FACULTY BOOK CLUB IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EXPLORING THE POWER OF TEXT, CONVERSATIONS AND STORIES TO
SUPPORT THE LEARNING NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

by

ARNETTA ALICIA HILL EADY

(Under the Direction of BETTY BISPLINGHOFF)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how the learning needs of seven
teacher kindergarten teachers and an assistant principal were impacted when they participated
together in a discussion of the book *The Dream-keepers* during the context of the school
day. Specifically, I wanted to know whether or not a book study group would be an
effective means of professional learning for teachers and administrators when the book
discussions occurred during the classroom teachers’ designated planning period. My
interest in exploring what endures from job embedded books studies led me to seek
theories and methods that are sensitive to individual stories and flexible enough to allow
connections between stories. The principles of qualitative research were well suited to the
study of such a phenomenon and formed the methodological framework for my research.
Case study was used to focus on the experiences and perceptions of seven kindergarten
teachers and an administrator. I employed narrative as a means to access the lived
experiences of the participants. I retold the participants’ accounts by producing a short story, *Head, Heart and Hands: We Construct a Legacy*, which includes two narratives. The first narrative, *We Gather Together*, is a combination of individual stories shared by seven kindergarten teachers and an assistant principal during the eight week book study. The second narrative, *Share My World*, is a collection of self-study essays that burst on the scene while I was engaged in analyzing my original data sources. The lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers alongside my own provided insight and helped formulate implications for job embedded book discussion groups.

This research study is connected to a second research study of *Dreamkeepers* at the same research site focusing on fifth grade teachers as book study participants. The researcher for the second study (*Poems of Practice: An Arts Based Study of Professional Development through Book Studies with Elementary Educators*) is the principal who employed poetry as the method of analysis. The principal and the assistant principal as participant researchers for both studies utilize a convergence of analysis to report combined research findings.

**INDEX WORDS:** book club, book study, administrator, assistant principal, kindergarten teachers, job embedded professional learning, constructive developmental theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, narrative analysis, self-study, storytelling
FACULTY BOOK CLUB IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EXPLORING THE POWER OF TEXT, CONVERSATIONS AND STORIES TO
SUPPORT THE LEARNING NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

by

ARNETTA ALICIA HILL EADY

B.A., Spelman College, 1981
MBA, Clark Atlanta University, 1984

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA
2015
FACULTY BOOK CLUB IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EXPLORING THE POWER OF TEXT, CONVERSATIONS AND STORIES TO
SUPPORT THE LEARNING NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

by

ARNETTA ALICIA HILL EADY

Major Professor: Betty Bisplinghoff
Committee: Cheryl Fields Smith
            Joseph Tobin

Electronic Version Approved:
Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2015
DEDICATION

To the love of my life and my soulmate, Fred Charles Eady

Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and understanding.

I pray that you are proud of me. I love you very much!

To my three beautiful daughters, Ashley Alexandria, Alexia Nicole, and Arynn Maria

I thank God for you each and every day. You are the light of my life.

You have been my cheerleaders throughout this process. Thank you!

Always remember faith over fear! Dreams do come true.

I love you always and forever!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I acknowledge my Lord and my Savior who guided me and strengthened me throughout this process. I am thankful for His grace and mercy.

I am deeply indebted to my committee chair, Dr. Betty Bisplinghoff for always knowing when to push and when to pull back. She is an extraordinary teacher. Under her tutelage, I’ve learned that I am capable of producing more than I ever imagined. She is a great encourager. She provided incredible support; I never felt alone throughout this process. I thank her for believing in me, challenging me and accompanying me to the finish line.

I am also grateful to my committee members, - Dr, Cheryl Fields Smith and Dr. Joseph Tobin. I am thankful for your encouragement and rich feedback. I am eternally grateful for your scholarly mentoring.

Dr JoBeth Allen, thank you for every lesson learned. Your classes were awesome because every week you intertwined theory and practice seamlessly. Thank you also for the support you provided as a member of my committee before your retirement. I appreciate your wisdom and guidance.

