area where students would talk and congregate with friends and peers that they may have not seen since the last workshop, and parents also gathered in this area to network and talk with other parents. Here is often where parents learned about other programs for their children or about various events and supports in the community. This informal networking was a staple of every Saturday workshop and all of the parents seemed to enjoy this social interaction. Some parents dropped their students off while most remained for the entire workshop. It is important to note that not all students were escorted to the program by parents, some were brought by teachers and foster parents or on buses by other members of the community or program staff from organizations such as 4H and the Boys and Girls Club.

After signing in participants were then directed to the continental breakfast table and from there into the auditorium for the large group session. The large group session usually began somewhere between 9:00 and 9:15 a.m. Six of the seven large group sessions were facilitated by Dr. S. She would give the opening remarks and try to get the students and parents interested and involved with lively and interactive conversation. She would also say in a very loud voice, “wake it up”. DJ, one of the focal students described this as her “being passionate”. Dr. S took care of what she called “housekeeping” and this typically included reminding students and parents of new resources (scholarships, other university programs, organizations) that had been made available, announcing accomplishments and achievements of students, making sure everyone had signed in, and introducing the topic and any guest speakers for the day.

At five out of seven workshops observed, guest speakers were brought in to address the topic of the day. These speakers were community activists, (from the Mexican, Native and African American communities), a government official, and university administrators. The government official spoke about issues related to scholarships and state’s effort to make sure that universities and colleges around the state were representative of all populations and how they were committed to providing as much support as possible. University administrators spoke about the efforts happening at the university where the program was hosted and gave students and parents tips on the admissions process and programs that they could get involved in around campus. Student activist groups such as the NAACP youth division and university’s Latino student organization came during the Tribute to Rosa Parks Workshop and Cultural Day Workshop and spoke about issues of preserving heritage and becoming active in the fight

for justice. One guest speaker from the state police also came and spoke to the group about internet crimes. He advised both students and parents about the dangers of not being cautious on the internet and offered resources for them to utilize in putting safeguards in place. After “housekeeping” tasks had been completed and guest speakers spoke, JoMack, one of the program coordinators, would give a 15-20 minute overview of what participants would be focusing on in breakout sessions. Student mentors were called to the front of the auditorium and students would be informed of who to line up with based on their grade. The first workshop was broken into five sessions; 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, and parents. The remaining six workshops combined the high school grades into one session which resulted in a total of four sessions. On average there were approximately 50 to 60 students and 25-30 parents in each breakout session. There were always two student mentors assigned to each session.

Each group would go to their respective rooms and student facilitators would implement the planned activity with their respective groups. An example of one activity was the creation of Coat of Arms where students had to create their own individual coat of arms that represented who they were. Student mentors then gave students the opportunity to present them to the group. Another breakout activity involved students filling out a learning style questionnaire to determine what type of learner they were and how to formulate study habits based on that information. During the Career Day workshop students were given thirty minutes in the computer lab to search for careers they were interested in and then student mentors facilitated conversation around careers they found on the internet and what plans they would have to make in choosing those

particular career paths. During breakout sessions, most students were often disengaged and student mentors spent most of this time attempting to manage behavior. I mentioned this unit of observation in order to provide a comprehensive and authentic view of the social context that made of the Saturday workshops. Parents used time in their sessions to network and talk with each other about resources and new information they had gathered relating to scholarships and college. This session was always facilitated by Dr. S and Dr. Taylor (a university faculty member who worked closely with the program). Saturday workshops concluded as each session was released in intervals for lunch. Program staff, students, parents, community members, and guest speakers also used lunch time as an opportunity to network.

#### Staff Roles Enacted

Field notes of program activity indicated the active role of staff members. Staff members' activity was coded and revealed four major categories of engagement. The first category was *speaking* and included instances where staff members served as speakers to the large group (students, parents, student mentors, guests) in the auditorium where participants convened. The second category was *interacting* and involved all instances where staff members were observed having conversations or brief exchanges with students and parents beyond the large group, either on an individual level or small group (2 or 3). A third category was *managing* and referred to all occurrences where staff members were engaged in actions that involved the identification of issues and problems and finding solutions. This consisted of reprimanding students, getting students and parents signed in, handling emergent issues with facility staff (meal tickets, unlocking breakout session rooms, directing student mentors, making copies of program materials, etc.). The fourth



category, *supporting* was mainly limited to student mentors and involved all interactions that occurred during break-out sessions. This included asking questions, providing one on one help with projects and assignments, and answering student questions.

In regards to the roles that staff members played in the implementation of Saturday Workshops, Dr. S primarily served in the speaker capacity and worked mostly with the parents. She also had many informal interactions with students during sign-in time and lunch. Sonia organized the sign-in materials and managed student mentors. Most of their questions and concerns were addressed to her. Martin was involved in all aspects of the implementation. He spent a majority of his time on Saturdays interacting with the students and parents. As he articulated himself, he wanted to get to know all of the participants on an individual level and make them feel like a valuable part of the program and to let them know that they cared. Martin was observed on several different occasions doing this. On one particular occasion Martin came into the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade breakout session and set at the table with a group of boys and spent about twenty minutes asking them about what they wanted to be when they grew up, where they went to school, their brothers and sisters, what sports they like, among other things.

Student mentors also played a major role in the implementation of the workshops. They were all undergraduate students attending the university where the program was hosted. There were a total of nine mentors, four males and five females. Seven were African American, one was White, and one was Native American. They were responsible for facilitating break out sessions and establishing relationships with and being role models to the students. They helped with various other tasks during the workshops and a

couple of them did power point presentations in the large group session on the legacy of Native Americans and being confident about who you are.

### Goals Enacted

In addition to general implementation components of the Saturday workshops, four main goals were observed being enacted. Three goals were articulated by staff: creating family connectedness, promoting high expectations for success, and developing positive cultural identity. The fourth goal, activism and advocacy was apparent only in the implementation and practice of the workshops.

### Family Connectedness

Across program activities and interactions with students, there was a salient theme of “We are family.” In addition to it being a staple slogan of the annual t-shirt design, “(Continuing the Family Legacy)” and program artifacts, it was also enacted within the context of the Saturday Workshops. This enactment was not part of specific activities, but did emerge within staff statements to students. During the kick-off workshop of the year the project director said, “TTD is you and without you there is no TTD” There was something very tangible and beneficial in the creation of “we” versus me in creating connectedness among this group. The staff understood that many of the students served by this program came from backgrounds where positive support may have been minimal, and therefore they worked toward creating an environment that promoted unity and togetherness. One program staff member said, “Who’s going to show you love? I will.” This type of language alluded to a sense of trust and reassurance that all participants (staff, students, and parents) would look out for the best interest of the group. Additionally, it promoted a context of connectedness and shared ideology concerning the

goals and objectives. All members of the “family” understood the goals TTD was attempting to accomplish and shared their commitment to achieving the desired end.

During a presentation about academic achievement, a female youth mentor of the program stated, “Take responsibility and know that there are always people looking up to you.” This notion of social responsibility builds a foundation for participants feeling a part of an effort beyond themselves. This type of accountability has the potential to make students more aware and conscious of the decisions that they make, both academically and socially. When asked informally during a workshop about what it meant to be a TTD participant, the program coordinator responded,

“I look at these kids and I think to myself , I wish I had been TTD, I wish I could go back and say I’m TTD alumni and I’m working for the program now you know but a lot...I think it’s a lot of responsibility, because as a TTD participant I don’t think they want to let TTD down.”

From this statement, we not only see that there may be a shared sense of responsibility and accountability, there is also evidence of a certain connection around what it means to be a member of TTD. Therefore, membership serves as source of bonding and unity among the students.

A key indicator of the creation of connectedness within this program is the use of “we”. Program staff consistently used the term “we” in their language when they addressed parents and students. During a Saturday workshop, titled, ‘Celebrating our Victory’ [a celebration for receiving more operational funding for the year], one of the program advisors shouted, “Are we going to make it? Yes we are!”. Written on the auditorium white board were huge letters that read “We are TTD”. Within this context the word ‘we’ takes on a more substantive and active form and serves as a source of group connectedness. There was a sense of collective struggle, collective achievement,

and collective concern. If one student in the program received a scholarship, Dr. S. would announce to the group as “we have another scholarship folks” and then proceed to say the name of the student who received it. A sense of “we” held more credence in this environment that “me” or “I”.

### Positive Cultural Identity

While the notion of family connectedness was a hallmark of TTD, one of the most prominent elements of program practice was the cultivation of a positive sense of self as African Americans, and students of color. Not only was this weaved throughout the various elements of practice such as the recognition of accomplishments, or bringing in prominent African American speakers from the local community , but an entire Saturday workshop, titled “Cultural Day”, was used to facilitate understanding around issues of culture and identity. It is important to note that this workshop took place immediately following the deaths of Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, so there were many references made to “knowing who you are” in relation to the accomplishments of these notable African American figures. The primary activities were directed toward helping students acquire a positive cultural self concept.

One activity involved the creation of the Coat of Arms. During a breakout session, students were asked to create a coat of arms as a symbol to serve as a representation of who they were. Drawn on the white board was a shield divided into six sections and each section had a label, Favorite Game or Sport, Dream Job, Three Wishes, Favorite Food, Ethnicity, Favorite School Subject. Each student in the session was given a blank sheet of 11x14 paper, pencils, and markers and told to create their own personal coat of arms. One of the female program mentors explained the activity to the group and

said that a long time ago when families and cities went to war with one another they would use the coat of arms to let their opponents know who they were fighting. “This [coat of ] arms should represent who you are so that without you saying anything people know immediately who you are.” She went on to say it should also be something that you “wear with great pride.” The purpose of this activity was to get students thinking not only about who they were in terms of interests and likes, but to also be proud of the characteristics that made them unique including their ethnicity.

The second activity was a tribute to Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King. The keynote speaker (university administrator), during this workshop continually pointed to the need for students to identify with great leaders of their community and to know that they too could impact their community. He said,

“With the passing of these great women, the chapter of the civil rights era is coming to a close, but it ain’t over, cause I know you all have the same ability that they had...so stand up and get going.”

The project director reinforces this point when she says, “You are next after Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez, and others. We need you future leaders today.” So through these statements staff members attempted to go beyond providing positive cultural models of success and invoke a sense of pride that the students too possess the same positive qualities that should be acknowledged and valued. One male student mentor told his ninth grade breakout session, “Value yourselves and what you do.” Another female student mentor in her breakout session gave her eighth graders the three A’s; Assure: Be Confident in Yourself and what you have to offer, Alert: Don’t be afraid to Let Others know about it, Activate: Voice yourself through speeches, boycotts, and letters. According to Youniss (2002), identity is a social and collective process, which

brings order to an individual's life and enables them to experience themselves as a part of something bigger. Identity allows different levels of transcendence and an experience of connectedness to local groups, life style patterns, movements, religions, and countries (Youniss, 2002). Many of the TTD's program ideas and activities were consistent with this conceptualization for thinking about developing positive sense identity, particularly around cultural elements. As shown, the elements of these two activities point to the program's effort to incorporate into their curriculum a mechanism that develops positive cultural identity among the students.

### High Expectations of Success

Just as students were developing positive cultural identities through learning about the successes of other African American models, the program also relayed through their practices high expectations of success. While high expectations for success were not a formal piece of the program curriculum, it was rather implemented explicitly through program staff's speeches, activities, and interactions with the students. In an interview the program director said,

"If I represent maybe a structure that they may not have at home that is wonderful but the thing that I always try and tell students, I try not to get down too hard on them but sometimes you just have to be really blunt with students like this is my house and there are rules and expectations in my house."

Here, the project director is voiced how she attempted to run the program and further how she gets students to understand that in TTD, there will be certain expectations. She opened one of the Saturday workshops by asking the group "What are we about"? A young boy (who looked to be a 5th or 6th grader) stood up and said "We are about learning and going to college." This notion of knowing "what we are about" is

connected not only to students striving toward success but also staff attempting to cultivate a sense of identity around college attainment and learning. A female guest speaker (state official) who works closely with the program, during the large group session of the same workshop said to the group,

“You are here because you are our future and we are here because we want you to be ready” She looks out at the group and she says, “There is greatness in this room, If you know where it is, stand”.

During this exchange boys and girls began to stand all over the auditorium, when she asked again, “Where is it?” All of students shouted, “In us!” This type of dialogue and interaction was a staple of all seven workshops. While the students were standing she went on to have them repeat, “If I believe, I can achieve!” Staff tried to reiterate to the students and the parents that they were already equipped with the necessary qualities to be great and do great things. It is important to note that within this context the term “great” can be equated to college attainment as the primary goal of this program is to get students on track for post secondary education. The idea that greatness was something that the students inherently have, transfers the staff’s expectations of what they can do and may be helping the students feel confident about what they are capable of. Martin, the assistant program director, in his talk with students about their abilities during the Technology workshop said, “Don’t let anyone tell you that you won’t succeed, there will be challenges, but we all have it in us to overcome them and continue on our path.” As noted previously, this concept of high expectations is similar to what Hilliard ( 2003), Delpit (1995), and Ladson Billings 1994) all highlight as culturally responsive pedagogy. To be sure, this type of practice can be beneficial for all students, but it specifically helps to dismantle the idea that some students because of their race, class, or cultural

background are destined to fail. African American students may be particularly aided by having a counter narrative that supports their success as opposed to highlighting their failures.

