

**ENGAGING TEACHERS IN A BOOK CLUB TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF CULTURAL  
DIVERSITY**

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the School of Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2017

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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# **ENGAGING TEACHERS IN A BOOK CLUB TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

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This report describes the participation of six teachers in a book club centered around the book *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There* (Milner, 2010). The group consisted of two males and four female teachers. Five of the teachers are European American and one male is African American. The teachers teach in a school with primarily white teachers and primarily African-American students. Teachers completed a survey about their teaching preparation and experiences related to cultural diversity before beginning the book club. Subsequently, the three book club sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. Analysis of the surveys and book club transcripts indicated that most of the teachers did not feel adequately prepared to teach diverse students before entering the teaching profession. The findings also indicate that a book club is a potentially productive starting point for promoting courageous conversations about culture and diversity in the school context.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In Pennsylvania today, students of color make up seventy-one percent of the education population, yet, ninety-six percent of the teachers are white (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). This discrepancy is a cause of serious concern. How are students and teachers interacting? How well do they understand one another? Are there consequences in terms of academic performance? According to current the National Assessment of Education Progress (2015) the average math score for white fourth graders was 24 points higher than the average score for their black peers. Likewise, in reading the average reading score for white students was 26 points higher than the average score for their black peers (NAEP, 2015).

With increasing numbers of students of color in schools, some states have strategically created action plans to ensure equitable learning environments (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015). For example, in June 2015, the Pennsylvania Department of Education published a report entitled, “Pennsylvania’s State Plan for Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators for All Students.” According to this report, each state must submit a plan describing steps it will take to ensure that “poor and minority children are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out of field teachers (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015).

This report raises important questions for me. I wonder what “inexperienced” means? Perhaps “inexperience” refers to a lack of understanding related to cultural diversity. Perhaps it

is a lack of attention and preparation for teaching culturally diverse students. The problem I am addressing is the cultural awareness of teachers who are teaching black students. Specifically, I am interested in facilitating a context to support teachers in developing their awareness of the cultural resources that these students have and how they might understand and address those resources in their teaching.

An important perspective on cultural understanding is provided in the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves a critical cultural consciousness when interacting with students from diverse backgrounds. Part of that consciousness involves teachers recognizing their own cultural backgrounds and realizing that some of the norms in their culture may not be norms in a student's culture. Gay (2002) notes that it is important for teachers to acquire accurate knowledge about the cultures, experiences, and contributions of other specific ethnic groups, as well as their own.

I teach in a magnet school located on the east side of a large city. The school began as a partial magnet school focused on German language and culture. The language focus was solely German because several predominantly wealthy German families lived in the neighborhood. The population of the school began as a very homogenous group of students. However, over the past 6-7 years, the population has shifted to become more diverse. Currently, there are 391 students, with 67% black, 22% white, and 6% multiethnic. Of these students, 13% have IEPs and these students are black. According to A Plus Schools report (2014), only 30% of black students in this school scored proficient or advanced on the state.

PSSA testing. According to the same report, the scores for white students scoring proficient or advanced on the state PSSA testing was 90% to 100%. The school has 16 teachers, 5 of whom are black.

The school is now a German and Mandarin Chinese magnet school. As a result, the school environment offers opportunities for the black students to learn about German and Chinese culture, customs, and language, but their own culture is not discussed or taught.

The specific stakeholders for my research are students, administrators, parents, and teachers. The black students are affected because two-thirds of this population are not performing at proficient or advanced levels on the state assessment. The administration has a stake in this issue because they work with the teachers, parents, and students. Also, the parents are affected because they have selected a magnet school for their children to have optimal cultural and learning opportunities. Lastly, the teachers have a large stake in this issue because most of them do not share the cultural background of the students they teach.

My problem of practice focuses on the potential of a teacher book club experience to influence the cultural perspectives of teachers. The book club sessions engaged teachers in my school in reading and talking about *Start Where You Are but Don't Stay There* (2010) by H. Rich Milner. The book provides an engaging discussion about the challenges, internal and external dilemmas, and opportunity gaps faced by teachers of diverse classrooms.

I designed my inquiry based on the work of Florio-Ruane (2001) who investigated teacher book club discussions of literature about culture and literacy. As posited by Florio-Ruane (2001) “the two challenges in contemporary teacher education are the disparity in background between a largely Euro-American teaching force and the diverse pupils it serves and the difficulty of teaching about culture in responsive, dialogic ways” (p.4). This lack of culturally

responsive teaching discussed by Ladson- Billings (1995), Paris (2012), Nieto (2005), Howard (2003) may be the reason for conflict and miscommunication between white teachers and black students in some classrooms. I designed my inquiry to address this situation.

In the sections that follow, I examine the literature that speaks to the issue of the cultural awareness of teachers who are teaching black students. The themes to be addressed include teacher book clubs, culturally relevant pedagogy, and engaging teachers in courageous conversations.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 BOOK CLUBS

According to Flood and Lapp (1994),” Book clubs are popular because they provide an intellectual forum where people can share ideas, thoughts, feelings and reactions to a piece of literature” (p.3). In the teaching profession opportunities are needed to discuss ideas and feelings.

Book clubs can be used as a starting point for difficult conversations, professional development, or a way to learn about other cultures.

Consider, Florio-Ruane (2001) who designed a book club with a homogeneous group of pre-service teachers called the Future Teacher’s Autobiography Club. The book club was held monthly, and the women had dinner and discussed six books dealing with some form of diversity and multiculturalism. To begin, Florio-Ruane (2001) discussed the importance of knowing your own culture so you can appreciate other cultures. According to Florio- Ruane, “our histories shape our practices, assumptions, and expectations” (p.24). For Florio-Ruane, members of the book club needed to take a deep look at their own culture to have empathy for diverse students.

Another take-away from Florio-Ruane’s (2001) book club investigation is that the book club sessions allowed the teachers to explore culture by responding to themes found in the diverse books that they read and talked about. These books included, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou,1969) and *Hunger of Memory* (Rodriguez,1982).

Discussing these books allowed participants to hear different points of view. For Florio-Ruane (2010) “Sometimes the discontinuity between what we already know and believe and the narrative confronting us is sufficient to prompt rethinking the familiar, telling ourselves a new story or retelling a familiar story from a new or different stance (p.76).” The book club allowed participants to move beyond narrow views about culture and to think about the impact of cultural and gender boundaries.

In addition, a book club is a nonthreatening way to discuss topics that would probably never be talked about in the school context. Florio-Ruane labels these as “hot lava” topics, such as race or politics that stir up passion from participants and may cause them to be uncomfortable. Florio-Ruane emphasizes that “a major challenge to teaching and learning by means of conversation is introducing and sustaining hot lava topics on the conversational floor—and examining them in ways that do not veer from conflict yet maintain the conversation as a speech event” (p.116).

Similarly, a book club was conducted by Flood et al. (1994) with twelve high school teachers from four different ethnic groups. This study was conducted over a two- year period with volunteer teachers and preservice teachers. The teachers read selected books from a collection of multicultural readings. The books included *Women Hollering Creek* (Cisneros, 1991), *House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1989), *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1972), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston, 1991), and *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 1989).

The group members kept a response journal and, after reading, shared their thoughts about the books.

The focus of this study was to investigate how participants:

- came to know and grow in their knowledge of multiculturalism
- articulated knowledge about the ways in which they read and respond to stories
- transformed experience as active participants in a book club to actions within their own classrooms
- communicated with their peers in a discussion group

The book club allowed the participants to see similarities in their own lives as well as discover the experiences of others from different cultures. The book club allowed the teachers to become more reflective about their teaching of students from different cultural backgrounds.