I also owe a special note of gratitude to the seven kindergarten teachers who agreed to participate in this study. Thank you for candidly sharing your observations, experiences and memories about teaching and learning. Your willingness to share your
stories enlivened and crystallized what otherwise might have been a traditional dissertation with an impersonal and dispassionate analysis.

I am eternally thankful for my friend, my principal and my research partner. We encountered unimaginable challenges on this journey and now we are about to cross the finish line. I am grateful for our friendship and our working relationship. I am excited about continuing our work and sharing our research findings in hopes of improving the academic achievement of all learners.

I am grateful to my husband Fred and our three daughters, Ashley, Alexia and Arynn for their incessant support and understanding. They were always available to listen to my expressed concerns and implied doubts about completing this task. Their words of encouragement and willingness to share their thoughts and ideas helped me to refocus and persevere. I am very thankful for their patience and endless sacrifices. They are the best team a wife and mother could ever pray for. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Research</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical and Educational Significance of the Research</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Clubs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Research</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design and Rationale</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Does Story Stand as Narrative Analysis</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 HEAD, HEART AND HANDS: WE CONSTRUCT A LEGACY ..............62
   Prologue .....................................................................................................62
   We Gather Together ...................................................................................65
   Sharing My World .....................................................................................93
5 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ...............................................................118
   The Doorbell Rang ...................................................................................119
   Convergence of Analysis .......................................................................121
   Conclusion ..................................................................................................133

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................136

APPENDICES
   A Participation Letter .............................................................................147
   B Consent Letter .....................................................................................149
   C Participant Profile ...............................................................................151
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Teachers’ Profiles – The Kindergarten Team ................................................. 46
Table 3.2: Group Norms ................................................................................................. 47
Table 3.3: Timetable for Book Club Discussions .......................................................... 51
Table 3.4: Classroom Culture in Kindergarten at Wesley Elementary School ............... 52
Table 3.5: Educational Philosophies of the Kindergarten Teachers .............................. 53
Table 3.6: Level One Data Analysis .............................................................................. 59
Table 3.7: Level Two Data Analysis ............................................................................. 60
Table 3.8: Level Three Data Analysis ............................................................................ 61
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How can we reform and even transform schools unless the adults in schools can reform and transform their own practice—unless they can learn? (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012, p. 3)

Adult learning in schools is best supported when teachers and administrators regularly engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues about improving their practice. (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012, p. 3)

Surely, improving student learning is the right focus! Consequently, I incessantly peruse the most recent literature about how students learn in authentic ways or for deep understanding or by equitable means. The research suggests that educators take into account cognitive science by planning backwards (Tomlinson and McTighe, 2013; Wiggins and McTighe, 2000), by being culturally considerate (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Scherff and Spector, 2011; Sleeter and Cornbleth, 2011), by teaching in longer blocks of time (Bernhardt, 2013; Canady and Rettig, 2013), by implementing standards-based curricula (Sleeter, 2005; Sleeter and Cornbleth, 2011), and by developing formative assessments (Marzano, 2010). In my school district, we have embarked on six new initiatives this school year in the name of improving student learning. Yet, despite all of the emphasis on student learning, how is it possible for
students to achieve more and learn in more authentic, equitable ways if teachers, principals, assistant principals, curriculum support specialists, grade level chairs, department chairs, instructional support staff – all of the adults in schools – also do not learn new ways to teach, to work together and to think about their profession? As an instructional leader, how can I work with my principal and the staff to transform Wesley Avenue Elementary School unless the adults in the school transform their own practices-unless the adults in the school can continue to learn?