Because of high expectations of greatness and success there is a collective goal among members of TTD to strive toward fulfilling their potential. Evidence of this construct can also be seen in one of the staff member's announcement of the program's book reading competition. She says, "There will be a prize for all of you who can read ten books by May. Think you can do that? I know you can". Again, this is an example of the staff's belief in what the students can do.

High expectations were also seen through the programmatic practice of recognizing accomplishments. This was a consistent agenda item at every Saturday Workshop. During one session, the project director reminded the students to bring in all of their awards so that they could be recognized. She told them that nothing was too small and because they had high expectations of all their students, she would expect to see a lot of different accomplishments. All of these practices and interactions support the assertion that this program cultivates a culture of high expectations for its students thereby giving affirmation of who they are and what they are capable of as students.

#### Activism

Practices related to promoting activism among TTD participants were observed in at least three Saturday workshops. Program staff and guest speakers emphasized to both students and parents the need for their involvement making changes in their communities and the importance of them making their voices heard. During the kick-off workshop youth members of the state National Association for the Advancement of Colored People



(NAACP) came and spoke to the students. They provided a history of the organization and encouraged both parents and students to become members. During their talk with the group that highlighted the work of Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth, both activist in the struggle for human and civil rights. One of the speakers, said to the group, “ Rosa Parks sat down so that all of us could sit down, and that’s what activism is all about, putting in the work so that everyone can prosper.” The TTD staff and participants applauded this comment. Another guest speaker from the state department of Economic Labor, in her speech to the group said, “Now that she’s [Rosa Parks] is gone, who will take up the charge?” This was a challenge that this speaker, who had substantial contact with the program and had spent years working with the program informally, was making to the students. In another workshop, a Native American student mentor gave a presentation on the history of Native Americans and their struggle for land and recognition in American society. This was another instance of the program’s efforts to one, develop a positive sense of cultural identity among its’ participants, and two to inspire them to be active around issues that were relevant to them.

Three guest speakers during the tribute to Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King addressed three different questions (also stipulated in the workshop program): (1) Can we make a difference in the community, (2) can I stand up for what I believe, and (3) what is a leader? Each speaker posed these questions to the large group and spoke about issues related to the history of civil rights, the war in Iraq, and current affirmative action policies. During this same workshop, Dr.S, read aloud a famous statement by Martin Niemoeller, titled “Thoughts to Ponder” that was also printed on the workshop agenda

‘In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t Jewish. Then they came for the trade unionist, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was Protestant. Then they came for the homosexuals, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t homosexual. Then they came for me, and by that time there was not one left to speak for me.’

She went on to emphasize to the group the importance of them using their voices to “not be afraid to speak out” when they witnessed something that wasn’t in the best interests of themselves or their communities. All of the previous comments and ideas articulated by the staff and others, was evidence of the programs’ push to get students to think about the significance of advocacy and activism. This is similar to Singer and Shangoury (2005) discussion on the ways that students of diverse backgrounds are encouraged to ask critical questions, be informed about social injustice, support one another, and to work toward positive social change. This notion is also illuminated by Freire (1993) and Morrell (2002) in their discussion of teaching youth to be critical thinkers and challenge ideas and institutions that work to keep oppress some while elevating others.

## Summary

To address the research question concerning the goals and objectives of the program as well as its’ structure and function, an analyses of program artifacts, focal interviews with staff, and field notes from program activity yielded data on the nature of the program as written, as articulated, and as observed. Program artifacts revealed that the primary goal of TTD was to prepare students for enrollment in post-secondary education by providing them with exposure to and information on the college admissions process, financial aid and other pertinent resources. In alignment with the program artifacts, staff

expressed that the goals and function of the program were centered around exposure to the college and university system through campus visits and exposure to college life. However, in addition to this goal, staff members emphasized three additional goals; to promote high expectations for student success, to assist students in developing a positive cultural identities, and to build a family oriented space. Staff members also expressed ways that they personally tried to transfer these goals and the roles they played in the program in general. Data collected from observing program activity revealed more detailed information about how the nature of program activity (Saturday Workshops), the roles played by staff and most importantly areas and topics that were most frequently promoted. Field notes revealed that consistent with elements articulated by staff, creating a family oriented space, promoting high expectations of students, and developing positive cultural identity among participants were focal goals of TTD. As observed, promoting activism and advocacy among participants was also a central theme. This theme emerged only in the observation of program activities and was not present in the program's written documentation or in interviews with staff members.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of goals and objectives as well as general descriptive information on the structure and function of TTD, so that the forthcoming discussion on student perspectives can be situated and put into context. The next chapter will focus on student views of their participation in TTD and how they made sense of the goals and objectives mentioned above as well other programmatic elements. In this chapter we will see how the four focal students responded to goals and objectives and various practices in the program. They will speak to the ways the program has helped them to think about who they are culturally, the meaning of family connectedness, the

acquisition of academic skills, the significance of African American achievement, planning for the future, high expectations for their success.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THEIR VOICES

*“It makes me feel good that everyone there is trying to reach their goals and reach where they can be and reach places where they never thought they could reach before because of where they were raised.” ~Charles, Student Interview #2, Fall 2006*

In the previous chapter, the goals of the TTD program and as the nature of program activities were discussed. Using the previous analysis as a frame, this chapter will discuss student perspectives in relation to their experiences in and with the program. Student perspectives about their experiences in the program were examined to shed light on the ways the program was influences their academic and social development. It addresses the research questions of (1) What are student’s general perspectives of the program and (2) how do students see the program as contributing to their academic and social development? The first section provides a conceptual definition of academic and social development. The remaining sections present assertions from analysis of student perspectives. The assertions are related to the general themes of; acquisition of academic skills, participating in a family oriented space, future academic planning, the development of positive cultural identities, and responses to programs high expectations. This chapter will conclude with a summary of all six assertions as expressed by student views.

Throughout data collection and analysis, particularly during the first and second round of interviews, research questions were refined to go beyond attempting to understand students likes and dislikes (research question #4) but to examine how they made sense of the resources and supports that were important to them (research questions #5 and 6). Further, I wanted to assess how students articulated the ways that the program

had influenced or impacted who they were as African American students. As a result, the analysis of data from student interviews yielded eleven themes; (1) advocacy and activism, (2) cultural identity, (3) the development of academic skills, (4) society's perception of black males, (5) the importance of African American student achievement, (6) program staff's high expectations, (7) connectedness to staff as family, (8) leadership, (9) articulation of adolescents needs, (10) definitions of success, and (11) future planning. All of these themes spoke to the ways in which Keith, Jamal, Charles, and Eric voiced their perspectives on their experience in and with the TTD program. The constant comparative method was used to analyze all three round of interviews in an effort determine which themes were more corroborated across all four participants. As a result, only six emerged as central constructs to understanding and illuminating their voice. These themes were more consistent and supported by all four boys. Consistency and salience were determined by both the number of times units of data appeared in transcripts and the similarity in content throughout. The following table displays these six themes and with the corresponding assertions that guide this narrative account.

Table 3.

Themes and Guiding Assertions

Theme	Assertion
Family Connection: Fictive Kinship	Students expressed a sense of belonging to a <i>family</i> and viewed this as being a significant component of the program for them.
Acquisition of Academic Skills	Students pointed to learning academic <i>skills</i> in the program as being a primary way the program contributed to their academic lives.
Cultural Identity Development	Students saw the program as helping them to develop and construct identities related to their <i>culture and heritage</i> as African Americans
Significance of African American Achievement	Students connected their achievement goals to the need to dispel <i>negative stereotypes</i> about African American
Responses to High Expectations for Success	Students responded positively and were driven by staff <i>high expectations</i> for their success
Future Planning/Goal Setting	Students articulated that the program had helped them to think about their futures and <i>start preparing</i> for post-secondary education and possible career paths.

The themes of family connection and the acquisition of academic skills themes will be discussed first as they were reported by students as being the components of TTD that were most significant for them. These two themes emerged as more central than the other four themes because when boys were asked what elements of the program were important to them, connection to family and learning academic skills were consistently cited by all four boys. The analysis of ethnic identity development will be highlighted next as this was one of the most salient ways students expressed who they were in relation to the program. Significance of African American student achievement and responses to high expectations for success were related to how students thought about

their ethnic identity, so they will follow next. It is my interpretive stance that future planning and goal setting is the culminating outcome present in student experiences in the program, not only because this is one of the major objectives of the program, but because this ideology has the potential to transfer longitudinally as students negotiate their academic lives beyond the program. Therefore, it will be discussed last.

#### Academic and Social Development

In thinking about how these six constructs represent the academic and social development of the students, a clear definition of how I conceptualized them as academic, social, or both is necessary. Family connectedness in the literature is often discussed in the field of sociology as a social construct. In particular, it is grounded in work by McAdoo (1978), Fordham (1983), and Ogbu's (1998) research on African American student and families. This line of research uses the term "fictive kinship" to describe communal, support networking relationships among non-related African Americans that exist because of their shared heritage, history, and social experiences. "Fictive kinship" refers to non blood ties voluntarily instituted by those who share similar cultural, economic, or geographical boundaries. Despite the social nature of the family connectedness, this study will discuss this concept as both social and academic because of how it functions within the context of TTD, an academic enrichment program. The acquisition of academic skills will clearly be regarded as associated with academic development as it points to the students learning strategies to assist with accomplishing academic tasks in school.

Like family connectedness, identity is a term whose meaning is flexible given the context and social space. However, similar to this study, the concept of ethnic identity



has often been used in educational research to explain the academic experiences, academic resistance, and academic incongruence of students of color (Davidson, 1996; Phelan, Davidson and Yu, 1996; Ogbu, 1987; Fordam, 1996; Spindler and Spindler, 1993). All of the constructs in theory are academically based, while others can be situated within a more social view. Additionally, the significance of African American student achievement, responses to high expectations, and future planning will all be operationalized in the forthcoming results, as related to academic development because of their connection to academic characteristics such as goal orientation and expectancy effect.

#### Family Connection: We are Family

Students expressed a sense of belonging to TTD as a fictive family and viewed this as being a significant component of the program for them. Keith, Jamal, Charles, and Eric responded to this element of connectedness in similar ways and all pointed to this as being a primary reason they continue to be involved. When asked what he liked or enjoyed most about FLP, Jamal pointed to his sense of belongingness and relationships within this space. He said, "It's a very family-based setting; they want you to feel comfortable and they allow you to do that." When probed further on what specific things he was referring to, he said, "Like the speakers they have. They have good things to say and they present themselves in a way that you think you can connect with them."

When Charles was asked what he thought the concept of FLP as family meant, he responded, "I think that it mean that the counselors and teachers, they do a good job of establishing themselves to the students and helping them out so it's like one big family,

how they help each other out.” Charles went on to explain how and why members of FLP were connected as a group, he said,

“I do like, like when Dr. S gets up, everybody knows her and everybody likes her a lot and when she’s absent pretty much it’s not the same without her so I think that we are connected.”

Even though Charles pointed to the physical absence of Dr. S, the program director, as being an example of how he feels connected, it is important to note that this also speaks to a sense of bonding that he shares with program staff. This can also be seen through Keith’s statement, “The family part, it just means that we’re together united.” He went on to say, “Yeah, it’s important because if people don’t think you’re family, you don’t need to be there.” Here we see that in addition to Keith’s understanding what it means to be a part of the FLP family, he also points to it as being a critical requirement for participation. Charles also indicated in his discussion that if it wasn’t for the “family atmosphere” it would be harder to understand the staff and it makes him want to “come back every time.” Similar to Keith and Charles, Eric also expressed views related to what his notion of FLP family meant. He said, “I feel good because they treat me like I’m their own son and they don’t like push me away or like say here you need to take care of this kid, if they have the time they do it”. When probed further and asked if he thought this type of connection was important, he said, “...family you know, that helps me out in school, plus that could probably help me out when I’m trying to go to college and high school.” This is evidence that connections can be made between what happens socially in their lives and what happens academically. Having positive social supports in place can influence the ways that students engage with and perform in school. Eric corroborated this point when he articulated,

“I feel a connection because the staff is very welcoming. They’re trying to get you to become a part of this family and just the way they have the program set up they want you to feel a part of a group that you can come to.”

Students expressed that they felt comfortable knowing that they had a group of people (the program) that cared for them and would be there for them when they needed them. It was important to them the program staff made themselves available and made valuable connections with the students. In Eric’s words, “They really like talk to you and when they are talking to you it feels like they are talking to you one on one mainly to you, like it really seeps into you.” Like Eric, Charles also felt that staff members cared enough to assist them whenever necessary. In our last interview together he stated, “What I really like about KCP is I think the staff is really fun and really helpful. I think that, that is one of the major assets.”

When Charles was asked to elaborate on his feelings about his connection with the staff he spoke about how helpful they were and attributed that to their having knowledge about who they (students) were and the goals they were trying to accomplish. He noted, “A lot of them are helpful and they help each other out because they know where everybody comes from and what they’re trying to be.” Keith further explicated this point by noting the significance to him when he said, “It’s important because then you have someone you can talk to that will understand you better and yeah you need to talk to somebody cause everybody needs to talk to somebody.”