This book club also created a positive way for teachers to discuss culture in a nonthreatening environment. According to Flood and his colleagues, “increased understandings about multiculturalism were evidenced by everyone. The selected texts served as springboards for reflecting on and sharing experiences” (p.22).

Book clubs are important because they may be the only opportunity teachers get to discuss cultural issues. Further, book clubs can also be used to confront potential biases and stereotypes that teachers may have in subjects such as math and science. Mensah (2009) conducted a book club designed to challenge biases about teaching science to diverse learners. She worked with 23 preservice teachers enrolled in a 16- week elementary science methods course at a large urban university. The participants were asked to write reflections in a journal for further discussion.

Unlike the previously discussed book club, this book club did not have multiple texts to read. Instead, the group met to discuss an instructor-selected text about issues pertinent to science teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. This book club was important because many



of the teachers in the study didn't feel they needed to think about diversity when it came to science.

Mensah noticed that after the book club “the teachers failed to see what the students brought with them upon entering science classrooms and how community, language and culture were relevant for science teaching (p. 1049).” In fact, after reading a multicultural book, one preservice teacher stated, “I did not understand how the first section of the reading related to science” (p.1050) This is an important example of how teachers may fail to see how cultural diversity plays an important role in the subjects that they teach students every day. Book clubs can influence teachers' thinking, but that is not always the case.

## **2.2 CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

As noted by Delpit (2006), “One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power” (p.66). This statement echoes the need for cultural understanding and change in the dominant pedagogy used in many classrooms.

An important perspective on cultural understanding is provided in the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves a critical cultural consciousness when interacting with students from diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2002). Part of that consciousness involves teachers recognizing and understanding their own cultural background and realizing that their norms may not be the norms of their students. According to Gay (2002), it is important for teachers to acquire accurate knowledge about cultures, experiences, and contributions of

other ethnic groups, -as well as their own. Likewise, Florio- Ruane (2001) states, “the challenge for teacher education, then, is not only to acknowledge one’s own background and the background of others, but to wonder-to inquire critically into those backgrounds as they shape, texture, and bias the ways we live our lives as teachers and learners” (p.123).

Similarly, another existing perspective on the need for culturally relevant pedagogy is the need for cultural connections. The cultural connection is lost if teachers are not connected with their students’ lives or their cultures. For Ladson-Billings (1995), there is a critical need for more teachers who can relate to African-American students and support them in being successful in school. To further support this claim, Ladson-Billings (2006) asserted that there is an education gap that teachers and parents must address more aggressively by working with researchers, school board members, and outside agencies.

Nieto (2005) asserts that we need to acknowledge that there is still institutional racism in schools and that there is rampant cultural mismatching in classrooms. This situation can create a spirit of distrust in parents. Along similar lines, Paris (2012) states there is a need for a more aggressive approach to developing cultural pedagogy because culture is important in a child’s educational journey.

### **2.3 COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS**

In addition to the need for culturally relevant pedagogy, there is a lack of conversation about diversity or culture on national, state, and local levels. Conversations about race can be the impetus for change in a school system. Milner (2010) discusses why people are apprehensive about race as an important area of discourse for a variety of reasons, including: (a) they are

uncomfortable talking about it; (b) they find it irrelevant to do so; (c) race is sometimes considered a taboo subject due to its horrific history for some in U.S. society; and (d) race is misunderstood by so many, both within and outside education. Despite these challenges, Milner emphasizes the need to discuss race because, “opportunity forces us to think about how systems, processes, and institutions are overtly and covertly designed to maintain the status quo and sustain depressingly complicated disparities in education” (p.8).

In 2016, Milner surveyed 450 preservice teachers about their beliefs about race. According to the findings, teachers agreed that race should be discussed in the classrooms but they felt unprepared to lead such conversations (Anderson, 2017). Although it may be quite uncomfortable for some to have such conversations, it is necessary to be proactive when there are cultural conflicts in the classroom.

Likewise, Mansfield and Marie (2015) presented a qualitative analysis of two empirical studies that focused on leadership practices of female practitioners at the secondary level. The researchers used interviews and focus groups to examine how leaders were engaging stakeholders about educational inequities. The participants were engaging in discourse about race, class, and gender in the classroom. The researchers concluded that, to even begin the work of cultural discussions, the leaders had to have passion, practice, and persistence. The leaders had to *want* to do the work needed for equity and transformation. The analysis revealed that each leader handled discussions differently depending on their own culture or passion for the issues. The leaders learned about themselves and others. They were also able to witness how engaging, sharing, and testing ideas in the field can help a school be successful.

The research described above provides support for my intention to engage teachers in my school in a book club focused on exploring issues related to cultural diversity. The research questions for my investigation are:

- What do teachers say about their preparedness to teach culturally diverse students?
- What do teachers share in a book club context about their experiences with students at Langston Hughes Academy related to cultural diversity?

### 3.0 METHODS

Action research is the approach that best describes this inquiry. According to Buss and Zambo (2016) action research involves “an action, or intervention, and the systematic study of that action through collection of quantitative data, qualitative data, or mixed- methods data” (p.141). My inquiry involves enacting a teacher book club focused on issues related to cultural diversity and studying what the book club sessions revealed about teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach culturally diverse students and their experiences with students at my school related to cultural diversity. It is a case study of the book club sessions that makes use of qualitative data in the form of survey responses and discussion transcripts as well as quantitative data in the form of scaled survey responses.

To address the research questions for this inquiry, I recruited a diverse group of six volunteer teachers from Langston Hughes Academy. The teachers were asked to participate in a semester-long book club to discuss *Start Where You Are, But Don’t Stay There* (Milner, 2010). I informed the teachers that we would meet once a month from October through December after school for an hour to discuss the issues in the book along with a few questions about each chapter. The meetings were held in a classroom. In addition, I provided each teacher with a copy of the book and two or three questions each month to think about for each chapter. I also provided dinner during each meeting.

In the following sections, I provide a description of each teacher based on their responses to the pre-survey. All names are pseudonyms.

Each teacher participant was asked to take a pre-survey to gain information about their experiences and cultural background. The following questions were asked:

- Where and when did you secure your initial teaching certification?
- How long have you been teaching? Tell where, when, and what grade levels.
- How would you describe your cultural background? What race do you identify with?
- Before entering the teaching profession, how often did you interact with students from racial, cultural, or economic groups different from your own and in what context?
- In your free time, how often do you take part in cultural events, celebrations, shows, movies, rallies, or other opportunities for interaction with racial groups outside of your own?

### **3.1 MRS. COLES**

Mrs. Coles is 62 years old and just finished her 26<sup>th</sup> year of teaching at Langston Hughes Academy. She is a white woman of Slovak and German ancestry. Her personality is highly energetic and she is passionate about teaching and learning from others. All she ever wanted to be was a teacher. Mrs. Coles grew up in a very white (as she put it) neighborhood, and she attended all white schools most of her elementary years. She had few interactions with diverse

students prior to teaching. While participating in the book club, she had just begun her first month of retirement from Langston Hughes Academy.

### **3.2 MISS FRANKLIN**

Miss Franklin has been teaching for more than 32 years at Langston Hughes Academy. She is a 60-year-old white woman with a no-nonsense and outspoken personality. She was thinking about retiring a few months after the book club ended. Miss Franklin did not grow up in a diverse neighborhood and admitted that she had very little interaction with students from racial, cultural, or economic groups different from her own prior to teaching.