I am a lead learner in my school who envisions a learning community where teachers exercise their power to create intellectually rigorous and culturally relevant classrooms to improve the lives of all students. I consistently yearn to see teachers providing rigorous, relevant instruction to all learners. Even though the majority of the teaching staff at Wesley Avenue Elementary School is African American, most of the classroom instruction is void of culturally relevant teaching. I wondered, “How can administrators encourage teachers to critically reflect on their pedagogy and take action to improve their teaching practices?” As a result of these wonderings, my principal and I decided to rethink our school-wide professional learning plan, beginning with the premise that every teacher has more to learn and much of the learning they need is available in their own school. In fact, schools become better places for learners when teachers become learners. More specifically, the literature suggests that student learning increases in schools where there are educator communities that are reflective, collaborative and focused on issues of teaching and learning (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012).
Background of the Research

The center of education is communication around books and ideas.  
(Kooy, 2006, Foreward)

Since “the act of teaching demands the existence of those who teach and those who learn” (Friere, 2005, p. 31), the book club was identified as an avenue to include teachers as major stakeholders in their lifelong learning processes. Teaching requires constant preparation and development on the part of teachers and such development is based on a critical analysis of their practice (Freire, 2005). In the book *Telling Stories in Book Clubs: Women Teachers and Professional Development*, Kooy (2006) stated, “When we read books that are important to us, we want desperately to pass those books on to others” (p. 4). Hence, a book discussion group could provide a platform to explore the critical significance of teaching and learning.

The Pilot Study - The principal and I decided to invite teachers to voluntarily join a book discussion. I knew exactly which book I wanted the teachers to read. *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* was the ethnography I chose to read and critique in my first qualitative research class. In this ethnography, Ladson-Billings (2009) examined the professional lives of eight exemplary African American and European American teachers of African American elementary students, their unique styles and methods, and how each affirmed and strengthened the cultural identity of their students. I desperately wanted to pass *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* on to the faculty because this book is aligned to my vision of how teachers can expand their professional knowledge base and pedagogical skills as
well as make their practice more culturally relevant. This timeless, inspirational work presents eight teacher portraits entwined with personal reflections and rich storytelling that address teaching pedagogy.

After an electronic communication was sent to the entire staff, sixteen staff members accepted the invitation to join the book study. These staff members included teachers, paraprofessionals, the parent liaison, the speech pathologist, the media specialist, and the social worker. Over the course of four weeks, the sixteen staff members, the principal and I convened once per week for approximately 90 minutes per session to explore culturally relevant pedagogy as we contextualized our life experiences as teachers and learners. We met after school and participation was voluntary.

The principal and I learned valuable lessons from the pilot study. We were impressed by the energy everyone seemed to have for this time together at the end of an arduous school day. Our meetings were scheduled for one hour but we often stayed well beyond the designated time frame. In fact, the recommendation from the group was to offer this book study for the whole staff! Teachers shared that the book club facilitated the creation of a collaborative learning space based on trust, validation, collegiality and authenticity. Teachers boasted about having the time to reflect on their practice, share stories and see fresh, realistic possibilities. The book club also provided a forum for the teachers and administrators to collaboratively construct a shared understanding of good pedagogy that is culturally considerate of all learners.

As the principal and I reflected on the lessons we learned from the pilot book study, we realized that the feedback from the initial book club experience suggested that our next steps should involve additional staff members; therefore, we planned to share the
book club experience with each grade level during their planning period once a week for eight weeks. We wondered about the impact of embedding a book club in the tightly timed space of a school day. We worried about where and how to begin. Could the energy, commitment and community spirit be reborn when surrounded by the pressures of a complex school day? We decided to try. We wanted to hear our teachers’ stories and learn how to connect these stories to their professional practices. We also desired to know what teachers and their administrators could learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy.

Purpose of the Study

Instructional leaders need to learn about the work of helping teachers learn.
(Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012, p. 12)

The purpose of this study was to learn how the learning needs of teachers and administrators are impacted when they participate together in a book discussion group during the context of the school day. More specifically, I wanted to know whether or not book study groups were an effective means of professional learning for teachers and administrators when the book discussions occur during the classroom teachers’ designated planning period.