Along with seeing the staff as being concerned and willing to assist, he also pointed to this as being a substantial component of the program. To be sure, Jamal said,

“The staff is who basically sets those high expectations and pushes you through when you do have hard times.” This data served as evidence that these adolescent boys see TTD as a safe zone and place for them to feel secure and supported when they have difficulties. McLaughlin (2000) contends that academic outreach programs and community organizations often served as safe havens and places of hope particularly for at risk students. Students in this study because of their class status and family background would not be considered students most at risk. However, as seen from their perspectives they still see TTD as a place of security and support. This distinction is important to make because it presents an example of middle class African American students having similar responses to academic programs. Keith spoke to this idea when he said, “They’re trying to get you to be able to tell them problems, like they want to be able to help you make it through easier.” This resonates with findings from Owen’s (2005) case study, which found that African American adolescents attending Project Hope thought of the program as a haven and looked to the program as an option to pursue when they found themselves having academic and social difficulties.

In addition to seeing the program enacting and creating a sense of family connectedness, it is clear that students were perceptive to this type of environment and pointed to it as being significant for them both currently in their immediate experiences and in the future. Students spoke about the value of TTD being a place where they could network, and establish ties to a group of people who would assist them and help them later on. When asked why this was important, Charles responded, “Well because you need someone who knows how to talk to everybody, the staff knows that and they help you through it, they’re fun. I think that’s pretty much the groundwork that they lay in

order to get a good program.” Here Charles particularly identified the ways that TTD was a resource and had the capabilities to make connections for their students. He is also referring to the staff knowledge of the importance of establishing a network upon which their students can thrive. When Eric was asked a similar question regarding why building relationships and networking in TTD was important he stated,

“I do think they’re important cause you never know who you’re going to meet and since I met them now, if I run into them again later on in my life then I can be like... well you know you might come somewhere and you don’t know what’s going on and you’re new in the place you will have someone to fill you in so basically you have a connection.”

Students articulated not only feeling a connection to the TTD program and thought of them as family, but they also saw this as being a relevant and tangible benefit to them. Through their voices we can see that the notion of TTD family was not just a slogan on the back of the program T-shirts or a message written on the white board at Saturday Workshops, it was a lived experience. It represented for them a context that extended and broadened their support system beyond their biological families. They saw the staff members and other youth in the program as being an extension of their real families. Although not related they viewed them as an extended family that would help them and be there when needed.

#### Acquisition of Academic Skills: Learning to Learn

Students pointed to learning academic skills in the program as being a primary way the program contributed to their academic lives. The analysis of the interview data revealed that Keith, Charles, Jamal, and Eric had learned academic strategies such as test-taking skills, study skills, and behavior management skills during their participation with

TTD. They not only learned these skills, but specifically recognized this support to be significant in helping them perform well academically and in Keith's words to "make better grades." This is evidence that learning took place within this context, and that the skills that were taught may have been transferred to the classroom. TTD's efforts to teach or equip students with academic skills made the notion of preparing for and performing in school vibrant and relevant to them.

When I specifically asked Eric how he utilized skills taught in the program he said, "Like a test. We have those tests and they told us like to go through the whole thing and read all the questions and I do that, and it helps, it's better". Jamal when asked the same question responded, "Studying, they taught me how to study, what I should be doing in class, what's the best thing that I should be doing." From Jamal's perspective, the program had taught him how to study effectively so that he retained information and also how to manage and complete his assignments in class. Jamal and Eric expressed that the program had helped them to be better students because they felt equipped with skills like test taking, behavior management, and study skills. The program helped to open up opportunities to be successful within the classroom and gave them a sense of control and know-how in relation to completing their school work. These skills in many ways allowed them to be more conscious, critical, and observant of their own learning styles. More specifically, it helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses as students. Abdullah (2001) referred to this as students being self-directed learners who take control of their own learning. In his view, self-directed learners are "responsible owners and managers of their own learning process (pg. 3)." Such individuals have the skills to access and process the information they need for a specific purpose. Self-directed

learning integrates self-management; management of the context, including social setting, resources, and actions with the process of self-monitoring whereby learners monitor, evaluate, and regulate their cognitive learning strategies. In the case of these four boys, being a self-directed learner was a trait or disposition that they were developing. The staff at TTD worked to raise the awareness of students' role in their own learning through the activities and curriculum of the Saturday workshops. This idea was explicated when Charles told me about a tip that one of the student mentors gave him during one workshop he had attended. He said she told him,

“You read and take notes you have to learn, like everybody learn in different ways. There are visual learners, aesthetic learners, and audio learners. For audio learners you might want to read it and then tape record yourself and then listen to it over again so you can memorize it or visually you can do experiments with it.”

Charles went on to give an example of how he felt that he was a visual learner and this is what made science class easier for him than other students in his class. He thought of this as his strength as a learner. Keith and Charles discussed how they made a conscious effort to be active in class so that the teacher would notice they were involved. He said, “I think I set a high standard for myself to listen and pay attention.” Along those same lines Charles stated, “Like I try to like do the work the best I can and try to be active and participate in class.”

In addition to identifying their own personal learning styles, the acquisition of learning skills seemed to serve as motivation for them to strive toward academic achievement and to change the way they viewed learning, particularly for Jamal. When I asked how the different skills he learned at TTD influenced him, he responded, “Probably it’s influencing me to study even more on the subject instead of just reading or going

through something really quick just to get a grade. It made me study and learn about it more. I take stuff more seriously.” Here he articulated the extent to which TTD had encouraged him to go beyond learning to gain specific performance outcomes, but to learn for the sake of learning. During one Saturday workshop, I recall hearing one student mentor emphasize to her breakout session that knowledge was all that mattered and it was something that despite the grades and test scores could not be taken away. It seems like this philosophy of education and learning was an idea that resonated with Jamal. In speaking about the influence of the TTD teaching various academic strategies, Keith also expressed that the program motivated him and gave him a sense of awareness about methods he could use to increase his school performance. He stated, “Yes I do think KCP is influencing me. It motivates me more than if I was just on my own. It lets me know that there are some things out there that I can do and should do to help me.”

These statements point to the academic development of these students via their experiences with and in the TTD program. The development of these types of skills and knowledge about studying, test taking, identification one’s learning style, and just the mere awareness of resources that are made available to become a better student, all contribute to what Eccles (2001) refers to as the interactive developmental process of adolescence. This theory rests on the notion that as adolescents interact in certain academic or social spaces, they acquire certain skills that they make sense of and come to adopt as part of who they are. Charles and Jamal demonstrated an awareness of their responsibility in making learning meaningful and monitoring themselves to make sure they were utilizing supports and competencies taught by the program. Similar to students in Guthrie’s (1996) study of student’s responses to a literacy curriculum, they seemed to



be motivated, persistent, independent, self-disciplined, self-confident and goal-oriented. In addition, they reported employing different strategies to complete homework assignments and to get work accomplished in class. It is important to note that these boys may have acquired skills in other contexts such as in their schools or at home and the extent to which they have garnered these skills may not be exclusive to their experience in the program.

### Cultural Identity Development: Knowing Who You Are

Students saw the program as helping them to develop and construct identities related to their culture and heritage as African Americans. There were three major ways Jamal, Eric, Charles, and Keith talked about TTD and its cultural influence. The first way dealt with the idea of knowing, knowing about the history and accomplishments of African Americans. The boys made reference to TTD providing them with information that allowed them to understand and appreciate the history of African Americans. For them it was particularly important to know that information because as Eric put it,

“not having it [information about African American culture] means you are lost and trying to... well I don’t know... cause some people just don’t even care who they are or where black people came from and how they got to the spot where they are and they just don’t care, but when you do know, then you get that extra knowledge about you.”

In Eric’s view, it was important to know about the African American culture because it was the vehicle through which you know yourself. Despite his apparent difficulty in expressing this idea, it is very significant that he equated not knowing one’s culture to the concept of being “lost.” This is evidence that he saw the acquisition of cultural forms of information as being critical to understanding who he was as an African American. Jamal talked about this knowledge of his culture in relation to knowing the

“truth”. He felt it was significant to learn an authentic version of African American history and to be open in talking about. When I asked him what made him think that TTD was trying to get him to think about his cultural identity he responded, “Because of the way they talk about it all the time and they really want you to learn something. They want you to learn about the history of it, you know how did it happen, why did it happen and the truth about it instead of hiding it?”

It had been Eric’s experience that his teachers in school and the “news people” did not always tell the truth about African American people, especially males, but that TTD tried to give them a more honest depiction. In elaborating on this point, he said, “Mostly they think the world, that blacks are just good at music and sports, yeah that’s the images that they have as blacks as a success, yeah and the rest of them are just on the streets, doing nothing.” The fact that Eric spoke of TTD giving a more comprehensive view of who African Americans are may allude to the fact that through the program providing culturally relevant information, they may also be providing a counter narrative to views and images he gets from other sources. The term counter narrative was first introduced in the field of African American Studies, as researchers and scholars attempted to respond to the misrepresentation of African Americans in traditional anthologies and texts (Anderson, 1988). However this term over the last couple decades has made its way into the field of education and Hilliard, Perry, and Steele (2003) suggest that counter narratives should be used in classrooms that serve African American students because they provide them with an enlightened view on who they are and most important who they can be.

In thinking about how this might be beneficial to students to have counter narratives and multiple perspectives on who they are, Charles felt that other African Americans may be missing out on or lack the ability to understand the negativity that is associated with being black when they are not aware of more positive perspectives. He said, “It’s probably damaging the way that they think of black people but the black people really probably don’t care because they don’t know.”

Charles’s statement is also indicative of a certain type of conscious raising found in the critical race ideas in work by Friere (1998b), Carter (2005), and Morrell(2002) . This notion involves teaching students to be aware and critical of the relationship that exists between race, society, and its primary institutions such as the justice system and public education. To this point, Jamal said that TTD had helped him to understand that, “some things have gotten better and some things still need to change and I think that does inform me a lot about the world, I think they do a good job of doing that cause some things I didn’t know before they let me into it.” This again is reflective of Eric’s feeling that TTD had brought him into a sense of knowing about the historical and current social status of African Americans. This process that Eric was involved in to make sense of who he is as an African American while also understanding the “world” is what Boykin (1986) and Sellars (1998), refer to as a multidimensional identity development process whereby minority adolescents attempt to mediate membership in their ethnic group in addition to membership in the mainstream culture. Many students of color go through a process in which they must negotiate their identities and connection to their ethnic group as well as to the larger society. For example, one has to conceptualize who they are as

both African American and American and in many ways these two identities can be vastly different.

The program helped the boys to “know” about their cultural heritage, but they were also constructing their cultural identities was through understanding themselves via this knowledge. The boys were asked directly whether or not they felt the program helped them to think about themselves and their culture in positive ways. They were also asked whether or not this was helpful for them in thinking about and understanding who they were as African Americans. Eric responded by saying, “I would have to say yes because now I think more about where I want to go in life and college and high school and what I want to do.” Charles says, “They do help me think about that. They let me know that I am different and that I do need to focus more on my culture, so I can extend on the world so I’m not just blending in.” The issue that is most prevalent in this comment, is the focus on difference. The program helped Charles to understand that he is unique and that by focusing on his uniqueness he will be more equipped to have an impact on society. From this perspective his ethnicity will help him to set himself apart and in his word not blend in with others. Here again, we see his conceptualization of a counter narrative promoted by the program, one that focuses on the strengths and advantages of being African American as opposed to the disadvantages. Eric talked about this element in relation to the program helping students to “see their own selves better”. Eric and Keith also spoke about knowing culture in order to know where you are going. Eric said very matter factly when I asked how black history was important, “I got from it that our black history it’s really important and like a lot of people have said that if you don’t know your history, you don’t know your future...so.” Similarly Keith said, “They say that it’s good

to remember where you came from cause if you don't know where you been you don't know where you bout to be." Both of these statements align with the ways that TTD staff tried to teach why it is important to talk about the culture of different minority groups. It could be that both Eric and Keith who have matriculated through the program for two years or more are regurgitating the program language. However, it could also be that they have internalized this way of thinking about why this element of the program is significant to their lives, and specifically their futures.

Jamal made this more tangible when he spoke about knowing the history of African Americans. He said, "They keep telling us a lot about our history and about where we came from and where we could be and how we should improve where we are so now I think more about where I want to go in life and college and high school and what I want to do." Jamal was taking information and knowledge about African Americans and starting to at least "think more about" what he wanted to do and accomplish. He said later on in our last interview that this information helped him to see that he shouldn't listen to others who may talk negatively about who he is because he knows the truth about his people. His exact words were, "you need to know that you are just as good as everybody else and if people put you down you can't listen to it cause you know that it's not true." Here again, we see that students are using the knowledge gained in TTD as a counter narrative to mainstream views that may perpetuate a more negative conceptualization of blacks.