### **3.3 MISS WILSON**

Miss Wilson has been in education for the past 8 years. She is a 55-year-old African-American woman, and teaching is her second career. Her personality is very cheerful and optimistic. Miss Wilson grew up in a very diverse neighborhood. While in high school, her class was one of the first classes in the city to desegregate. She learned a lot about different cultures and interacted with several students from different backgrounds.

### **3.4 MR. JONES**

Mr. Jones is a 60-year-old African American who has been teaching for 30 years. He is very strict and has a pessimistic view most of the time. Mr. Jones grew up in a white suburban neighborhood and remained in the same neighborhood until he graduated from college.

### **3.5 MR. FRANCISCO**

Mr. Francisco is a 37-year-old white man who has been in education for about ten years. He spent 5 of those years teaching at Langston Hughes Academy. Mr. Francisco attended an upper middle-class school with mostly white and Catholic students. Mr. Francisco is very upbeat and introspective. He stays informed with culturally relevant topics and trainings.

### **3.6 MRS. GOODMAN**

Mrs. Goodman is a 48- year-old white woman who has been teaching for more than 18 years, 9 of which have been at Langston Hughes Academy. She just completed a doctoral program in education. She grew up in a lower -class white neighborhood. She did not interact or learn about different cultures prior to teaching at Langston Hughes Academy.



## **4.0 RESOURCES**

The book club centered around the book *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There* (2010) by H. Rich Milner. The book provides an engaging discussion about the challenges, internal and external dilemmas, and opportunity gaps faced by teachers of diverse classrooms. The book provides an in-depth description of four teachers and their diverse experiences. The following is a brief description of each teacher and their experiences as presented in Milner's book.

### **4.1 MR. HALL**

Mr. Hall is a white male teacher in an urban school. He started his career unaffected by and unfamiliar with issues of race in his own life. He also didn't realize how race manifested in the lives of the African-American students he taught. According to Milner (2010), "Mr. Hall started off going to work just to teach science and had to work to understand that teaching science would require much more than knowledge of his subject" (p.46). In the beginning his relationships with the students was purely academic and the students felt invisible. As time went on Mr. Hall learned he had to get to know the students by searching for common ground between him and the students. He shared a lot of his personal life and personal stories with his students to

continue to build relationships. He was effective because he learned from his students and adjusted his teaching throughout the years.

## **4.2 DR. JOHNSON**

Dr. Johnson is a black female teacher who taught at a suburban high school. She worked to create a culturally sensitive atmosphere. According to Milner (2010), “Dr. Johnson transcended cultural conflicts by making explicit connection with her own and her students’ experiences with feeling marginalized and by showing she cared for them by having high expectations and not accepting mediocrity” (p.90). In her school, discussions of race were not celebrated. Instead, her teaching style was met with some resistance. In essence, Dr. Johnson had empathy for her students that other teachers did not possess. As a result, she could be an effective teacher because she kept an open dialogue about race, prejudice, and unjust treatment. Dr. Johnson provided a space where students could talk about race and explore different perspectives through literature.

## **4.3 MR. JACKSON**

Mr. Jackson is a black male teacher at a diverse urban school. He worked well with his students because his own children were around the same age. Mr. Jackson was immersed in the students’ world at home and at school. This allowed him to have a relational advantage with the students that most other teachers did not have. He used music and hip hop to develop lessons.

According to Milner (2010), “engaging in popular culture and learning about ways to connect lessons from popular culture into teaching and learning have potential to assist educators” (p.129). Mr. Jackson used pop culture to engage his students in math and science. The students enjoyed his class because he brought their world into the classroom.

#### **4.4 MS. SHAW**

Ms. Shaw is a black teacher who had been teaching for thirty-five years. She kept the students engaged in work from the moment they walked into her classroom until class was over. She was very passionate about her work as a teacher. She felt she was called to do more than teach- she wanted to change lives and perspectives. For Milner (2010), “Ms. Shaw made it clear that it was part of her role, responsibility, and calling to empower her students to serve and change their communities” (p.132). In addition to seeing her teaching as a mission. Ms. Shaw also taught her students that they had a collective responsibility to take their learning seriously and focus on improving the community. She also taught the students to have self-pride. Ms. Shaw was a successful teacher because of her commitment to the school and to the students.

## **5.0 DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 SURVEYS**

All teachers were asked to respond to a two-part survey before the first book club session. The first part consisted of thirteen open-ended response questions. The second part of the survey consisted of twenty-five Likert Scale Items. (See Appendix B.) I analyzed the survey data by summarizing teachers' responses and providing examples of responses to the survey questions dealing with the following topics:

- Changes in teaching and learning community (questions 5,8,11)
- Preparation and support from the school system (question 7)
- Barriers to communicating with or teaching African-American students (question 9)
- Curriculum issues (question 10)

### **5.2 TRANSCRIPTS OF BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS**

The book club members engaged in discussions about chapters 1 through 5 in Milner's book. In preparation for each scheduled meeting, I gave the teachers questions to think about.

The book club sessions lasted for 45 minutes to an hour. The sessions were audio taped using a digital audio recorder. After the session ended each session was transcribed. These transcripts provided the second data source. I analyzed the transcripts by identifying specific content units in the transcripts related to the four themes listed above. I also identified other themes that emerged during the discussions and labeled them with identifying codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For example, the following transcript excerpt was coded as curriculum issues.

“I want to focus on the curriculum. You know, the cultural conflicts when they talked about how the curriculum plays a role. I’ve seen a huge change, going back to those stories when you know they had an issue and it was always resolved. To now, where there are more stories that explain more in depth. O.K. Where in real life is and the fact that there are differences and that whole diversity. I don’t remember that in our last reading series.” (Miss Franklin, Book Club Session One)

## **6.0 FINDINGS**

In the sections that follow, I share the findings from my analysis of the survey data and discussion transcripts.

### **6.1 TEACHER'S RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS**

In this section, I summarize teacher's responses to survey questions related to the following topics:

- Changes in teaching and learning community (questions 5,8,11)
- Preparation and support from the school system (question 7)
- Barriers to communicating with or teaching African American students (question 9)
- Curriculum issues (question 10)

## **6.2 CHANGES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY AT LANGSTON HUGHES ACADEMY**

Teachers agreed that the biggest change occurring at Langston Hughes Academy was the demographic shift resulting in more African American students. They also noted that there were more single-parent families with lower incomes. Class sizes are also much larger than before.

Some teachers stated the community-school partnership is not strong anymore. This loss of community partnership had taken away volunteers and money from the school. In addition, some teachers expressed concern that there are not enough opportunities for the staff to get to know each other. Some teachers feel race is an issue among the teachers and the students. Other teachers feel race is a national issue that will never go away.

When asked what changes they have noticed with the teaching and learning community at Langston Hughes Academy the teacher's responses were unfavorable.

Mr. Jones stated, "It's gotten worse. This change has happened because we have more single, working parents that don't spend the time needed to properly help their child. These changes are negative" (Book Club One).

According to Mr. Francisco, "In the 4.5 years I've been at Langston Hughes Academy, I have noticed a loss of mostly white students, often children of upper -middle- class professionals live near the school, through attrition and to nearby private and charter schools. More of our students (White, Black and Asian) came from areas of higher poverty than in previous years. I have heard from parents who pulled their children out that the parents were frustrated by large class sizes and concerns about highly disruptive students." ( Book Club One).

Mrs. Coles shared the comment that, "I do believe, and I think the teaching and learning conditions survey will corroborate this opinion, that the atmosphere of trust and respect at

Langston Hughes Academy decreased over the years. Students are less respectful of one another and their teachers. I feel that some of this change can be attributed to the fact that teachers were under a great deal of stress as the new teaching evaluation system was put into place along with overemphasis on testing” (Book Club Two).