My interest in exploring what endures from job embedded books studies led me to seek theories and methods that were sensitive to individual stories and flexible enough to allow connections between stories. The principles of qualitative research were well suited to the study of such a phenomenon and formed the methodological framework for my research. In particular, I used the case study approach to hone my focus on the
experiences and perceptions of seven different teachers. As the study evolved, I hoped to become more aware of the influence that teachers’ families, cultures, and current teaching circumstances might have on their professional practices as well as their ability to become more culturally relevant educators. A qualitative case study approach requires researching lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). The lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers alongside my own provided insight and helped me formulate implications for job embedded book discussion groups.

Theoretical and Educational Significance of the Research

Around the dawn of the twenty-first century, teacher book clubs gained considerable attention in the research community (Clark, 2001; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Kooy, 2006). In this study, I employed the book club concept as an informal, discussion group that met regularly to discuss a selected text that included elements of teaching and learning in schools. Book Club meetings consisted of informal discussions and storytelling around the text and the teachers’ lives. The book club allowed participants to read and use stories as heuristics and explanatory devices for making sense of their world in a social, relational, safe context (Kooy, 2006).

My study was situated within a theoretical framework that included narrative (storytelling) as well as constructive developmental theory of adult development in the context of faculty book clubs.

Narrative Inquiry - Teachers love to tell and hear stories about teaching. In telling, they set the stage, construct a plot and provide characters and a real life problem. Many teachers have active and lifelong reading histories (Kooy, 2006). They know not only
what stories are but understand what stories do (Kooy, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Narrative is suitable for the expression of how texts shape the lives of teachers and the personal practical knowledge they carry into teaching (Kooy, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). We must tell our teaching stories if we are to understand our teaching lives (Trimmer, 1997). Stories, then, have interrelated, evaluative and social functions (Kooy, 2006; Trimmer, 1997).

According to Bruner, storytelling performs the dual cultural functions of making the strange familiar and making ourselves private and distinctive (Ritchie and Wilson, 2000). Bruner further suggested that it is important not to be so intellectually dismissive towards narrative as if it were a trashy way of thinking about and talking about what we do with our minds (Ritchie and Wilson, 2000). If students are encouraged to think about the different outcomes that could have resulted from a set of circumstances, they are demonstrating use-ability of knowledge about a subject (Ritchie and Wilson, 2000). Rather than just retaining knowledge and facts, students go beyond them to use their imaginations to think about other outcomes, as they don’t need the completion of a logical argument to understand a story (Ritchie and Wilson, 2000). This helps them to think about facing the future and it stimulates the teacher too.

In telling stories, we become both narrated selves (telling the story of our own lives) and narrating selves (sharing interpretations with others) (Kooy, 2006). In my role as “narrating self,” I listened to the audio taped sessions of the book club discussions and wrote reflections and stories about what I heard. I envisioned the role of “narrated self” as an ongoing sharing of my life experiences. As a participant observer, my thoughts, ideas, perceptions, dreams and experiences are all a part of my life story. I hoped that as my
stories and the stories of the kindergarten teachers entered our collaborative learning space, participants would be open to multiple meanings and new possibilities that resist and reconstruct old interpretations (Ritchie and Wilson, 2002).

Bruner (1986) claimed that every act of writing or telling involves constructing and therefore interpreting past experience and present rhetorical context. Stories are interpretive acts and they are never voiced but instead are dialogical, shaped by previous history, by present emotional and rhetorical context, by the potential listener as well as by the teller (Bruner, 1986; Ritchie and Wilson, 2002). Stories also open up the realm of reinterpretation. Bruner (1986) also states that narrative inhabits a realm “of potential, of possibility, of uncertainty, contradictions and silences” (p. 11). Narrative, then, creates multiple potential meanings and even contradictions, and therefore narrative creates spaces for rethinking and resisting old interpretations (Bruner, 1986). But more than interpretation and critique are possible through narrative. In this process of resistance and revision, action can occur. Narrative is never passive, never just interpretive and reflective (Kooy, 2006). Knowledge emerges through narrative when it is used strategically and connected in an ongoing dialogic between “telling” and “doing,” between narrative, reflection and praxis (Ritchie & Wilson, 2002).