When I spoke with Charles about what it meant to have a positive cultural identity, he responded, "Yes because if you're like negative you're saying what's the point but if you have a positive cultural identity about yourself you actually want to do

better.” It is important to note that the term cultural identity is a term that I introduced in my questioning and not one that he used independently. However, in my conversation with him, I was fairly certain that he understood what it meant because at this juncture we had talked substantially on having knowledge of one’s culture and having positive ways of thinking about that culture. Through the previous comment, we can see that Charles equated thinking positively about who you are culturally, would help an individual want to do better. I did not probe this particular comment to unpack what “to do better” meant. However, the nature of our conversation indicated that the “to do better” referred to academic achievement.

This idea of achievement discussed by Charles, is directly connected to the third way that students talked about TTD helping to construct cultural identities. In addition to the benefits of facilitating positive cultural identity to assist with knowing who you are, the program practices may also have been influencing how students were making meaning around their identities in connection with goal orientation and future planning. When Charles was asked whether or not he agreed with this notion of being different and learning about his culture, he responded, “I do kind of agree with it because learning about my culture is important; it helps me learn what we have done and what we can do.” Again there is a reference to “we.” Previously, “we” was discussed in relation to members of the FLP family; however, students may be thinking about themselves as connected to a larger “we,” all members of their ethnic group (i.e. African Americans). My interpretation is that the students developed a sense of connectedness to their ethnic group and culture in positive ways, thereby viewing themselves in relation to a group of

positive models. When asked what things were taught about culture and identity, Keith said,

“They taught us like the importance of how African Americans did to help us be where we at and how we should keep going and don’t just stop there. It makes me want to go up a step higher than they was to do a lil better, just keep going and do the best.”

As students’ responses show, they were developing attitudes and beliefs that could have been leading to the development of positive cultural identity which could subsequently influence their academic and social outcomes through their own goal orientation. Eric further explicates this point when he said,

“it will make me...well because you know how they had to fight all hard to have us get the good and excellent education just as the whites, and it makes you wanna work cause you know somebody was doing this for you so you want to work and do even better.”

Here Eric is making reference to the historical knowledge of African American culture and how that motivates his work ethic and makes him want to do better. As Charles did, Eric made reference to doing better, which can be linked to doing better in school. This analysis was made particularly because he was referring to African Americans struggle for rights to equal education. Jamal also felt that hearing about culturally relevant ideas at TTD helped him to now only set goals but to think about what type of career he should choose. He commented, “yes it does increase my goals I don’t think I would just be happy with doing something insignificant like that’s why I want to be an entrepreneur because I want to have a company that will give a lot of jobs to people.” During the program’s workshop on activism, Dr. S and other program presenters, spoke about the economic hardships within many African American communities and how this led to a host of problems for them. This may have influenced

Jamal thinking about his career. Eric spoke very poignantly in relation to defining what having a positive cultural identity meant for him.

“I think it means you would respect your culture, instead of all those ancestors that built it up you don’t want to tear it down because you know if you do, you’re basically tearing yourself down and beating up yourself. It reflects on them to but most of all since you’ve done it, it reflects on you. You might not even think of it as a big deal but your ancestors do, they think of it as wow we did this and they basically tore down our name. Like since my last name is Carter, that’s just like me going out robbing doing drugs and stuff like that people are going to be like the Carters do that, the Carters do this when they really don’t do anything like that.”

His comment helped to substantiate how these boys have been taught to think of themselves culturally through their participation in TTD. Eric in particular expressed not only a historical knowledge and a social obligation to the African American community, but also how he may have been thinking about these things in relation to understanding who he was and the decisions he made. Through their learning about the culture of African Americans and being exposed to more positive examples, the students in this study seem to be developing and constructing their own cultural identities.

#### Significance of African American Student Achievement: Challenging Stereotypes

In addition to reporting that the program had helped them to construct positive cultural identities and formulate future goals, all four boys also felt that their achievement was significant because it would helped to dispel stereotypes and negative perceptions that exist within society. All of the boys expressed that they attempted to “do well” and succeed because they wanted there to be examples of success to represent the African American community. In addition, they spoke in depth about the need to achieve in order to show people (society) that they could overcome. The notion of achievement in relation to the significance to people of color was frequently mentioned in TTD and the



staff members tried to teach this ideology to both the students and parents. To be sure, it was a fundamental goal of TTD to get students to understand why college was important for underrepresented minorities (African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans). In doing so, program staff stressed to the adolescents in the program how critical their success in school was not only to themselves but also to their communities. In this section the term “achievement” will be conceptualized as high academic performance, or school grades. In the first interview I specifically asked the boys whether or not they thought about the importance of African Americans achieving and whether or not that helped them to make decisions in school. Jamal answered, “Yeah because...well... there’s a perception that a lot of times we won’t or just don’t care so, it’s important for getting rid of that perception.” Jamal’s younger brother, Charles, made a similar comment in saying, “I think that’s [achievement] important to show that you can overcome and such, I also think that it would help get more jobs and get people to respect us more.” These statements allude to Jamal and Charles perceiving there to be negative views held by society about African Americans, and that achieving will help to dismantle those ideas.

Charles also said, “Because of where we came from its people that still think well after we were, or after we got rid of segregation and things, we just went down hill from there, but it’s important for people to know that we’re taking advantage of that.” His reference to “where we came from” refers to the state of African Americans in the 50’s and 60’s. Charles is speaking of the work that was done by African Americans and others to desegregate schools and fight for quality education. It was important for him that African American students achieve because it would show “people” that they are utilizing

the opportunities that were created through that struggle. This statement is also evidence that Charles was conscious of the historical aspects of the African American community. As mentioned previously this knowledge in and of itself had helped him to make certain decisions about who he was and what he would like to accomplish. During this conversation, Charles also said, “because sometimes people think that black students they’re not as smart and that’s not true so it’s important to be able to show, like if you get good grades that might show that hey we’re just as smart or maybe smarter than you are.” Eric views his desire to make good grades as a way to show others how smart he is and feels that this would help to dismantle misconceptions about black students not being smart. Other aspects of his life experiences may have informed this view, but practices in TTD encouraged students to be aware of negative views that were held by some about people of color, particularly African Americans. When I probed his comments and asked him talk a little more about what he meant by being smart he commented, “Well just that there are enough people smart enough to do it [school work], it’s just that people don’t think they will.” Again Eric expresses his perspective on how he feels African American students are viewed by mainstream society and how their capabilities are often minimized or not recognized at all.

Eric’s view on achievement was similar to Charles and Jamal as he talked about the need to prove people wrong who have judged African Americans in the past. He contended,

“It’s [achievement] important because people judge us by how we look, our skin complexion and if we prove them wrong maybe we could just, maybe we could like make it up there enough so they can be like, oh this kid is cool, he’s not ghetto, or how we used to judging blacks.”

When Eric says “make it up there,” he was referring to academic achievement and in particular college attainment. He too was conscious of race and the ways social dynamics perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions about certain groups of people. He ultimately saw achievement as a catalyst for overcoming stigmas that he feels have been attached to himself and the African American community. Jamal expressed this point most clearly when I asked him about stereotypes and whether he felt that people held negative ideas about African Americans, and he responded, “Well it’s like we know what we’re worth but we’re not viewed like that, we’re viewed as not as good or in worse conditions.” Similar to the other boys, he feels that there is a mismatch between how other people perceive them and what they really are. The notion of being worthy speaks to the ways that Jamal may be thinking about his place in the world and how that place can be shaped by views and perceptions that people have about him.

I asked Eric what made him think that people didn’t recognize the “worth” of African American students and he said, “Just from the way a lot of people act, they act like they don’t care but they really do a lot of times but they just act like it so.” This comment alludes to the fact that Eric sees the ways that some African American students behave as contributing to stereotypes, but that these stereotypes are not valid because they are merely based on how students “act” and not who they really are. Charles explained his interpretation of stereotypes he had witnessed in the media and T.V. said,

“They hardly show a white man getting away. It’s like they don’t want to show those tape because I know there is a lot of other white males in the community that do crime instead of blacks and all these shows they show black man running away, black females jumping over fences running away from the cops, but I know there is some tape somewhere else that a white man is doing crime.”

He talked in depth about how when he watched the news, he only saw African Americans but that he knew that white people also committed crimes just as African Americans did. But the media wanted to focus on African Americans and Mexicans to make people think “that’s all we’re made of.” Along this same point Jamal spoke to me about his experiences in school with certain teachers and how he had witnessed negative views they held about African American boys. It is important to note that he felt that these perceptions were held by both white and black teachers at his school. In his words,

“They think these boys are going to grow up and be criminals. They’re going to be in a shop and rob somebody and I don’t think that’s true. If you give us the chance we can really show who we are but they don’t really give us the chance they just like judge by what other blacks do.”

Jamal just wanted teachers in his school to not use what they see other African Americans do to make assumptions about what he would do and how he would behave. Instead he wanted them to give him the “chance” to display who he is an individual. Eric spoke to a different experience in his school specifically with one of his teachers around issues of stereotypes.

“There’s this one teacher, I really like her because she’s always talking about us as a whole black community and not us as in just you and I liked her so much, she like really teaches me like what if you done this, think about it before you do it, cause you always have a choice. If you take the wrong choice it could lead up to someone saying oh black man this and that. Like on the news when it’s a white man they say his name and age and stuff like that and when it’s a black they just say black male. They never say the man’s name, they treat us as a whole, so as a whole we should achieve what our goal is to be uh, well...technically free...”

Here we can see that Eric saw himself as a member of the larger African American community and therefore felt a sense of social responsibility to be conscious of the choices he made. It is also important to note, that I understood from this statement

that this ideology, at least for Eric, was not one that only existed for him via TTD. He was also being exposed to this type of achievement ideology in his school. Eric says that the goal of the African American community is to be “free”. When I asked him what he meant by this concept of being “free”, he responded, “like we’re not even really free, we’re chained in our minds.” This concept of psychological slavery has been most notably discussed by Akbar (1976) in his book *Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery*. Akbar says that the over 300 years experienced in slavery’s brutality and unnaturalness constituted a severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African-Americans. And while historians have documented the realities of slavery as descriptions of past events, psychologists and sociologists have failed to attend to the persistence of problems in the mental and social lives of people that have roots in slavery.

Eric’s comment also resonated with the advocacy and activism ideas that were promoted by TTD. As a program they consistently emphasized that as people of color the struggle continues and that this was and should be an ongoing process. Eric connected his achievement to not only striving toward this goal of freedom, but also the importance of it being a collective effort.

In our conversation about the significance of achievement for African Americans, Keith said that he knew that people would form opinions about him based on the fact that he was black and would think in certain ways about the types of activities he was involved in. Despite those opinions, he felt that blacks should strive toward college attainment to prove that those views were false. To be sure, he articulated,

“Yeah I always think of how people gone always judge me just because I’m black or they always gone think I’m from the ghetto about to rob somebody, I’m from the ghetto so all I want to do is go out and get girls and stuff. There are some teachers out there and some kids that think oh

this black kid is just trouble and I don't want him in my class or this kid is trouble so I'm gone stop him from learning so everyone else can feel more secure. I think that we should try to aim for college cause they say that blacks are the ones that are going to be in prison. They're building more prisons for us out there. If we make it to college we can prove them wrong."

Keith was not only aware of negative perceptions and the views held by others but saw this as influencing the learning of black students, particularly when teachers held those views. As a way to counter these negative views, he felt that black students should strive toward college to move away from images of black men only being associated with prison or in his word 'trouble'. Keith, Eric, Jamal, and Charles all articulated perceiving that there were certain types of stereotypes held by others about African Americans and particularly African American boys. Steele and Aronson (1995) define this phenomenon as stereotype threat. This theory contends that when students of color or women are facing stereotypes, as result of internalizing a threat of negative consequences, fear they will verify the stereotype. This ultimately results in a type of self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. The views held by the boys in this study show that stereotype threat can also have a different effect on students in that by perceiving the stereotype, they are motivated more toward achievement to dispel or counter the negative perception. This idea will be discussed more in the following discussion chapter.

#### **Responding to Staff's High Expectation: Being the Best You Can Be**

Students desire to achieve and their efforts to overcome stereotypes may have also been influenced by high expectation of success held by staff at TTD. Recall from chapter four, that program staff all stated that they expected the students to perform to their best abilities. They felt that helping students to recognize their potential and consistently reminding them that they had something valuable to contribute to their communities was

an intricate piece of the work they did within the program. Jamal, Eric, Keith, and Charles seemed to not only understand that the program staff had certain expectations, but also seemed to formulate goals for themselves in relation to living up to those expectations. The following comments from Eric, Jamal, and Charles explicated this point. I asked the students whether or not they felt the program staff had high expectations for them succeeding and if so, whether or not they attempted to live up to those expectations. Eric responded by saying, "I think they do, like they think of you as their own and they want you to be the best that you can be, make it to where you want to be in life, they want you to be happy with yourself." Eric was not only describing TTD and its culture of family but emphasizing that the extent to which he felt the program staff pushed students toward goals that they had set for themselves. Additionally, he felt that the staff were concerned with making sure he could be proud of the decisions he made as well his accomplishments. He went on to say,

"I do I really try to go where I want to be, make them happy, make my parents happy, make my family happy about what I've done and try to make my teachers at my school happy so that they really look at me as oh this kid really wants to go somewhere."

