

ABSTRACT

THE STRATEGIES THAT ELEMENTARY TEACHERS PERCEIVE AS EFFECTIVE IN HELPING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS BECOME PROFICIENT WRITERS

by

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Writing is a skill that is used throughout life as a way to communicate. Through supportive and responsive classrooms, schools may best help each child grow into literacy in ways that enable them to use written language productively throughout their lives. However important writing skills may be, African American males are under performing in this area. African American males have historically performed poorly on standardized tests in all academic areas, including writing. The lower levels of writing skills can impact essential life domains, such as completing educational goals, fulfilling employment and having the ability to become contributing members of society, and caring for a family.

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the strategies elementary teachers perceive as effective in helping African American male students become proficient writers. The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. To collect the data, a questionnaire and face-to-face open-ended one-on-one semi-structured interviews from teachers who had experience with teaching African American boys. The teachers were all at the instructional point of teaching initial writing skills and strategies to their students.

The results from these interviews yielded six themes: Culture, language, teacher training, writing approach, and motivation. There were important issues confronting these teachers in their

own abilities to teach these children, as well as a self-reported lack of training and experience in how to improve or increase writing skills for these boys. These themes created a theory of the experiences of the participants that suggest when effective writing strategies are used, African American males may be more inclined to engage in the writing process and show improved writing outcomes. The findings of this study may be useful to teachers who teach writing to all students.