The role of story reaches into the research on the impact of teacher education and points to the need for professional learning that embraces existing teacher knowledge (Kooy, 2006). Storytelling is a vital learning tool as the richest learning experiences come from narrative (Bruner, 1986). One way of addressing this matter is through narrative approaches that highlight stories of professional practice (Kooy, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Unfortunately, the idea of story and narrative as it applies to the lives of teachers
and their “stories to live by” is neglected. There is minimal literature that addresses the bridge between books, life and learning. My study considered these concepts in the intersections of narrative and knowledge as well as how adults learn and how teachers develop a pedagogy that is culturally relevant in the context of faculty book clubs.

Constructive Developmental Theory - I relied on constructive developmental theory to advance my understanding of how adults (specifically teachers and administrators) learn in the context of faculty book club meetings that occur during the school day. Constructive developmental theory is a stage theory of adult development that focuses on the growth and elaboration of a person’s ways of understanding the self and the world (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor and Baker, 2006). The term “constructive-developmental” was first suggested by Kegan (1980) to refer to a stream of work in psychology that focuses on the development of meaning and meaning making processes across the lifespan. The theory is “constructive” in the sense that it deals with a person’s constructions and interpretations of an experience, that is, the meaning a person makes of an experience (Kegan, 1980). It is “developmental” in the sense that it is concerned with how those constructions and interpretations of an experience grow more complex over time (Kegan, 1980). Constructive-developmental theory thus takes as its subject the growth and elaboration of a person’s ways of understanding the self and the world. It assumes an ongoing process of development in which qualitatively different meaning systems evolve over time, both as a natural unfolding as well as in response to the limitations of existing ways of making meaning (Kegan, 1980). Each meaning system is more complex than the previous one in the sense that it is capable of including, differentiating among, and integrating a more diverse range of experience (Kegan, 1980).
Along with Kegan, other early theorists contributing to this stream were Fingarette (1963), Kohlberg (1969), Perry (1970), and Loevinger (1976).

Constructive developmental theory is built on the seminal work of Jean Piaget (1954), which he referred to as genetic epistemology, the genesis or successive unfolding of the capacity for rational thought in the developing child. For Piaget, “development was not a gradual accumulation of new knowledge, but a process of moving through qualitatively distinct stages of growth, a process that transforms knowledge itself” (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor and Baker, 2006, p. 635). As a constructivist, Piaget believed that categories of thought such as number, space, time and quantity are actively constructed by the individual in response to the need to understand the world. When contradictions arise in individuals’ current ways of constructing the world, they reconstruct how they understand the world to eliminate the contradiction (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor and Baker, 2006, p. 636).

McCauley et. al. (2006) outlined the basic propositions of constructive developmental theory as follows: (1) People actively construct ways of understanding and making sense of themselves and the world as opposed to “taking in” an objective world. (2) There are identifiable patterns of meaning making that people share in common with one another. These are variously referred to as stages, orders of consciousness, ways of knowing, levels of development, organizing principles or orders of development. (3) Orders of development unfold in specific invariant sequences with each successive order transcending and including the previous order. (4) In general, people do not regress. Once an order of development has been constructed, the previous order loses its organizing function, but remains as a perspective that can be reflected
upon. (5) Later orders of development are more complex than earlier orders because they support more comprehensive understanding. (6) Developmental movement from order of development to the next is driven by limitations in the current way of constructing meaning. This can happen when a person faces increased complexity in the environment that requires a more complex way of understanding themselves and the world. (7) People’s order of development influences what they notice or can become aware of and therefore what they can describe, reflect on, and change.

Constructive-developmental theory concerns itself with two primary aspects of development (Drago-Severson, 2009): (a) the organizing principles that regulate how people make sense of themselves and the world (orders of development) and (b) how these regulative principles are constructed and reconstructed over time (developmental movement). An organizing principle itself is subjective because the person is subject to its capacity to make meaning. It cannot be reflected on itself since it is the regulative means by which the person engages in reflection. Developmental movement involves the person’s gradually increasing awareness of his or her current subjective organizing principle until the person is able to reflect on the organizing principle itself, at which point what was subjective becomes objective (Drago-Severson, 2009). Of course, there will then be a new organizing principle to which the person is subject. When operating from this new principle, which takes the former principle as an object of reflection, a person is capable of differentiating and integrating more complex life experiences (Drago-Severson, 2009).