We see from these comments that not only did Eric recognize that the staff had positive expectations for him succeeding but that he applied this value to his school practices. This provides an explanation for why this construct may be significant, particularly as we think about how this type of educational practice has implications for influencing student outcomes. After Jamal responded yes to the question about whether or not he felt the program had certain expectations of him, I asked how he knew. His response was,

“Like at all the programs, and I’m not just saying this because of the way she yells a lot but she [Dr.S] just tries to stress the same things like getting the scholarships and doing your study skills, she stresses that and those a lot so I think that makes you passionate.”

Jamal spoke to how he was aware of the high expectations held by Dr.S because she was always so passionate in getting them to think about obtaining scholarships and practicing study skills. He understood that these steps were important to Dr. S and other members of the staff. He specifically spoke to this point when he said,

“We need it [encouragement to succeed] and if we don’t get those we won’t be as successful and she wants us to be successful and then too, I think they expect that we should be able to do great things, and that’s what they’re trying to get us to think and then do.”

It is apparent through these responses that the students made sense of the program’s expectations and articulated one of the program’s themes of striving toward greatness. They also explained why the practice of having high expectations of student achievement was a necessary component in their success. Keith spoke to his awareness of staff’s expectations when he said,

“Well it’s just the way they try to instill that into us every time, every meeting we’ll be there and they’ll talk about getting scholarships and how we should do it, how we can do it, how it’s easy enough to do, so just the way they try to put that into us makes me believe that’s what they want.”

Keith knew staff had expectations because of the consistency of their message. During, this conversation he jokingly spoke about how staff would talk “like a broken record” about how they expected certain things out of TTD students and that they believed that they all would excel. Charles talked about how staff expectations made students feel that they could do anything and that it made him



“feel good that everyone is trying to reach their goals and reach where they can be and reach places where they never thought they could reach before because of where they were raised.” He appreciated the fact that he could be in a program where students were motivated to do well and didn’t have to worry about “what hood they were from” or “what they parents did for a living”. In his view, it was important for young people to think this way about their futures and to not feel limited in where they could go and what they could achieve. Additionally, Keith felt that the staff’s high expectations created challenges for students to live up to and created a goal for them to strive toward. He commented, “Yeah because if they don’t have high expectations, it’s just really messed up because then you’re just there. If it’s high then you have challenges and I think that makes you better off.” For Charles, not only did he feel that the program’s high expectations motivate him to strive toward his goal but he also felt these expectations were what made the program relevant. From his perspective, if staff were not going to have high expectations for them, it defeated the purpose of them participating.

Keith and Jamal discussed staff’s high expectations in relation to how they were connected to the same values stressed by their own parents. Keith said,

“they’re basically like some other parents of yours. They expect you to do everything your parents would expect you to do. They don’t put any more force on you like if you don’t do this, they leave it up to you but they still, if you get off track they will get you back on it because like your parents they really do care, they don’t like pretend to want the best for you.”

Keith expressed that through staff expectations he was able to see that the program cared about his success in the same way that his parents did and that they were genuine in wanting to see him achieve. This was important for him because the staff just became an extension of his parents and helped to reinforce what he was already getting

from home. This was another expression of how students perceived culture of TTD. It may have been easier for them to internalize staff expectations because of the similarity to what their parents wanted for them. Jamal made similar connections to the program staff's values and that of his parents. He told me that the "expectations KCP set are pretty much the same as my parents. They pretty much want me to go to college right after high school so that's well I'm like surrounded by that." He like Jamal felt that KCP reinforced the notion of success and achievement that was already present for him at home with his own parents. He also voiced that he particularly tried to live up to this expectation because,

"when you're in a program like KCP and they have expectations for you to go to college, you don't want to just ignore those and just don't go because a lot of people don't want to let some of the people in KCP down so they will do everything to go to college if they can."

Here we see that at least for Jamal he was conscious of the program's expectations for him to enroll in college and spoke to a desire for students in the program to want to accomplish that goal in an effort to not disappoint program staff. The ways that Jamal, Eric, Keith, and Charles responded to staff members high expectations resonate with Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) concept of the Pygmalion effect. Stemming from what has become a classic educational study on teacher expectation, this theory contends that teacher's expectations about a student can eventually lead that person to behave and achieve in ways that conform to those expectations. Though, some theorists have argued about the psychological validity of "expectancy effects," research into the ways in which teachers interact with their students and the relationship between those interactions and students' academic performance have shed considerable light on the field of teacher education as well as the learning and development of minority

students. Specifically, this theory has helped to inform the nature of teacher education in that, it has suggested that teachers be more conscious and thoughtful about the perceptions and ideas that they consciously and unconsciously hold about their students. This is related to the learning and development of African American students in that research on teacher's views on African American students, especially males, has often been negative, resulting in these students not developing necessary skills and competencies.

Even though, the context that students in this sample participated in was different from the traditional classroom context, connections can be drawn particularly as we think about the ways that certain types of educational practices influence students both in and outside of school.

#### **Future Planning: A Focus on Tomorrow**

Encouraging students to think beyond their immediate realities and formulate visions of what their futures would look like was a central way TTD had influenced the lives of these four boys. Students articulated that the program had helped them to think about their futures and start preparing for post-secondary education and possible career paths. They reported that the program had helped them to think about opportunities that would be available to them in regards to selecting a job and finding a "good college." I specifically asked Keith, Jamal, Charles, and Eric if they thought TTD had helped them to make plans for their future and if so, whether or not this was important to them. In response to this question, Keith said, "They get us to think about our purpose and about how to make good choices for the future. College can help so that you have opportunities."

Keith felt that the program had helped to conceptualize and think through what would be the best path to choose and to make “good choices” for himself. He also pointed to the idea that college attainment would provide him with certain opportunities that he may not otherwise have. Eric said specifically for him TTD had helped him to think about his future by exposing him to the different types of careers that were available to him. He commented, “I really didn’t take it serious that much before but I see now that I really need to start thinking about careers right now instead of waiting until I get out of high school because it’s gone be harder.” He expressed that the program had made finding a potential career path more relevant to him since he started attending a couple years earlier in the sixth grade.

In terms somewhat different from Keith and Eric, Charles indicated that the program had helped him to think about his future by teaching him different academic skills. From his perspective the program allowed him to make the connection between his achievement in school now and the benefits it would bring later. He said, “They helped me, just like probably in the little stuff like studying and just learning how to do tests and stuff...I know that’s what’s going to set me up straight when I get to high school and then to a university.” After this comment I asked Charles why this preparation for the future was important to him. His response was, “It’s important because well I’d rather be somebody that has a good house and car and an excellent career instead of just poverty.” Charles equated the importance of preparing for the future to having material possessions and being financially capable. In his view, these were not only the descriptors of being successful, but what could be acquirable via a college education. In talking about his perception of the program Jamal said that TTD helped him to formulate plans for his

future by asking certain types of questions related to what he wants to accomplish in his life. To be sure, he said,

“They ask us a lot like what do you want to be when you grow up, what do you want to do in life? Do you expect to go to college? Do you want to go to college? Do you want to go to high school? Do you want a better education? That makes me think about like where do I actually want to go, so right now even though I’m young I still think about that like wow, this is coming up quick.”

Jamal said these questions were very helpful in not only getting him to think about what he did in fact want to do but also for creating a sense of urgency around the need for him to have a solid plan for “tomorrow”. For Jamal, planning for and enrolling in college was approaching fast and in his words “coming up quick,” so it was an urgent matter. Along those same lines Charles said that he felt that the program was helping him to be more successful by giving him a real sense of what the future would and could be like for him. “Just having me here showing me around state’s campus has helped me to see that I can make plans to do this.” Both Charles and his parents stated it had always been his goal to attend State University. He felt that his participation in the program made that a goal more of an obtainable reality. In his recalling how the program had helped him to think about his future, Keith said,

“I remember they had a few workshops where they talked about getting a portfolio and how that’s important. I think that was something that really helped me think about planning my future cause since then I’ve actually started a portfolio to help me get into college. I use it a lot and my mom even helps me organize it sometimes.”

For Keith, the portfolio contained aspects of who he was. When I asked to see it, his mother brought out a three ring binder. In the binder there were certificates from his school and science program he had attended, tests that had either A’s or B’s scribbled at the top, a couple of report cards, and an essay he wrote for English class. Keith’s mother

laughed at how proud of the portfolio he had been and even joked that she had never seen her son who is often disorganized get so excited about organizing something. This portfolio to Keith was a way that he could have all his work and accomplishments in one place. He emphasized that the program had told students that having a portfolio would make it easier for him to apply for scholarships and present himself to potential colleges and universities. It was also important and special for him to have an item where he could see all of his accomplishments and it gave him a boost of confidence to have it.

Often it has been assumed that during the years of adolescence there is a decline in achievement motivation and the extent to which students are goal oriented (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Some researchers contend that this decline is largely caused by physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty and, therefore, is somewhat inevitable. This assumption has been challenged, however, by research that demonstrates that the nature of motivational change and goal setting during middle school depends on characteristics of the learning environment in which students find themselves (Midgley, 1993). The extent to which adolescents began to formulate goals and plan for the future is contingent on what educational supports and practices they are exposed to. In thinking about goal orientation in this way, Jamal, Charles, Keith, and Eric were being influenced by their participation in TTD which was a setting that emphasized the importance and necessity of planning for post-secondary education. The boys attributed their thinking about college and planning for their careers to the nature of programmatic practices.

## **Summary**

The analysis of interview data yielded twelve themes related to how Jamal, Eric, Charles, and Keith experienced their participation in the Truth Tubman Douglas program, a college outreach program for underrepresented minorities. Six themes emerged that were supported and substantiated by all four boys as being central to their perspectives and views of the program. These six themes led to six guiding assertions for how these students made sense of and perceived this particular enrichment program.

First, students expressed a sense of belonging to a fictive family that was a significant aspect of the program. All four boys spoke about the extent to which they were connected with members of the TTD staff and how they felt that staff even viewed them as their own children. Three of the boys in particular, Jamal, Charles, and Eric, expressed that they felt that the program served a space they could go to when and if they needed help for support. In addition to the students' sense that TTD was a safe space, they also highlighted the significance of having TTD as a tangible network of individuals that would help them to accomplish their goals of doing well in school (grades), and college attainment.

Second, students pointed to learning academic skills in the program as being a primary way the program contributed to their academic lives. All of the boys utilized skills such as study skills and test taking skills in their classrooms at school and felt that along with having a family-like connection to staff, that this was a central component and tangible of the program for them. This resource helped them to not only develop certain learning skills but also to identify what type of learners they were. This aided them in determining their strengths and weaknesses as students. Third, voices of the students also

spoke to how the program had helped them to develop and construct identities related to their culture and heritage as African Americans. It was important for them to know about African American history and this knowledge as a counter narrative to understand who they were in relation to that history. Additionally, similar to ideologies related to critical race theory, Jamal, Eric, Charles and Keith created goals for themselves. Students saw the program as helping them to develop and construct identities related to their culture and heritage as African Americans.

Fourth, As the program helped them to construct cultural identity, students connected their achievement goals to the need to dispel negative stereotypes about African Americans. All four boys spoke with clarity about how they used negative perceptions that society held about them as African Americans to motivate them to excel academically. Unlike some minority youth who may internalize stereotypes and fail academically as a result, they worked to disprove those ideas and present examples that conflict with those ideas. Fifth, students also responded positively to and were motivated by staff high expectations for their success. Keith and Jamal felt that staff expectations not only mirrored the expectations held by their parents, but that they presented them with challenges and standard upon which to strive toward. This result aligns well with research that illustrates the positive developmental effects of being in an academic environment that promotes high expectations (Owens, 2005). Lastly, students articulated that the program had helped them to think about their futures and start preparing for post-secondary education and possible career paths. The clearly voiced that that the program's emphasis on college attainment had aided in them thinking about "tomorrow" and making choices now that would impact their futures.



In the following chapter, I will discuss in more detail how these findings support and or challenge theoretical ideas associated with fictive kinship, ethnic identity, acquiring of academic skills, stereotype threat, expectancy effect, and goal orientation. In addition, I will address the ways that findings from this study have implications for the field of educational research and more specifically the learning and development of African American adolescents.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

*In order for our inquiries to be transformative they should work to, “stimulate a needed and important discourse about the ways that scholars conduct educational research that enhances democracy and social justice while advancing the kinds of scientific knowledge that will make a difference in the lives of children.”*

*Gloria Ladson Billings and William Tate, Educational Research  
and the Public Interest, 2006, pg. xiii*

#### Study Purpose Revisited

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of 4 African-American males, participating in one university outreach program for underrepresented youth. The intent was to capture their stories and experiences in the TTD Rising Stars program that aimed to serve their academic and social needs. It was expected that examining participant voices would reveal significant insights not only about the nature of outreach programs but also how students made sense of such programs' impact on them academically and socially. As argued by Lincoln (1995) and others, bringing students' voices to the forefront of educational inquiries provides a richness and authenticity to the social, political, and emotional ways that they perceive their educational experiences, but also to the nature and intricacies of certain educational practices. A qualitative case study was designed to answer research questions about the structure and function of the Truth Tubman Douglas program as well as the goals and objectives. It was an essential first step to examine the curriculum, staff roles, and enacted practices of this program in order to create a foundation upon which to explore the perspectives of the four focal students. This study was guided by research questions related to understanding student's general perspectives about the program and how they saw the program contributing to their academic and social development. As research

questions evolved the “what” questions about the program and student perspectives became “how” questions to gain a richer understanding of this particular case.