### **6.3 PREPARATION AND SUPPORT FROM THE SCHOOL SYSTEM**

Overall, when asked if they believed the school district equips teachers with strategies that are effective for teaching African American students most of the participants expressed that there was not enough support from the school district. Some participants felt a few programs offered were beneficial because they were focused on lowering the discomfort and defensiveness of white teachers working with black teachers. Other teachers felt programs impacted them personally.

According to Mr. Francisco, “I think the district has improved in recent years, the initiative to have teachers speak candidly and casually about race (unfortunately called “Courageous Conversations”) has been a good way to lower White teachers’ discomfort and defensiveness about their own racial and cultural perceptions” (Book Club Two).

In contrast, Mr. Jones said,” No, I’ve never seen any strategies being offered. They may offer workshops on diversity, but nothing on effective teaching for African American children” (Book Club Two). Miss Franklin stated that, “Overall, no. The most beneficial program I participated in was the SEE committee (Sustaining Equitable Environment). That definitely had an impact on me-I wish I would have had something like this sooner in my career” (Book Club Two).



## 6.4 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATING WITH OR TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

All teachers wrote that there were barriers with communicating or teaching African American students. When asked if they could name 3 barriers they may have or other teachers may have with communicating or teaching African- American students effectively the teachers discussed a broad range of barriers.

Miss Wilson stated, "The barriers are understanding, compassion, and empathy. Some teachers just feel that the students are bad and unable to be taught. They can't get through to the students and begin to get frustrated" (Book Club Three).

According to Mrs. Coles, "I cannot name three, because I really feel that there is only one-but it is a big one. I worked hard for all my students and tried every day to understand all students and communicate with all students. I would like to think that any barriers to communicating and teaching African American students effectively did not come from within me. However, there were still barriers there, and it made me sad. I feel that the barriers were coming from the fact that our society has been segregated for so long, that there are experiences that I simply don't understand, and therefore I do not end up appearing "relatable" even though I was trying" (Book Club Three).

According to Mr. Francisco, "One reason for barriers is lacking awareness of one's own bias: We all carry stereotypes in our heads. They affect how we react with different groups of people. The key to dismantling them is to question which stereotypes and misperceptions we might have" (Book Club Three).

For Mr. Jones, “One barrier is communication-not being able to contact parents. The language in the curriculum is not suited for African American children. We need more time to help students who struggle” (Book Club Three).

Teachers’ comments related to barriers in communication indicated that some teachers believed that barriers to communication could not be avoided due to the history of segregation in American society. Other teachers felt there were barriers because there was a lack of diversity among teachers or lack of awareness of one’s own biases. Furthermore, teachers shared that the lack of culturally relevant curriculum created barriers.

## **6.5 LACK OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

All teachers expressed there was not a vast amount of multicultural curriculum. Some participants stated the curriculum the district offers has some selections that relate to diversity, but there was not much depth. The African-American teachers felt the curriculum did not offer any diverse perspectives. When the teachers were asked if they feel the curriculum at Langston Hughes Academy included perspectives of diverse cultures the teachers had mixed responses.

Miss Franklin stated, “The students are not seeing anyone who looks like them in any of the text books. They only see accomplishments of whites in textbooks” (Book Club One).

Mr. Jones shared, “it’s the board curriculum which doesn’t contain much diversity” (Book club One).

In contrast, Miss Franklin noted, “Yes, our curriculum is so different from years ago. We need to continue to build more cultural awareness” (Book Club One).

According to Mr. Francisco, “the curriculum has some diverse perspectives, but often not in a way that will provoke discussions of how people can be different, or to understand different backgrounds” (Book Club Three).

Miss Coles shared, “There are small attempts to introduce cultures, but there needs to be so much more. It is not just enough to just have a story here or there. The curriculum needs to have multi-cultural history, literature, art, embedded in the program in equal measure. Otherwise, the study of diverse cultures just seems like an “add on” and not the integral component it is in our country’s history” (Book Club Three).

Several themes in teachers’ responses to the open-ended questions were also found in their responses to scaled items.

## 6.6 TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO SCALED SURVEY ITEMS

**Table 1. Teacher responses to scaled survey items**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
I grew up in a diverse community.	1		1	3
I feel confident that as a preservice teacher my university adequately prepared me to work with culturally diverse students.		1	2	2
My district offers various opportunities for teachers to learn about how to work with culturally diverse students.		3	2	
My district should offer various opportunities for teachers to learn about how to work with culturally diverse students.	5			
Each year I feel more confident about teaching culturally diverse students.	2	3		
Working with diverse students is challenging for me.	1	2	2	
In my eyes, all students are the same and should be treated the same.	4		1	
I read books about culture and race frequently.	1	2	1	1
Most culturally diverse students fail to understand my point of view.			5	
Sometimes I fail to understand my diverse student's point of view.		3	1	1

**Table 1 (continued)**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
The curriculum we use in the district includes perspectives from various cultures.		2	2	1
After a professional development on a topic centered on working with diverse students I feel more confident in my ability to work with diverse students.		3	1	1
I am very interested in learning about diverse cultures.	4	1		
I have a vast diversity knowledge base.		3	1	1
I am confident with designing culturally relevant curricula.		3	1	1
I care about what happens in communities different from my own.	3	2		
I understand the behaviors of the diverse students in my classroom.	1	2	2	
Most of the negative behaviors of diverse students in my classroom are learned at home.	1		3	1
Race and culture are not linked with school failure.	1	1	3	
I contribute to many of the positive behaviors of my diverse students.		5		
During the week, I reflect on how I can better communicate with my culturally diverse students.	1	4		

**Table 1 (continued)**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
The way culturally diverse students speak shapes my perceptions about them.	1	1	2	1
I am interested in learning about different cultures.	3	2		
Teachers from diverse cultures are better prepared to work with diverse students.	2	2	1	
Sometimes I feel I am not an effective teacher for culturally diverse students.		2	2	1

Teachers' responses to the scaled survey questions reveal some important patterns. First, most of the teachers did not grow up in a diverse community. In addition, many the teachers did not feel confident that their teacher preparation programs had prepared them to work with culturally diverse students. All the teachers expressed strong agreement that the district should offer more professional development on race, culture and diversity. Most teachers agreed that working with diverse students was challenging for them.

The survey results revealed that the teachers are interested in learning about diverse cultures. In fact, the teachers care about what happens in communities different from their own and they want to understand how they can better communicate with the culturally diverse students.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPTS**

The discussions that took place during the three book club discussions were wide ranging and often did not directly address the planned questions. For example, teachers were eager to discuss the presidential election and the political climate in America. In addition, the teachers also discussed race relations in the United States and the lack of counter narratives to discuss historic accounts.

Although, these topics were important for the teachers they were not the intended focus for our book club discussions. Despite the constant volley of intended questions and unintended answers the discussion was still productive and insightful.

I analyzed the discussion transcripts for specific comments related to the same four themes used to analyze teachers' responses to the open-ended survey questions related to (a) changes in teaching and learning community, (b) preparation and support from the school system, (c) barriers to communicating with or teaching African-American students, and (d) curriculum issues. In the sections that follow, I describe relevant episodes from the transcripts.

### **7.1 BOOK CLUB ONE**

The first book club began with the teachers sitting in a large circle. I started out asking the teachers about the moment they knew they wanted to be a teacher. Some teachers knew they

wanted to be a teacher from a young age while other choose education because they wanted to help children succeed, others wanted to oversee their environment.