While there is no exact timetable for adult development, Kegan does suggest that there are identifiable stages that leaders interested in supporting teacher development
might consider (Drago-Severson, 2009). These stages move along a complex path of adult learning and adults move along the path in a variety of ways. Constructive developmental theory calls the three ways of knowing that are most typical in adults instrumental, socializing and self-authoring. Instrumental knowers are drawn to specific answers and concrete processes. “Instrumental knowers orient toward following rules and feel supported when others provide specific advice and explicit procedures so that they can accomplish their goals” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 61). “The opinions and perspectives of others are important to instrumental knowers but only after their own interests are looked after” (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012, p. 6). Socializing knowers focus on others, believe that group needs are important, and can place a group’s needs before their own. “These adults are most concerned with understanding other people’s feelings and judgments about them and their work” (Drago-Severson, 2008, p. 61). Socializing knowers are uncomfortable with conflicting opinions, values and behaviors; therefore, it can be difficult for socializing knowers to challenge their team, department or group (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012). Self-authoring knowers are reflective about themselves and their context. They have the capacity to think not only about their practice, but also about who they are. Self-authoring knowers “have the developmental capacity to generate their own internal value system and they take responsibility for and ownership of their own internal authority” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 61). Self-authoring knowers understand that there are tensions associated with the implementation of any professional practice (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012). Self-authoring knowers understand that “there are no easy
answers and are suspicious of them when they hear them” (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012, p. 7).

In every school, there are instrumental, socializing and self-authoring knowers who will experience different learning opportunities in different ways. Adult learning theory suggests that instructional leaders who support adult learning in schools need to understand not only different ways of knowing but also how the different structures, approaches and formats that they use will be experienced by the different learners who exist in every school (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012).

For my study, I drew from constructive developmental theory of adult development to help me understand the intricate ways that teachers and administrators know and learn. This theory is appropriate because it suggests that much of what we already know about student learning is also relevant to adult learning (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012). This theory also suggests that adults continually work to make sense of their experiences and the way that adults make sense of their world can change and grow more complex over time (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman & Hensley, 2012). In a school, this means that adults, depending on a variety of factors, will understand their experiences in very different ways.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE


Book clubs are one way to help teachers improve their methods and practices. In book club discussions, teachers are able to consider and critique the instructional practices they read about, they are able to consider alternative theoretical perspectives and ultimately, they are more likely to modify their day to day classroom practices. New teaching practices are likely to lead to improved student outcomes.

In this section of my study, I review literature related to the history of book clubs/book studies/book discussion groups in the United States and how book clubs have been addressed in the literature. I proceed to summarize what the literature says about how book studies have been engaged to support the professional learning needs of teachers and administrators.

I chose the research literature by searching the ERIC and Google Scholar databases using different combinations of key phrases: (a) “book club” and “professional learning,” (b) “book discussion” and “professional learning” and (c) “book study” and “culturally relevant pedagogy.” I set the search option to include only peer reviewed journals. By reading the titles and/or abstracts, I narrowed the search to include only
research that dealt with book clubs or discussion groups for the professional development of teachers and administrators. I excluded research about implementing book clubs with students and research about book clubs or book discussion groups outside the field of education because these articles are not directly relevant to this study. I also perused the reference lists of the journal articles and books I identified through the ERIC and Google Scholar searches to identify additional relevant literature.

Book Studies and Book Clubs

The current book club phenomenon took hold in the 1980s (Long, 2003; Kooy, 2006) and was ignited in the United States by Oprah Winfrey in the 1990s. Primarily populated by women and part of mainstream popular culture, book clubs have rarely been subject to serious academic inquiry (Long, 2003; Kooy, 2006). Considering the social phenomenon and even how much book clubs mean to their participants, it seems extraordinary they have remained out of the scholarly limelight. Elizabeth Long, one of the first persons to conduct scholarly research on book clubs, focused on women’s reading groups. She was amazed that groups of women discussing books could mean so much to the participants especially when these same book clubs were so invisible to scholars. In her book Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life, Kooy (2006) shared that reading groups were not a topic of interest to her academic colleagues. It was as if women’s reading groups “occupied a zone of cultural invisibility (p. 5).