In Chapter One I introduced the study, while identifying the purpose and presenting the significance of conducting this investigation. Chapter Two reviewed relevant literature on academic outreach programs, adolescent development, issues with research on minority student development, and the significance of student voice. This chapter brought into focus the relationship between the practices of academic outreach programs and the social and academic development and concluded with a review of discussions of student voice as an important scholarly discourse within educational research. In Chapter Three, I established and summarized the methodological principles and procedures that guided this research. Chapter Four helped to situate the context of this story by providing an overview of the TTD program via program artifacts, staff interviews, and field observations. Chapter Five, the second results chapter, discussed the findings from the students about their experience within the program. Through the voices of Charles, Keith, Jamal, and Eric this chapter provided a space for students’ perceptions about their adolescent worlds as well as their feelings about academic achievement, cultural identity, and goals for the future. This chapter will review and summarize the major findings, address this study’s connection to the broader literature within each theme, and discuss limitations and implications for future research.

### Summary of Findings

The findings from this study contribute to our understanding of the adolescent development of African-American students in two primary ways. First, it highlights the nature and function of one academic outreach program that provides services and pre-

collegiate support to adolescents. Second, it offers an analysis of student perspectives as they relate to fictive kinship, cultural identity development, significance of African-American student achievement, acquisition of academic strategies, response to high expectations, and future planning. A summary of these findings will be discussed below.

#### Truth Tubman Douglas Rising Stars Program

In gaining a broader view of the program, this study sought to examine the structure and function as well as goals and objectives. Based on program artifacts, and views of staff, and Saturday observations, the TTD program pursued four major goals. Staff worked to expose students to college and university life through their programs and activities, assisted students in developing positive cultural identities, promoted high expectations for student success, and created a family oriented space. Not only were these goals present in program artifacts, they were also articulated by the staff. Staff members saw them as the primary elements of the program.

The central focus of the TTD Rising Stars program was to expose students to campus activities and other college students, but also in the words of Dr. S during her interview, to “show them what opportunities were available via a college education.” Researchers and practitioners for the most part agree that outreach efforts that increase students aspirations, expose them to the world of college at an early age, and provide interventions aimed at increasing their academic performance have been instrumental in illuminating the barriers to equitable opportunity for higher education (Fenske, Geranios, and Moore, 1995; Perna, 2002; Gandara, Larson, Mehan and Rumberger, 1998). The work of the TTD program, while supplemental to curriculum and other traditional school practices worked to influence the orientation of students to college attainment.

A second goal was to assist students in developing positive cultural identities. Staff members saw it as central to help students to not only be knowledgeable about who they were as African Americans, but to have a sense of pride. Staff also worked to expose students to the accomplishments of other African-Americans figures as well as other minorities. They wanted to show students that they too, have those capabilities as students of color. Additionally, to help students understand their worth they also wanted students to see themselves as leaders of their communities. Although this goal was not present in what was written in program artifacts about the program, it was central in the program implementation.

This type of practice aligns with the Multiple Worlds Model as presented by Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1996). They contend that in adapting to different social spaces, students encounter psychosocial, gender, linguistic, and socio-cultural elements that influence their identity development. This model offers a helpful way to understand adolescent cultural identity construction in relation to particular academic settings. Recognizing identity as a response to context is useful because it implies that identity is not acquired passively by individuals but emerges through an individual's experience in multiple contexts such as schools, neighborhoods, and community programs. In the case of this study TTD Rising Stars Program existed as one context in the lives of these four boys that was working to help them construct positive cultural ideas and identities.

A third major goal of the program involved the promotion of high expectations for student success. Staff members relayed to students that they were confident about what they accomplished and that they expected them to live up to their full potential,

which was high academic performance. During the Saturday Workshops this expectation was expressed through speakers' remarks, activities, and interactions with students.

This practice of creating and sustaining high expectations for student success has been discussed in the literature as being a "culturally responsive practice" (Irvine and Armento, 2001). Effective and consistent communication of high expectation helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1970). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful. Similar to Jordan-Irvine and Armento's (2001) results in a study of pedagogy for elementary and middle schools, TTD created an environment in which there was genuine respect for students and a belief in their capability. Teachers in this study encouraged students to achieve academically and to see themselves as successful learners. The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) developed Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy based on decades of research across cultural and socioeconomic contexts, and having high expectations for students and presenting them with challenges was the fourth standard (Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003).

The final goal of the TTD program involved the creation of a family-oriented space. As with the promotion of high expectation, creating a family-type environment was not a written goal of the program but rather present in the practices and ideologies of staff members. For the Assistant Director, the extent to which the program was representative of a family significantly influenced both the practice of the program as well as the success of the program. For program staff, the students and parents were viewed in the context of the group or community. As such, their practices subscribed to a

collective approach for mentoring young people of African descent as well as Native- and Mexican-Americans.

This practice is similar to the notion of fictive kinship as presented by McAdoo (1978), Fordham (1998), and Ogbu's (1983) research on African American students and families. This network of fictive kin within the context of TTD provided broader opportunities for students to access a resource-rich community that offered a wide array of institutional, informational, and economic assets. The approach of TTD was based on traditional African cultural systems and ethos. According to Leary (1998), this type of relational bond is typical among African Americans; it stems from their earlier experiences with slavery and the necessity of constructing fictive familial relationships for mere survival. Particularly for African Americans, this approach supported an African world view in that the collective of a group supersedes the individual. The importance of these unique family relationships is that all members of the family, regardless of biological relationships, share the same loyalties, responsibilities, and cooperation as relatives (Dodson, 1997).

Given the aforementioned goals, it is important to note in summarizing the TTD program that staff members also reported weaknesses of the program. Two areas reported by staff members as places where TTD could improve were attitudes of staff and content of materials (worksheets, activities, etc.). The staff, particularly the student mentors were reported to sometimes take advantage of the relaxed nature of the program and failed to interact with the students and take an active role in the implementation of program activities. In addition, two of the staff members felt that the information provided by the program was not as up to date as it could have been. The Assistant Director in particular

felt that other staff members underestimated the nature of information that could be mastered by students who attended the program.

### Student Perspectives

Based on student's conceptualization of TTD, my analysis has indicated that three of the four boys found the fictive kinship practices and acquisition of academic strategies to be most significant for their participation in the program. In addition, they reported constructing positive ideas about their culture as African Americans and the significance of their academic achievement. They had positive responses to program's high expectations for their success and articulated how TTD had helped them to think about their future aspirations. All of these findings are connected to adolescent development because all four students were building upon and acquiring ways of thinking that contributed to their mental, emotional, and intellectual capacity. The following sections will explicate these points further.

**Family Connectedness.** All four boys expressed a sense of connectedness to the program and program staff. They perceived staff to be a network and the program to be an alternative place for them when they needed support. They responded positively to the culture of fictive kinship that had been created by the staff. Along with the acquisition of academic skills, this was one "asset" that was reported to be the most significant. Fictive kinship, as mentioned previously, is an anthropological concept of relating people not bound by blood or marriage, who have some reciprocal social or economic connection, who eventually are known as your "play cousin" or another family member (Fordham, 1991). This guiding ethos stems from the belief that there are unique conceptualizations of social interactions for people of African heritage. Included in this worldview are the



values of communalism, affect, spirituality and the concept of self as an individual with a collective responsibility to the group (Kambon, 1998). The notion of the family is thought of as extending beyond the immediate household. These fictive kinship systems exist in African-American communities today and include individuals unrelated biologically. Essentially, a sense of collective responsibility exists within and has been a source of survival for some (Baldwin, 1991).

Understanding the power of relationships, this program focused on expanding the family unit and when possible to reconnect the biological one. Charles, Keith, Eric, and Jamal not only reported feeling apart of the TTD family, but also felt that that this was a necessary and central piece of the program. Some hold that African American students may be able to observe and learn through contact and interaction with a collective group that embodies varied lived experiences, interests, values, and perspectives on race and ethnicity. According to Nobles (1991), traditional West African belief systems survived the Middle Passage (i.e., transport of African captives to the West) and hundreds of years of enslavement, and continue to persist among present day African-Americans.

People of African descent in the United States have maintained cultural traditions through institutions, such as churches, families, clubs, fraternities, and sororities, and local community groups. Based on comments and responses from the students in this study, it may be beneficial for researchers and educators to acknowledge and understand the nature of traditional African cultural beliefs and practices. These types of approaches use the students' heritage as a frame of reference and students may in turn have positive responses to these practices and see them as useful to their academic

and social development. It is important to note that the concept of fictive kinship may not be present in the lives of all African-American students, similar to other cultural characteristics, variations do exist. But, given the responses of some students toward this practice, it is still worthy of inquiry as educators and researchers seek ways to be inclusive of all students.

**Academic Skills.** Along with family connectedness, the acquisition of academic skills and strategies was also central. Jamal, Eric, Charles, and Keith all reported that the program had helped them to identify their own learning styles and build strategies to aid in improving their performance in the classroom. The students thought it was particularly important that the program allowed them to identify their strengths and weaknesses as learners. Students were developing into what Abdullah (2001) referred to as self directed learners. They were learning to take control of their learning by managing their skill sets, recognizing their cognitive strengths, and identifying appropriate strategies to accomplish academic tasks. Various disciplines within education have long promoted self-directed learning as desirable.

Research in the fields of adult education (Garrison, 1997), gifted education (Schillereff, 2001), web-based and distance learning (Scheidet, 2003) has shown the effectiveness of this orientation. Teachers, parents, administrators, and students must understand the concepts of student motivation, metacognition, self-efficacy, self-regulation, locus of control, and goal orientation. These concepts provide the foundation for a student seeking to become a self-directed learner. Although students can become self-directed learners without explicit instruction, development of these traits is more likely to occur when teachers and administrators understand and foster them at the

classroom or school level (Lumsden, 1999; Renchler, 1992; Biemiller & Meichenbaum, 1992). To be sure, it is difficult for students to become self-directed learners without becoming engaged in a curriculum or academic context that facilitates it.

As mentioned previously, the TTD program was different in many ways from the traditional classroom and the staff members were not teachers. However, staff worked to instill certain characteristics of self-directed learning into their students. In turn, the students in this study reported it to be not only one of the most significant, but also the most useful and practical. It is important to note that the program staff and students referred to this element as learning skills and strategies and did not use the term “self-directed.” I took an interpretive stance in my analysis to characterize this practice as self directed. According to Lumsden (1999), fostering self-directed learners cannot take place in one or two academic settings but must permeate the entire culture of an educational context. Students saw their acquisition of academic skills within TTD as being central to their experience within that context. It emerged consistently throughout students’ narratives about what the program meant to them and what they gained via their participation. In essence, students felt that TTD was attempting to help them facilitate, manage, and arrange their own learning experiences.

**Cultural Identity.** Students saw the program as helping them to develop and construct identities related to their culture and heritage as African-Americans. Based on their comments and responses, the TTD program helped them to become more knowledgeable about African-American history and encouraged them to be more thoughtful about the relationships between race, society, and institutions such as schools and the justice system. Via learning about their collective culture, students reported

gaining a broader sense of self based on the accomplishments of other African-Americans. The program helped these students to positively acknowledge who they were in relation to a larger group of individuals. They developed a sense of connectedness to their ethnic group and culture in positive ways. Charles and Eric reported that gaining a broader sense of their culture motivated them to set goals for themselves and “do better.” To be sure, construction of their cultural identities was linked to a desire to want to achieve in order to have a positive impact on their communities. This construction of positive cultural identity in relation to the community is connected to family connectedness in that students see themselves as part of a collective whole.

Identity is a complex and fluid term that shifts in meaning depending on the context and social location in which individuals find themselves. Spindler and Spindler (1993) have studied the process of identity development with a particular emphasis on the experiences of students of color, and the social categories of race, class and gender. Their work aligns with the practices of TTD and the responses of the students in that the construction of cultural identity results from adaptations in multiple worlds of interaction. Additionally, according to Erickson (1980), identity development is one of the primary processes during adolescence and requires perhaps this most social interaction. Further, the concept of identity may be best described and understood in terms of the multiple spaces in which adolescents exist. Cultural identity involves the learned beliefs, traditions, and interactions that are shared among members of any human society and is a powerful entity in the everyday lives of individuals and groups of people (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). As an ever-evolving constellation of influences, culture shapes the experiences, and worldviews of individuals, groups, communities, and institutions.

TTD engaged students in ways that influenced their academic and social development, as the program helped students to resolve the question of who they were, in terms of the often intersecting domains of culture, values, and beliefs. As Way (1996) has argued, students in this study were constructing a sense of their cultural identity by comparing themselves with the standards and ideals of others in their communities as well as situating themselves within social structures that were significant to them. Erickson's (1980) analysis of identity suggests that identity involves a dual process of reflection and observation based on their own beliefs of how others see and judge them. This provides support for the social dynamics of identity construction within a social space like TTD. Contrary to Ogbu's (1987) assertion that many students of color sacrifice academic success to maintain their cultural identities and remain affiliated with their culturally similar peers, students in this study were attempting to maintain their identities and develop cultural competencies needed for academic success. Given that the context of this setting was not school, but rather an enrichment program, Ogbu's findings are not entirely falsified.