Mrs. Coles said, “I always played school with my sisters and I was the teacher. What can I say in the basement with my sisters in everything. There was never a question in my mind.”

Mr. Jones replied, “In college I was in business as a freshman and I finally told myself I can’t see myself sitting behind a desk taking orders from someone I don’t even like. So, I got into education.”

I started with this question because in the introduction section of the Milner (2010) text he describes a moment in his life that helped define his calling in life. I needed to know my audience. I also wanted to gain a proper assessment of why they answered some of the questions with the responses they did.

In addition, staff members and people out in the community have complained constantly that the good reputation of Langston Hughes Academy has declined over the years because of the kids that are being bused into the school. I was curious about this and wondered about what the teachers had to say. I asked the teachers what changes in the teaching and learning community have they seen at Langston Hughes Academy over the years.

Mr. Jones quickly jumped in to respond turning to the other teachers, “Yes, it has gotten worse. It’s true! I am not pulling any punches. It used to be the best school in the district. Am I lying? (the teachers nod in agreement) People fought to get in this school you know the staff was great. Most of the staff...we smiled when we walked in the school you know...changes happen now a lot of people don’t smile.”



Mr. Jones has been working at Langston Hughes Academy for over 30 years so he has seen the school at its best. Mr. Francisco has been working at Langston Hughes for about 5 years so he was also curious about Mr. Jones's response.

Mr. Francisco: "What do you think it is? Because obviously, that's before my time."

Mr. Jones: "I'm not going to say what I want to say ,but..."

Mr. Jones: "Part of it is that people I told \_\_\_\_\_ that some teachers are afraid of the kids. They see a black child and they're afraid to say something to him. For example, someone in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I saw them in the hallways the other day. The kid walks around with a hood on, and I see him and tell him to take the hood off. I am not afraid of him. The day I get afraid of a ten year -old is the day I retire. But some people don't want the conflict, but the kids are running the asylum."

After Mr. Jones takes his passionate stance on why he feels the climate of the school has changed all the teachers laugh and nod in agreement.

Mr. Francisco added that he felt that the school had changed because some of the teachers are not use to working with African American children. Mr. Francisco stated, "What about the second chapter and the science teacher we talk about how people come from the suburbs or mostly white school district and then they come to the city of Pittsburgh to schools with mostly black children and they don't they expect kids to act a certain way. I guess what people don't understand is that they are supposed to adjust. They don't see what learning looks like with a different culture."

The first book club was dominated by the men making most of the comments about the changes occurring at Langston Hughes Academy.

## 7.2 BOOK CLUB TWO

The second book club meeting was held on November 16<sup>th</sup> which was right after the Presidential election results were announced. This meeting did not flow as easily as the first meeting. However, once the teachers started talking it lasted past the hour I had planned for the discussion. The teachers tried to stay on topic about the book, but the election results overshadowed the entire meeting. Some teachers said they couldn't sleep the night before, many expressed their students were scared and wanted to talk about the election. The teachers were also scared and wanted to talk about the election. There were several long pauses, and the book questions were not answered entirely because the teachers wanted to express their thoughts on the election and racial issues in America. Miss Franklin felt that the election turned out the way it did because of the lack of multi-cultural education in the classroom. She was very eager to show me a one-page response she wrote about why she felt we needed more multicultural education in the classrooms.

For example, in her response Miss Franklin stated, "All students need more opportunities to learn about other cultural groups. Reflecting on self and others is a great beginning. Spending time to build relationships makes all of this so much more meaningful. Living in a complicated multi-media/social media world it is imperative that all humanity make conscious efforts to think outside the box. That would derail subconscious attitudes about other ethnic groups."

I started off the book club with the following questions: "In chapter 3, Dr. Johnson discovered that her colleagues, parents, and even many students did not believe issues of race or diversity were important in her mostly white and affluent school. Do you believe that race and diversity are critical aspects to understand in mostly white schools and classrooms? Why or why not?"

Mr. Francisco stated, “I bet if most of the white schools took the time to discuss this you would have seen a different result in the Presidential election.”

Miss Franklin added, “Yep, Yep, I watched the news yesterday and I am frustrated about this stuff. I’ve had three families approach me saying, can we talk about this with the kids because the kids are asking questions about what’s going to happen to them now so that’s another thing.”

I then asked why there were not more diversity discussions at Langston Hughes Academy. Mrs. Goodman responded, “Because race has always been a touchy subject and a lot of people don’t want to tread on that because they don’t want to step on toes. They don’t want to offend anyone.

According to Mr. Jones, “People don’t want to be called racist. Also, people don’t think there was a need to talk about it. We all have to, but you have to find the right time.”

Mr. Francisco shared a story about when he was part of a cultural response team at Langston Hughes Academy. Mr. Francisco shared, “People generally keep quiet about it, but I also felt the team was viewed a little bit with suspicion by teachers. I’ve seen this from a couple of white teachers –what’s this going to be? I don’t know what’s going on in their heads for sure, but from past experiences it seems like it’s an attitude of now how are you going to call us racist this time.”

I wanted to hear more about this issue at Langston Hughes Academy so I asked what would be the benefits of having this dialogue with the staff? What would be the challenges?

For Mrs. Goodman, “The challenge of having this discussion with the staff is how you are being perceived by others through different responses. That is sometimes how the trainings have been laid out. I feel sometimes like after a while you feel like you’ve done something

wrong. When you know, you aren't that—your colleagues understand, but that's how you are made to feel.”

The teachers then started talking about chapter 3 for a few minutes, but then the conversation quickly shifted back to the election and the lack of diversity conversations in the schools. Miss Wilson turned to the group and asked about how the teachers can solve the problem of the lack of diversity conversations in schools.

According to Mr. Francisco, “People get angry when you bring up teaching this in schools. Just like chapter 3 that sounds like a place I grew up. It was ignorant, a very ignorant place and it was not diverse at all. It was mostly Catholic even to the point where it was anti-Semitic. People from those types of areas resist when they hear the suggestion. Why don't we teach the history of all people in this country? And they say that's not what the story was and they feel like they're being oppressed. I feel like that is what encouraged people to vote for Trump in the first place.”

### **7.3 BOOK CLUB THREE**

The last meeting was more on topic with the book discussion questions however, some topics overshadowed others. For example, like the second book club I had an eager teacher(Miss Coles) who couldn't stay in her seat long enough because she wanted to show and explain to the group all the statistics she printed off from the Pennsylvania Department of Education Website about the lack of minority teachers. I asked the question and she was ready to explain.

Mrs. Thomas: “In chapter 5, one white teacher voiced her concerns about the low number of African American students at her school. She worried that her African American students

would not be able to relate or connect with African American teachers in the same way that white teachers had connected with her. At your school, how many racially diverse teachers are there? How many students are there? Do you feel this is the right balance?

Miss Franklin stated, “I think having more African American men would be good. We have very few academic.”

Miss Coles added, “I brought this (pointing to research from Pennsylvania Department of Education) because I have been doing this with my SOP. You have 71 % white students in PA and 29 % minority. However, educators there are 96% of the teachers are white and 4% are minority. This is in the whole state of Pennsylvania and that’s pretty interesting.”

Furthermore, Miss Coles continued,” The research from the Pennsylvania Department website indicated that as far as educator diversity in 1999 there were about 34,00 white education majors in PA. Then in 2014 the number dropped to 16,000 for white and 900 for black education majors. Out of the 16,000 only 4000 graduate. Out of the minorities only 363 graduate, however, for African Americans only 165 teachers have graduated. Where are all these African American teachers?”

Miss Goodman stated, “What’s more alarming is I wonder how many of those teachers are black men?”

The group continued to discuss all the programs the district has tried to recruit more African -American teachers, however, the incentives have not been enough to keep them in the district.

The next question I asked the group was to identify the school recommendations Milner (2010) suggested that resonate with you. Which of these would you like to see adapted or adopted?

Miss Goodman stated, “Parent centered dinner and movies.”

Miss Coles added, “What about this one, a school wide reading. I guess...this is a fairly new book. I mean sometimes you feel like saying in this modern world. I feel like parents would want to do these things, but there are so many time constraints.”

Miss Franklin shared, “We use to do a lot of parent centered workshops we tried to bring it back and it wasn’t that strong. Maybe if we didn’t make it so school workshop oriented. Go back to that other one and make it a community centered dinner.”

The teachers kept discussing all the failed attempts Langston Hughes Academy had with trying to get the parents involved with the school. The conversation ended with one wondering how much involvement there is at home with the students and their school work. I shifted the topic to teacher preparation program to gauge where the teachers felt the public-school system all went wrong.

Mrs. Thomas: What do you think can be done to better prepare teachers to teach all students well in schools?

Miss Coles: “We’ll that’s was all about teacher prep.”

Miss Franklin: “I heard teacher prep programs were terrible right now.”

Miss Wilson: “They have to prep them for two different types of teaching. Suburban teaching and city teaching. Because some of the teachers come in and say I wasn’t prepared for this. This wasn’t what I had at the school out wherever. Then they come here and say,” oh no I can’t do this. ” So, if they’re going to do teacher prep they have to prepare them for two different types of teaching.”

Mr. Francisco added, “The best class I had for teacher prep I took at CCAC in Ed Psych 101 or 201 or whatever it was. It was because she was the only teacher I had that talked exactly

about that. When you tell a kid to leave the room and he says make me. Then what do you do at that point? That's just it, nothing would let me come to thinking about that if it hadn't been for her.”

The book club sessions were designed to foster discussion about Milner's book for the purpose of investigating how teachers in Langston Hughes Academy were addressing issues related to cultural diversity. However, the discussion organically evolved into a deeper, more meaningful, conversation in which the teachers seemed to be honest and willing to share their concerns with me. In essence, the book was not the focus of attention, but rather served as a jumping-off point for discussion.

## **8.0 DISCUSSION**

In this section, I will focus comments on: (a) book club context, (b) insights from teachers, and (c) recommendations I will end with implications for my practices.

### **8.1 BOOK CLUB CONTEXT**

The book club meetings seemed to offer teachers a context for sharing their opinions about how they feel about issues that arise in a school setting. The book club seemed to provide a space for free-flowing conversation in which teachers did not feel like they were being looked at as racist or being judged by what they said each time they made a statement about their stance on race and diversity. For example, one teacher commented, “The challenge of having discussions with staff is how you are being perceived by others through different responses. That is sometimes how the trainings have been laid out. I feel sometimes like after a while you feel like you’ve done something wrong. When you know, you aren’t that-your colleagues understand, but that’s how you are made to feel” (Book Club Three).

During the book club, I noticed that the teachers were passionate about sharing what they felt about race and culture. The teachers seemed to value a space where the school context was not seen as a safe place to have these types of discussions even though the consensus with the teachers was discussions about culture were needed more at home and in the classroom. Another



point that the teachers agreed upon was that race has always been a subject that was not brought up in the school context. Consider one teacher's response when asked why discussions about race are not held at Langston Hughes Academy. Miss Wilson stated, "Because race has always been a touchy subject and a lot of people don't want to tread on that because they don't want to step on toes. They don't want to offend anyone. I have been here for 4 or 5 years and there has never been a conversation about race with teachers" (Book Club Three). The book club seemed to offer the opportunity for such conversations.

## **8.2 INSIGHTS FROM TEACHERS**

The teachers provided insights on why they felt issues of diversity were not discussed. One teacher stated, "People don't want to be called a racist. Also, people don't think there is a need to talk about it. We all have to but you have to find the right time" (Book Club Two). While the teachers were offering their insights, I noticed all the teachers felt very comfortable talking about diversity with their students in their classroom, however, it was ironic to me that the adults in the school wouldn't talk to each other about diversity or race. Some teachers stated they were very comfortable talking about race with anyone others felt they would be perceived negatively by fellow co-workers. I noticed the African American teachers voiced the most passion with being comfortable having this conversation with anyone student or teacher. As noted by Mr. Jones when asked why there are not more diversity discussions at Langston Hughes Academy. Mr. Jones passionately stated, "For me I really don't care. When I taught Science, I talked about stuff like that. I didn't care and that was back then when this school was more white than black. I didn't care, but some people do care" (Book Club Two).

The teachers shared that they felt a lot of the misconceptions about other races are because some students have not had discussions with their parents about diversity so they may only see one side of the story. As the teachers reflected on their own experiences, the teachers felt that if parents talked more about these issues then they would grow up to be adults that were more culturally aware. Several teachers admitted that they did not come in from their teacher prep programs ready to immerse in the urban culture. Miss Goodman shared a brief story, “Now I will not say Cal U completely prepared me for urban teaching because literally my first job I was in learning support and suddenly there goes a desk. I was like ummmmm. I was like I don’t know if I can do this because I have no clue what to do. I was 21 and I wanted to run out the room” (Book Club Three).

The teachers also let me know that most valuable lessons that they learned about teaching in urban schools was not in text book or in any of their teacher education programs. The teachers thought teacher preparation programs were not doing enough to adequately prepare the teachers to teach in urban schools.

## 9.0 CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, I will focus on considerations related to engaging teachers in a book club discussion about issues of cultural diversity. These are: (a) willingness to learn, (b) the right space, and (c) time set aside for discussions.

As teachers acknowledged during the book club sessions, teachers sometimes come from households in which diversity or cultures other than their own are not discussed. They live in communities that are very segregated and they are not exposed to diverse viewpoints. This situation can lead to beliefs in stereotypes about other cultures.

For teachers to engage in conversations about cultural diversity, they need to have an attitude that includes openness and a willingness to learn. When I talk about this willingness to learn, I am referring to a deep desire to know more. This desire will be so strong that the teacher will voluntarily seek opportunities in which they can engage in meaningful learning experiences that will help them to communicate with their students more effectively. In addition, teachers need to still hold on to their truths about their own culture, but also be willing to learn about someone else's struggles, successes, and experiences. The teachers must be willing to disagree and be comfortable with the discomfort of the conversation. There should be times when the teacher voluntarily reads or attends events in which they learn about a new culture. However, if they are close-minded and don't have a willingness or desire to learn they will not fully

appreciate what they have experienced at a cultural event. The willingness to learn mentality would be beneficial for any educator in a diverse classroom.

The second topic for consideration is related to finding the right space to discuss issues of cultural diversity. During the book club, I learned that teachers do not want to feel pressured, embarrassed or frowned upon because of an answer given at a staff meeting about race or culture. The teachers don't want the staff meeting to become a controversial place to be each week. Therefore, the staff meeting may not be the right space to have a conversation about diversity.

The space teachers would like is one that is laid back and nonthreatening. For example, if teachers were at a staff meeting and the principal walked in or prompted a discussion about culture some teachers may not give honest answers because they don't want to be looked at someone who is not culturally relevant. This situation may seem threatening because they don't want their boss to know how they really feel because it may backfire when it is time to get observed. So, as a result, some teachers may give answers they feel everyone wants to hear. Furthermore, the teachers may feel that their colleagues may not understand their point of view. Also, they may not feel comfortable being questioned in front of all the staff for fear of a disagreement of being looked at as nonempathetic. In addition, discussing issues of diversity with the whole staff present may seem threatening because people do not want to be seen as disagreeable or not being able to relate to the students. The right space to have discussions is very important because teachers will be more honest if they feel they are not being judged or looked at as a racist. A book club is a neutral space because your primarily goal is to discuss the book, however, in discussing the book topics related to the book can evolve organically without being forced.