**Significance of African-American Student Achievement.** Because it was a fundamental goal of the program to teach students about the significance of underrepresented minorities attending college, all of the students reported feeling a need to achieve academically in order to have an influence on their community. Students reported that it was important for them to achieve academically in order to work toward removing society's perception that African Americans do not perform well academically. These students were conscious of the racial stereotypes and misperceptions held by those in the larger society and felt that it was significant for them to challenge those ideas. TTD

encouraged students to be aware of negative views held by some in society, and this is perhaps what influenced the boys to formulate achievement goals in response to them. There are two major areas of educational research that students' ideas about the significance of African-American achievement address.

The first deals with Steele and Aronson's (1995) view of stereotype threat. Steele contends when a person's social or cultural identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to under perform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. He attributes the underperformance to a person's anxiety that he or she will conform to the negative stereotype. The anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including distraction and increased body temperature, all of which diminish performance level and students self efficacy. The four students in this study reported being conscious of stereotypes but rather than reacting adversely reaction to them, chose to respond positively by trying to provide themselves as counterexamples. The result supports findings presented by Carter (2005) in her case study on high achieving African-American students. She found that despite negative stereotypes and being aware of the negative social, racial, political, climate that faces some African-Americans, many of them managed to thrive and chose to excel in spite of.

The second area of research that this element of student responses can be linked to is critical race theory and pedagogy. Critical race theory has its roots in the more established fields of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, and politics (Dixon and Rousseau, 2006) and deals with the social construction and reality of race and discrimination from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Critical race pedagogy is a similar assertion and has been present in much of the dialogue in

contemporary educational research. It evolved from a direct response to Freire's (1997) call for critical and reflective journaling of the pedagogical process. Researchers such as Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2006) have addressed this call by conducting research on the critical processes of educators (e. g. their response to race relations and political awareness) and on how critical race theory and pedagogy can be used for practice. They contend that it is important to be critical of circumstances that accept the existence of schools as mechanisms of social reproduction. Teaching students of color to think, act, and speak, like wealthy, suburban, and white students is not going to ensure success for those students. Students should be engaged in a critical discourse that seeks to transform their identities and empower them. Students' in this study understood the stereotypes held by some in society, and this knowledge inspired them to think critically about them and work toward dispelling them.

**Response to High Expectations.** Students in this study responded positively to staff high expectations for success. Program staff would talk about how they expected high achievement out of TTD students and that they believed all of them would excel. Students reported that staff expectations made them feel that they could do anything. It made them feel good to know that they were apart of a community were everyone was pushing toward trying to excel and perform well in school. Students' responses indicated that they were excited about the possibility and opportunities to do well despite where they came from or what their background may have been. They felt that it was important for young people to think about their futures this way and to not feel limited in where they could go and what they could achieve. Additionally, students felt that staff's high expectations helped to present them with challenges to strive toward.

These responses allude to a relationship between expectations and student achievement. Although my data cannot establish this relationship as a causal linkage, high expectations set the context for high achievement. Students in this study were developing a sense of their own achievement based on the expectations of staff members in the program. In time spent with these students and their families, the notion of high expectation was held by their families and may have even been present within other social domains of which they were apart. However, students did point specifically to their reactions to the staff of TTD and their expectations. Students' positive responses to staff expectations were evidence of adults successfully communicating their optimism about their capacity to learn. As Hilliard (2003) has argued regarding high expectations, if students are made aware of educator's desire for their success, they are more likely to have positive responses and come to realize and acknowledge their own potential for achievement. The high expectations held by members of the TTD staff align with comprehensive views of building educational contexts and creating conditions that promote learning for all students but specifically African-American students. It is important to note that when students were asked whether or not they felt the staff had high expectations for their success, their responses could have been influenced by social acceptability. Given their experience with the program and their high regard for program staff, it would not have been favorable for them to answer those particular questions negatively. However, I felt that I was successful in assuring that their responses were confidential and others from the program would not have access to their responses and this may have controlled for the inflation in their answers.



**Future Planning.** Lastly, the four students in this study were encouraged by the TTD program to look beyond their present realities and formulate goals and visions for their futures. More specifically, students spoke to the ways the program imparted to the importance of preparing for post-secondary attainment and possible career paths. Despite literature pointing to the decline in goal orientation during the early years of adolescence, Jamal, Keith, Charles, and Eric reported having established clear goals and expectations about the future, as influenced by their participation in TTD. They seemed to have acquired goal-oriented dispositions in thinking about their plans and outlook for their futures. Goal orientation is defined by Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, and Hall (2003) as the individual's ability to make plans and set goals, it works in conjunction with self-efficacy to increase motivation. Goal-oriented individuals set challenging goals for themselves and maintain high levels of commitment to those goals despite encountering obstacles or challenges. Although my data do not directly support any empirical claims about the lasting commitment these students made to accomplishing their goals, their responses do support a move in that direction.

Ames (1992a) has argued that individual goal orientations may be influenced by the motivational climates that are created by what teachers and significant others say and do. According to Kaplan and Maehr (1999), educational practices that are geared toward facilitating goal orientation among African-American students address an important social concern involving the achievement of a group of students who have typically been marginalized and not given opportunities envision their future success. Additionally, providing students with the opportunities to create goals for the future helps to keep them mobilized toward success and empowers them to take control of their own

academic and social destinies. The views of students in this study support the ecological theory of goal orientation and add to existing knowledge about the ways that it may be developed in African-American students, males in particular.

### Connections to Relevant Literature

The findings in this study support and are connected to three broad areas of the literature that were presented in Chapter Two. The first area dealt with the critical adolescence period in child development. The second was related to viewing development from an environmental perspective. Lastly, findings align with a more positive view of development among African-American youth.

#### Adolescent Development

Theorists who believe in critical periods believe that children who do not get special stimulation during their window of receptivity are going to be "stuck" forever and never gain the abilities they should have gained in that period. However, other theorists believe that those very sensitive times in a child's life are just sensitive periods. They agree that children who do not get the right nurturing at the right times to jumpstart their developmental potential are going to have problems later in life, but they do not think that this inability to develop is permanent (Lilliard, 1996).

During adolescence youth face a range of developmental issues. Havighurst (1952) suggested that two important issues included work and relationships. Levinson (1978) focused on changing relationships and on exploration, while Erikson (1968) commented on intimacy and commitment to goals. Super (1963) indicated that exploring and crystallizing vocational choice are also important to older adolescents and young adults. What seems evident is that older adolescents and young adults enter transitions

with the goal of becoming independently functioning adults, as they strive to meet evolving personal and career related needs. This theory could perhaps explain or help to understand how and why Jamal, Keith, Charles, and Eric reported various feelings about their future goals, relationships with program staff, cultural identity. Erikson (1968) suggested that in our culture, adolescence affords a "psychosocial moratorium," particularly for middle - and upper-class American children. They do not yet have to "play for keeps," but can experiment, trying various roles, and thus hopefully find the one most suitable for them (Child Development Institute Resource Guide 2006). Although the participants of this study displayed characteristics similar to other adolescents during the critical period of development, they also showed in their responses about academic achievement and social mobility, that they were in fact playing for keeps. For these four boys, every decision and choice would determine significant life outcomes.

#### Environmental Views of Development

Second, findings from this study also support the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1975 ) and other researchers who use the ecological theory to explain how factors in a child's environment can affect how he or she grows and develops. Bronfenbrenner (1975) labeled different aspects or levels of the environment that influence children's development, including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem is the small, immediate environment the child lives in. Children's microsystems will include any immediate relationships or organizations they interacts with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their school or daycare.

In this study the students' microsystem included the Truth Tubman Douglas Program. Similar to findings from Dryfoos' (1998) study, how the program interacted

with the student participants may have an effect on how they grow and develop. The more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to learn and thrive. When viewed from this perspective, developmental paths are shaped by the reciprocal interplay between personal factors and diverse influences in ever-changing societies. The environment in which people live their lives is not a situational entity that ordains their life course. Rather it is a varied array of transactional life events in which individuals interact and respond to elements of their surroundings (Bandura, 2005). These surroundings are typically linked to age, status, and their roles in educational, familial, occupational, and other institutional systems. Findings of this study support the idea that adolescents may be influenced by their participation in the organized structure of TTD.

### Positive Views of African-American Development

Lastly, the participants in this study and their articulation of their experiences result in a common narrative that lends itself well to a larger body of research that focuses on what may be working in African-Americans' lives, not to the deficiencies. As mentioned in chapter two, more often than not empirical research that focuses on African-American students, especially males, highlight at length the disparities and disadvantages that exist. Ladson Billings and Tate (2006) suggest that research should be transformative in that it serves to enhance social justice and democracy, while also advancing the field of educational research. This paradigm is especially significant for inquiries involving students of color as they have been historically marginalized the most. Ladson-Billings (2000) notes that "references to the educational needs of African-

American students are folded into a discourse of deprivation” (p. 206). Furthermore, “the educational research literature, when it considers African-American learners at all, has constructed all African-American children, regardless of economic or social circumstance, within the deficit paradigm” (p. 206).

This research showcases a sustained effort that was providing parallel yet different experiences from traditional school for African-American youth. It presents a description of their learning and teaching in affirmative ways. To be sure, these findings serve as a response to the prevailing historic patterns of the sometimes incorrect and biased estimates of the developmental capacity of students of color, particularly African-Americans. There is a place for understanding and examining factors that lead to the negative outcomes of African-American adolescents, as it contributes to the creation of a comprehensive view of their educational and social experiences. However, the current study as well as future analysis of this data will seek to shed light on the ways that African-American youth can achieve healthy developmental outcomes.

#### Limitations

Although purposeful sampling can provide rich and insightful cases that increase understanding about certain phenomena, this is sometimes achieved with a limited sample. This study utilized a very small sample of students. Because there were only 4 participants, there is further need to investigate this area of educational research to determine whether findings from a larger and broader sample would match these results. It is also important to note that three of the four boys were from middle-to upper-class black families. An examination of whether (or not) these boys’ experiences are representative of African-American adolescents in

their peer group is needed. It could be the case that this sample of boys is atypical in that beyond their participation in the Truth Tubman Douglas program, they had fairly stable and strong support networks via their families and communities. Unlike students in Owens' (2005) study or the youth that Milbrey and McLaughlin (2000) highlight in *Urban Sanctuaries*, these four boys did have other sources of reinforcement. Given different background circumstances of the boys, their responses to how the program influenced them may have been slightly different.

This sample also consisted of all boys. The selection of all boys was based on the availability of those who volunteered to participate and was not necessarily purposeful. Further discussion and inquiry on how adolescent girls respond to a program like TTD is needed. Additionally, the analysis of students' perspectives about the TTD program relied on my interpretations of interview data which are ultimately self reports. In attempting to examine student voice and gain insight through interviews, it is important to note the complexity that this type of method presents. Self-reports are although rich and insightful, still pose questions about the validity of information shared, particularly when the participants are asked questions that could potentially depict them or those close to them in a negative light. As the researcher, I was conscious of this limitation throughout the duration of the study.

I attempted to control for self-report as much as possible in my analysis and interpretation of student responses. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, information they provided about their experiences was not cross-checked or corroborated with program staff. However, two parents of the boys participated in interviews where they discussed their views on TTD as well as how they observed their children's

responses to participating. This data was used minimally in the analysis of participant responses but not formerly included in this dissertation. These interviews revealed that generally parents saw TTD as being an asset to their children academically and were pleased that their sons enjoyed their experiences with the program. Although students and their parents saw me as a member of the TTD “family,” my role as researcher and the nature of this study were explained to all four boys and their parents at multiple times prior to and during the course of data collection. I would describe the requirements of my doctoral program to conduct research for a dissertation, and while I was connected to the program, my obligations to conduct the study were primary. It is my hope that this offset the tendency for them to depict the program in a favorable light.

### Implications

The findings from this dissertation have implications for three broad areas of educational research: university outreach programs, adolescent learning and development, and student voice. In considering how this study contributes to what we know about academic outreach programs, I am first reminded of Dr. S’s comment to me about the importance of doing this work so that people understand the nature of the TTD program, “I’m so glad you’re on board, we need the work that you will doing, so that people can know what we’re about.” On a larger scale it is important for all educational stakeholders including program facilitators to know about academic outreach programs and how they function. TTD is just one academic outreach program among hundreds and maybe thousands in the United States, and it is beyond the empirical reach of this study to generalize to other programs. However, there are certain elements of this work that may be useful in understanding the work being done in these settings. Specifically, the

TTD program engaged successfully in such practices as teaching students about the positive aspects of the African American culture, relaying high expectations for student success, exposing them to the world of college, and creating a family-oriented space for with the students.

The voices of participants represented in this study demonstrate that outreach programs play a viable role in providing students, particularly African-American students, with positive ideologies and skills they need to function and succeed academically. Educators, policy makers, and researchers interested in creating effective support networks for the positive development of students of color can utilize information and insight from this study and similar studies to realize this goal. Future research should be undertaken to examine the perspectives and views of students in other programs in order to examine and assess the generality of the results reported here. More specifically, this line of work could reveal significant information about the pedagogical approaches that are being implemented within these spaces.

The presented findings also have implications for the field of adolescent learning and development. They shed light on the construction of their cultural identities as students as well as the development of academic skills and goal orientation. This study contributes to the socio-cultural view of adolescent development as presented first by Vygotsky (1978) and later by Cole (1990). This view of learning and development relies on understanding development through the enactment of social activity. First, the study provides insight into the ways that adolescents may be constructing and negotiating their identities via social activity within academic outreach programs. Through their participation and positive interaction with peers and adults,



youth are able to build appropriate identities about who they are culturally. Second, the study has shown how the TTD program has been a context for this acquisition of academic skills and for their becoming more self directed learners. Third, the study has documented their progress toward becoming more goal-oriented, when exposed to certain academic practices. According to Eccles (2001), positive development is influenced and nurtured by what happens within contexts and relationships as well as across the people, places and possibilities young people encounter in their daily lives.

Lastly, this study has implications for understanding and focusing on student voice. Cook-Sather (2002) has observed that, "Because of who they are, what they know, and how they are positioned, students must be recognized as having knowledge essential to the development of sound educational policies and practices (p. 5)." One step toward a comprehensive view of students is through the exploration of their perspectives and ideas on their learning and development. This study contributes to this area of educational research by offering an analysis of the perspectives, voices, views, and experiences of students who actively participated in an educational context. Although the perspectives and experiences created from youth perspectives will not generalize across contexts, they do offer contextual ideas and issues that are pertinent to the conversation about how to address the needs of adolescents, particularly African American students.

It is my hope that by presenting the voices of students in this program, researchers and practitioners can begin to thoughtfully reflect on their work with these adolescents by understanding how they may be experiencing academic spaces outside of school that are shaping their social, emotional, and academic development. A focus on student voice helps educational stakeholders to understand that students do know what

types of support they need, and that they can articulate those needs while also critiquing their own socio-cultural environments. Much of the research on African American students emphasizes their cultural discontinuities, portraying them as students with limited hope and academic aspirations. Yet the voices of Eric, Charles, Jamal, and Keith do not illustrate academic or social deficiency. They are not disconnected from schooling or achievement but rather reveal their resilience and dedication to their academic success.

#### Future Directions: Developing a Research Agenda

This dissertation serves as a platform for developing a future research agenda in examining student voice and the learning and development of African-American students. There are still remaining questions for exploring students' perspectives within traditional classrooms to broaden our understanding of their learning and development via various kinds of curriculum and practices. For example, what are students' perspectives on standards based testing or culturally responsive pedagogy? It is my hope to continue these endeavors and build a line of research that helps in our understanding the ways that African American students learn and develop. Over the next five years I would like to contribute to the body of research that utilizes student voice to understand the intricacies, complexities, and nuances within the wider world of education.

Additionally, following Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006), I view my role as researcher to be "transformative" in that it serves to enhance social justice and democracy, while also advancing the field of educational research and the knowledge of students. In the words of John Hope Franklin (2005), a notable African-American scholar and historian,

"While I set out to advance my professional career on the basis of the highest standards of scholarship, I also used that scholarship to expose the hypocrisy underlying so much of American social and race relations. It never ceased being a risky feat of tightrope walking, but I always believed

that if I could use my knowledge and training to improve society it was incumbent on me to make an attempt (pg. 376)”

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Student Participant Interview Protocol #1**

#### **Introductory Questions**

- ☒ What grade are you in?
- ☒ How old are you?
- ☒ Tell me about yourself. Like what you like to do for fun. What type of music do you listen to. What is your favorite subject in school?
- ☒ What type of student do you think you are? Good, ok, Not so good.
- ☒ We'll talk more about this later?

#### **General Questions**

- ☒ How long have you participated in the KCP Rising Stars Program?
- ☒ This is my second year. {Didn't participate in the summer residency program}
- ☒ Have you participated in this program?
- ☒ Do you have friends or family members that participate?
- ☒ What have you liked or enjoyed most about KCP Rising Star?
- ☒ Were there things that you maybe didn't like so much about the program? If so what were they, and why?
- ☒ What has been your favorite activity in the program?
- ☒ What do you think the purpose of KCP is?
- ☒ Do they say anything specifically about the importance of college for urban youth or minority students? If so what?
- ☒ Has KCP taught you about academic achievement in general?
- ☒ What have they taught you about culture and identity (specifically about your own culture or about other cultures)?
  - Have these things helped you to think about how you identify or view yourself as a person or student?

- ☒ What resources and support (i.e. summer workshops, speakers) has helped you the most, if at all?
- ☒ Thinking back to a couple months ago when we discussed leadership and initiative, what do you a leader is ?
- ☒ Have you learned anything in the program about conflict resolution or how to resolve conflicts.
- ☒ Last month was the Rosa Parks Tribute and they talked about activism, what do you think activism is?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Student Participant Interview Protocol #2**

#### **General Questions**

- ☒ What is this notion of “We are family” that is present in KCP, what are your views on that? Do you feel connected to KCP and if so how is this helpful for you?
  - Have you developed friendships and relationships within KCP
- ☒ KCP talks a lot about knowing what type of student you are and how you learn best. Describe who you are as a student. What do you think about your own academic ability?
- ☒ How often do you use these learning style skills that are taught by the program?
- ☒ What do you all think the significance of African American student achievement is, or is it important?
- ☒ What have been some of the things that KCP has taught you about academic achievement and how does that fit or not fit with what your parents tell you about achievement?
- ☒ What do you think the social and academic needs are of young people around your age are? What do you think are some of your needs are? (i.e. what would you need to help you be successful in school and in society)
- ☒ Describe your idea of success? What does it mean to be successful? Good job, lots of jewelry, what?
- ☒ How does KCP help you think about your cultural identity as a young black male?
- ☒ Has KCP made you socially aware about what is going on in the world? (i.e. in schools, in government, in the media)
- ☒ Does the staff at KCP have certain expectations for you as a student? If so, what are they?
  - If so, do you try to live up to those expectations?

**JAMAL**

- ☒ Do they say anything specifically about the importance of college for urban youth or minority students? If so what?

- ☒ Has KCP taught you about academic achievement in general?
- ☒ What have they taught you about culture and identity (specifically about your own culture or about other cultures)?
  - Have these things helped you to think about how you identify or view yourself as a person or student?
- ☒ What resources and support (i.e. summer workshops, speakers) has helped you the most, if at all?
- ☒ Thinking back to a couple months ago when we discussed leadership and initiative, what do you a leader is ?
- ☒ What do you think activism is? What did KCP talk about at the Rosa Parks Tribute. Do remember any of the things that from Saturday about activism?
- ☒ From last time: In what ways has KCP helped you to think about your purpose?
- ☒ Why is it important to be open? What does that mean to you?

#### CHARLES

- ☒ In what specific ways has KCP helped you to prepare for college and “ make better grades”
- ☒ What does social justice mean for you? Probe: What does it mean to “be educated so you can fight back”
- ☒ What is meant by some students “being smart but not having opportunities”
- ☒ Talk more about the comparison of the two different middle schools. Are there connections to what is learned in KCP.

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- ☒ The difference between his statement about his potential to do good work and how he actually performs and what he perceives he might needs to do better.
- ☒ Importance of making friends and developing relationships within the program
- ☒ Social view of minority/black students “ we know what we’re worth but we’re not viewed like that” pg. 5



- ☒ **Significance and Meaning of staff views and relationships. How significant is the staff's belief in your potential and ultimate success to you and does it help you in school?**
- ☒ **Probe further on the definition of success. Pg.9**

## APPENDIX C

### Student Participant Interview Protocol #2

- ☒ **.IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:** What is a rising star? What do you think it means to be a part of KCP and what makes you different from young people who are not apart of the program?
- ☒ What sessions have you attended this year? Which workshops stand out for you the most? *Note: (Can also get this info from program as well)*
- ☒ Opening Kick-off Workshop
- ☒ Technology Day
- ☒ Cultural Day
- ☒ Tribute to Rosa Parks
- ☒ Summer Sign-Up Info Session
- ☒ Study Skills
- ☒ Test Taking
- ☒ Pet Visit
- ☒ Talk more in general about how this program is helping (impacting) you? Are there any drawbacks? Are there ways that the program may not be so helpful?
- ☒ We've talked about utilizing skills from KCP in the classroom but are there other things that happen in the program that influence you in school?
- ☒ **PEER SUPPORT:** How important are the relationships you build here in KCP?
- ☒ **YOUTH NEEDS:** What do you think is important for or needed for young people like yourself to be successful?
- ☒ **KCP PROGRAM:** Ultimately do you think KCP has or will help you accomplish your goals? Why and in what way?
- ☒ How has KCP helped you make plans for you future and do you think this is important? Why or Why not?
- ☒ Do the program staffs' high expectations of your success make you confident about what you are capable of?
- ☒ In what ways have you tried to use leadership skills taught by the program? Specific examples from school and home.

- ☒ Do you consider yourself to be different from your peers? Do you feel that your participation in KCP influences you in a way that makes you different from others who do not participate? If so, how and in what ways?
- ☒ **LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVISM:** Do you feel that leadership important for African American students?
- ☒ Is Leadership connected to being an activist, or are those two different things?
- ☒ Do you think about the decisions you make to succeed in school as a form of activism?
- ☒ Why is it important for black children to have a better future? (Kyle)
- ☒ How does education make you more equipped to “fight back”?
- ☒ What do you think are some of the major issues facing young people? (In schools, in their neighborhoods, in their homes)
- ☒ Is it important for you to define your own success?
- ☒ **BLACK IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:** What examples have you used to think about your future success (the program, your friends, your parents?)
- ☒ Do you think about the importance of African American achieving and does that help you make decisions in school?
- ☒ What are some of the images of black males that you see in the media (T.V. movies, music videos, etc.) Do you identify with those images. If so, in what ways? If not, why?
- ☒ How do you think black males are perceived at your school? Do you think this perception impacts their learning?
- ☒ Do you think black male’s needs are different from other students?
- ☒ What do you think it means to have a positive cultural identity?
- ☒ What type of support would you need in order to have a positive view of yourself?
- ☒ Do you think that your cultural identity is connected to how you perform in school?

- ☒ **CONCLUSION:** This is our last interview so are there other things that you want to tell me about your participation and experience in KCP that might be helpful in me understanding your views and experiences?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Staff Interview Protocol**

- ☒ How did you come to be involved with KCP? How long have you been involved and in what capacity?
- ☒ How long has this program been here at Michigan State?
- ☒ What do you perceive as the major goals and objectives of the program?
- ☒ How do you think those goals are carried out in program activities?
- ☒ In what ways have you personally tried to transfer these goals and objectives to the youth participants?
- ☒ How do you attempt to align program activities and program curriculum with the goals and objectives?
- ☒ Are there components of the program that you feel are particularly significant for the youth? If so, what are they?
- ☒ In what ways does KCP attempt to address the academic and developmental needs of the participants? What do you perceive these needs to be?
- ☒ Are there components or areas of the program that you feel can be improved? (i.e. structure of activities, programs, staff, etc.) If so, what are they?
- ☒ What does it mean to be a KCP participant?
- ☒ What types of ideas and values aligned with being KCP?
- ☒ How important do you feel that these resources and supports are for young people?
- ☒ How important do you think they are to urban and/or minority youth?
- ☒ In thinking about gaining useful information on student experiences in the program, what types of questions do you think could be asked of current participants? What areas may be helpful to focus on?
- ☒ How important do you think this program is for young black males? Why?
- ☒ What components of the program do you think are or would be most significant for them?
- ☒ In general, what do you think the academic and social needs of young black males are?

☒ Are there ways that you try to specifically support the males in the program?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Key Informant Interview Protocol**

- ☒ How old are you? What school do you attend?
- ☒ How long did you participate in the KCP Rising Stars Program?
- ☒ Did you have friends or family members that participated or are currently participating?
- ☒ What did you like or enjoy most about KCP Rising Stars?
- ☒ Were there things that you maybe didn't like so much about the program? If so, what were they, and why?
- ☒ What did it mean to be a KCP participant?
  - What types of ideas and values aligned with being KCP?
- ☒ In your view, what did KCP teach you if anything about going to college and planning for college?
  - Did they say anything specifically about the importance of college for urban youth or minority students? If so what?
  - How did you feel about what they were saying? How similar, if at all, was it to what your family and friends said or felt about college?
- ☒ What did they teach you about culture and identity (specifically about your own culture or about other cultures)?
  - Have these things helped you to think about how you identify or view yourself as a person or student?
- ☒ What resources and support (i.e. summer workshops, speakers) helped you the most, if at all?
- ☒ How important do you feel that these resources and supports are to young people?
  - How important do you think they are to urban and/or minority youth?
- ☒ In thinking about gaining useful information on student experiences in the program and thinking about your own experience as a Rising Star, what types of questions do you think could be asked of current participants? What areas may be helpful to focus on.

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