The last consideration is about time for discussions of cultural diversity and reflections on those discussions. This book club occurred over a semester, which allowed the teachers time to think about their responses and reflect on how we feel. In the school context, the problem is the administration does not allow adequate time to talk about culture. What usually happens is there is a one day of professional development in which the school leader or an outside person talks about issues of diversity and strategies to work with diverse students. This professional development usually does not address specifically the issues occurring at the specific school. Also, since it occurs in one day teachers never seem to get a chance to reflect or voice their concerns. The time is dedicated to listening to an “expert” on diversity, but no time is given for teachers to apply what they have learned and discuss what worked and what didn’t work.

Another issue is that teachers should dedicate most their time to creating lesson plans, completing massive amounts of paperwork, or making sure all their students perform well on standardized testing. With all of this on their plate there is not enough time set aside to have discussions about diversity. The teachers are forced to handle cultural conflict in the classroom without being properly taught how to respond. The teachers should make quick decisions about how to communicate with diverse students and sometimes there is conflict in the classrooms due to miscommunication.

The time set aside for discussions about diversity should be consistent and ongoing during the school year. The teachers deal with diversity issues every day, but the time set aside for the discussions may be an hour or two every six months or once a year. If teachers are not given time to have these discussions, then there is a void in the classroom environment. If teachers are not given time to discuss diversity, then they don’t have a place to ask questions or share stories about successes or failures with cultural diversity.

The book club allowed time to share stories, reflect, and to ask questions in a nonthreatening environment. The book club sessions also created a space in which all the teachers' voices were heard.

## **10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR MY PRACTICE**

I began the Ed.D program thinking about why African-American males were over represented in special education classes. I wanted to know why that was, but researching such a complex problem of practice would have been very difficult. How could I secure confidential student records? How much time would it take to research such a complex topic? Working with my advisor, I decided to focus on my own school context because it offered a unique setting for investigating mostly white teachers teaching mostly black students. I wanted to investigate further the complexities of a school in which the white students seem to be engaged and thriving academically yet, the black students continue to struggle academically and socially. I wondered what teachers thought about their preparedness to teach culturally diverse students. Would a book club focus on culturally responsive pedagogy influence teacher's attitude and perspectives about teaching culturally diverse students? I really wanted to know if the teachers at Langston Hughes Academy felt they were adequately equipped to work with diverse students. Previous research by Gay (2002) asserted that "too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students" (p106). In other words, teachers may not be provided with the knowledge or resources to teach students from diverse backgrounds. This inadequate preparation was evident in the stories shared by several of the teachers in the book club when they discussed how their teacher prep programs did not prepare them for authentic urban classroom experiences.

Another important takeaway from the book club was the teachers wanted more opportunities to discuss culture and diversity. The teachers in the book club agreed that Langston Hughes Academy lacked opportunities to discuss diversity. If there were opportunities provided to discuss diversity at Langston Hughes Academy, then some teachers felt like they were misunderstood by their fellow colleagues. Other teachers felt they would be viewed with a little bit of suspicion or told that they are doing something wrong. One phrase kept being repeated that teachers didn't want to be looked at as a racist. So, the unspoken truth at Langston Hughes Academy was that race was not spoken about in the meetings. However, as a new teacher to the school I saw race as an issue within my first week of working there.

Cultural discussions are needed on an ongoing basis especially when the school population is majority African-American. Courageous conversations about diversity and culture are just one way to close the gap in achievement. As it has been noted, Mansfield & Marie (2015) stated, "School leaders have to be willing to engage in conversations with school members internally and externally on practices that are systematically creating the gap between the have and have not" (p.836). These important issues can only be addressed if conversations occur between teachers and any other stakeholders in the student's lives. During this study, I learned that if teachers are given an authentic opportunity to engage in discussions about diversity they can learn more about other's cultures that are different from their own. Also, ongoing conversations lessen the tension for follow up conversations in an uneasy context.

In the future, I plan on expanding on the book club idea with the staff at my school. Every semester I want to conduct a book club with teachers and administrators. I also would like to find more books on African-American, Hispanic, and Jewish culture to share with the staff.



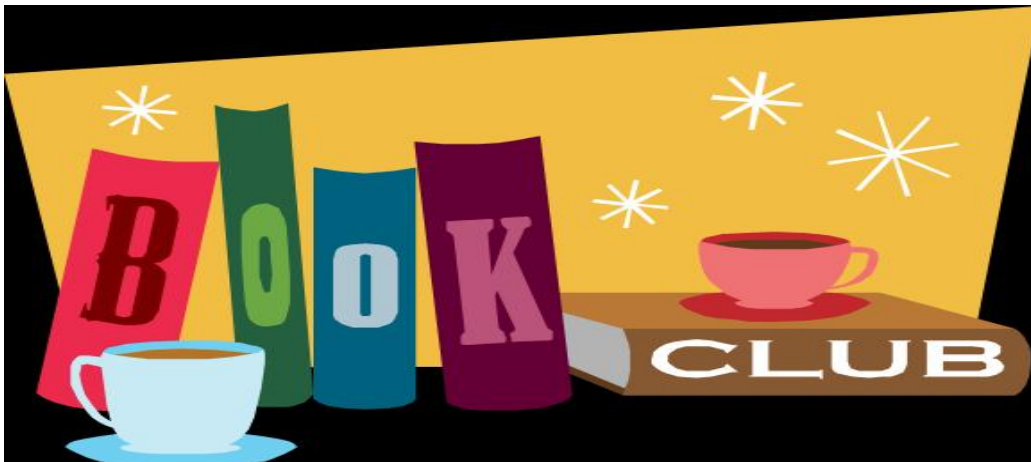
## **11.0 PLAN FOR DEMONSTRATION OF SCHOLARLY PRACTICE**

In the month of June, I plan to display my demonstration of excellence in the following ways: (a) share my findings with the staff at my school on June 8<sup>th</sup>, and (b) prepare a poster to display at the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate Convening at the University of Pittsburgh in June.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR BOOK CLUB

# Cultural Connections Teacher Book Club



Who? Interested K-5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers

What? Read a book about diverse classrooms and discuss cultural awareness of teachers.

When? Once a month in person and online, October through  
February

Where? Langston Hughes Academy

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Please return this form to Mrs. Thomas NO LATER THAN  
Wednesday, September 7

Yes, I wish to participate in this book club\_\_\_\_\_

No, I do not wish to participate in this book club\_\_\_\_\_

Name:\_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 1.** Information Sheet for Book Club

## **APPENDIX B**

### **SURVEY FOR BOOK CLUB**

**Directions:**

**Part One- Please take a moment to answer these open- ended questions.**

1) Please tell me your name, position, and how many years you have been working here at \_\_\_\_\_

2) Please tell me a little about your cultural background. Be specific and tell about 3-5 beliefs or norms that attribute to your cultural background.

3) Please tell me about the changes you have noticed with the teaching and learning community at Linden over the years? In addition, tell me why you think these changes have happened and whether you view the changes as positive or negative.

4) Before entering the teaching profession, how often did you interact with students from racial, cultural, or economic groups different from your own and in what context?

5) Do you feel Pittsburgh Public Schools equips teachers with strategies that are effective for teaching African- American students? Why or why not?

6) \_\_\_\_\_ school is set in a very middle- upper class neighborhood. However, some of the students bused in are from low income neighborhoods. How do you feel this plays out in this school context and why?

7) If you could name 3 barriers you may have or other teachers may have with communicating or teaching African-American students effectively, what do you think these barriers are and why?

8) Do you feel the curriculum at \_\_\_\_\_ includes perspectives of diverse cultures? Why or why not?

9) Do you feel culture or race is an issue at \_\_\_\_\_? If yes, please explain. If no, please explain.

10) In your free time do you read about diverse cultures? Also, do you share what you have learned with your colleagues or your students?

11) If you could be the superintendent for the day, what would be the first issue you would address with your district? Why would this be the first issue you would address?

12) In your free time, how often do you take part in cultural events, celebrations, shows, movies, rallies, or other opportunities for interactions with racial or cultural groups outside of your own?

**Part Two: Please answer these questions using the following scale:**

**Strongly Disagree (SA)**

**Disagree (D)**

**Agree (A)**

**Strongly Agree (SA)**

- 1) I grew up in a diverse community.
- 2) I feel confident that as a pre-service teacher my university adequately prepared me to work with culturally diverse students.
- 3) My district offers various opportunities for teachers to learn about how to work with culturally diverse students.
- 4) I feel my district should offer more professional development on race, culture, and diversity.
- 5) Each year I feel more confident about teaching culturally diverse students.
- 6) I feel that working with diverse students is challenging.
- 7) In my eyes, all students are the same and should be treated the same.
- 8) I read books about culture and race frequently.
- 9) I feel the culturally diverse students fail to understand my point of view.
- 10) Sometimes I fail to understand my diverse student's point of view.
- 11) The curriculum we use in this district includes perspectives from various cultures.
- 12) After a professional development on a topic centered on working with diverse students I feel more confident in my ability to work with diverse students.
- 13) I am very interested in learning about diverse cultures.
- 14) I have a vast diversity knowledge base.
- 15) I am confident with designing culturally relevant curricula.
- 16) I care about what happens in communities different from my own.
- 17) I understand the behaviors of the diverse students in my classroom.
- 18) Most of the negative behaviors of diverse students in my classroom are learned at home.
- 19) Race and culture are not linked with school failure.
- 20) I feel that I contribute to many of the positive behaviors of my diverse students.
- 21) During the week, I reflect on how I can better communicate with my culturally diverse students.
- 22) The way a culturally diverse students speaks shapes my perceptions about the student.
- 23) I am interested in learning about different cultures.
- 24) Teachers from diverse cultures are better prepared to work with diverse students.
- 25) Sometimes I feel I am not an effective teacher for culturally diverse students.

**Figure 2.** Survey for Book Club

## APPENDIX C

### BOOK CLUB DATES HANDOUT

#### Book Club Dates



Survey Due: On or before October 12<sup>th</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> book club meeting October 19<sup>th</sup> (chapters 1 and 2)

November 16<sup>th</sup> / Chapters 3 and 4

December 14 / chapter 5

January /TBD /post interviews



Note: The book will be placed in your mail box the first week of October. There will be two questions for each chapter that will require your response in the response journal. The response journal will be placed in your mailbox and emailed to you. We will talk more in depth about these questions and chapters during our meetings together. Please have the questions answered before we meet each month.

Thanks again for your time and participation.

Tamika Thomas

**Figure 3.** Book Club Dates Handout

## APPENDIX D

### BOOK CLUB 1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Book club

First Meeting: October 19<sup>th</sup> / Chapters 1 and 2

Survey due on October 12<sup>th\*\*\*\*</sup>



Directions: Please read **chapters 1 and 2** by October 19<sup>th</sup>. Please think about the questions below as you read through the chapters. You don't have to write out your responses.

Please just come prepared to discuss the questions.

#### Chapter One

- In chapter 1, Milner outlines five central tenets to assist teachers in closing the opportunity gap regarding diversity, especially for the classroom. These five areas are: (1) rejection of colorblindness, (2) understand and transcend cultural conflicts, (3) recognize the limits of meritocracy, (4) reject deficit mindsets and low expectations, and (5) reject context-neutral mindsets. Define and discuss each tenet. What are or might be some challenges to each of these in practice? What are or might be some challenges to each of these in practice? What are some benefits of each practice? How have these five tenets shown up in your own practice as a teacher?

## Chapter Two

- When Mr. Hall (Chapter 2) began teaching, he intended to “just teach science” and not acknowledge or worry about the influence of race and diversity of his students. His mindset and its accompanying practices frustrated some of his Black students, who urged him to “get to know” them. What does Mr. Hall do to “get to know” the students and how does that inform his practices with them?
- The importance of sharing powerful stories with students is a theme that was consistent throughout the book. Mr. Hall (chapter 2), for instance, shared personal stories with his students that seemed to resonate with them. He shared experiences about his wife and children and even about his past childhood experiences related to living in poverty. Do you believe sharing personal stories and experiences with students is inappropriate? Why or why not? What personal stories could you share with your students to help them connect with you and see you as a real person?

**Figure 4.** Book Club 1 Discussion Questions

## APPENDIX E

### BOOK CLUB 2 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Book club

**Second meeting: November 16<sup>th</sup> / Chapters 3 & 4**

**Survey was due on October 12<sup>th</sup>\*\*\*\*(Please turn in as soon as possible)**



Directions: Please read **chapters 3 and 4** by **November 16th**. Please think about the questions below as you read through the chapters. You don't have to write out your responses. Please just come prepared to discuss the questions.

#### Chapter 3

- In chapter 3, Dr. Johnson discovered that her colleagues, parents, and even many students did not believe issues of race or diversity were important in her mostly White and affluent school. Do you believe that race and diversity are critical aspects to understand in mostly White schools and classrooms? Why or why not?
- Teachers and society in general tend to have a difficult time discussing issues of diversity and especially race. Why? What are some benefits of having open dialogue regarding race and diversity? What are some challenges to these discussions? How might these discussions influence, benefit, or hinder student learning opportunities?

## Chapter 4

- Have you found that some African American students do not achieve because they fear that they may be perceived as “acting White” or that they may be seen as uncool? Provide examples to either support or refute the “acting White” thesis. See pages **114-116**.
- Although Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw are both African American teachers and taught at Bridge Middle School, they had very different perspectives about the role and influence of pop culture. Ms. Shaw for instance, rejected the role and relevance of it. Still, both teachers are successful. How would you compare and contrast the mindsets and practices of Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw? From your perspective, which educator seems to connect with the students more? Be specific.

**Figure 5.** Book Club 2 Discussion Questions

## APPENDIX F

### BOOK CLUB 3 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Book Club # 3

Third meeting: **December 14, 2017 / Chapter 5**



Directions: Please read chapter 5 by **December 14<sup>th</sup>**. Please think about the questions below as you read through the chapters. If you would like you can jot down some thoughts about the final chapter. Please come prepared to discuss the questions.

In chapter 5, one White teacher voiced her concern about the low number of African American role models available to the African American students in her school. She worried that her African American students would not be able to relate and connect with African American teachers in the same way that White teachers had connected with her. At your school, how many racially diverse teachers are there? How many diverse students are there? What about your district? Do you feel this is the right balance?

What did you learn from the six teachers (chapter 5) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.

On pages 188-192, identify the school level recommendations that resonate with you. Which of these would you like to see adopted or adapted? Why? What would be required to implement the recommendation for the entire school?

What do you think can be done to better prepare teachers to teach all students well in the schools across the U.S.?

**Figure 6.** Book Club 3 Discussion Questions

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