They were not of interest to literature departments, whose major focus is books and authors. They were not of interest to sociologists or political scientists or scholars of popular culture or communications departments. Reading groups had
slipped through disciplinary cracks to find themselves in a scholarly no man’s land. (Long, 2003, p. 5)

In an attempt to redress this gap, Long (2003) conducted an exploratory case study of women’s reading groups in Houston, Texas. She spent years observing and participating in women’s book clubs and interviewing members from different discussion groups. Through observations, interviews and historical analysis, Long explored the meanings women create as they discuss books and share stories about their lives with one another. The study demonstrated that for women, reading is fundamentally and inherently a social activity. As such, it enables women to use books for negotiating the impact of change on their own daily lives.

Kooy (2006) applied the book club concept to educational inquiry to explore and understand women teachers’ professional development. She argued, “The study of teachers’ groups provides insight into a significant but overlooked realm of experience, more closely related to what is recognized within the academy than previously thought and valued” (Kooy, 2006, p. 2).

**Book Studies Supporting the Learning Needs of Teachers and Administrators**

*Communication implies community. A book club is a formation of communities of nurture and care with books as the mediators.* (Kooy, 2006, p. 26)

A major goal of teacher book studies and book discussion groups is to cultivate teacher knowledge, identity and development in a social/supportive context (Kooy, 2006). These goals align with the major goals of professional learning. For example, a major goal of professional learning is to improve teaching (Bean & Morewood, 2007;
George, 2002; Guskey, 2000; Richardson & Anders, 2005). Other goals of professional learning are to change teachers’ attitudes and dispositions (Malm, 2009), introduce teachers to new pedagogical strategies (Adger, Hoyle & Dickinson, 2004), and cultivate teachers’ critical thinking and decision making skills related to their teaching (Richardson & Anders, 2005). One way to address these professional learning goals is to actively involve teachers in the learning process through activities like the reading and discussion of different types of text such as books and journal articles. Teacher book clubs allow teachers the opportunity to read professional texts with the additional benefit of them coming together to engage in discussion with other teachers and colleagues (Bean, Valerio, Mallette & Readance, 1999; Flood, et. Al., 1994; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001; George, 2002; Goldberg & Pesko, 2000; Kisch, 2009; Kooy, 2006;).

Teacher book clubs have been used to address a variety of professional development topics. In some instances teacher book clubs were used by teachers and administrators to enhance their understanding of the difficult pedagogical or social issues faced by teachers in schools (Kisch, 2009). The use of professional texts that targeted pedagogical or social issues as a springboard to discussion led participants to discuss issues pertinent to their teaching and enhance their understandings of the topics (Kisch, 2009). Another common use of teacher book clubs for professional learning was to enhance teachers’ knowledge of adolescent literature and multicultural issues that arose from the adolescent literature they read (Chevalier & Houser, 1997; George, 2001; George, 2002; Flood, et. al., 1994). Still other book clubs focused on autobiographical texts as a means to lead future teachers to deeper understandings of cultural issues.
(Florio-Ruan, 2001). In the following sections, I review the literature in each of the areas mentioned above.

Book clubs have been used to address pedagogical or social issues faced by teachers in schools (Kooy, 2006). The use of professional texts that targeted pedagogical or social issues as a springboard to discussion led participants to discuss issues pertinent to their teaching and enhance their understandings of the topics (Kisch, 2009; Kooy, 2006). The findings suggest that teacher book clubs focused on pedagogical or social issues can help teachers achieve the goal of enhanced understanding of professional learning topics. Further, since pedagogical or social issues have direct implications for classroom practice, enhanced understanding of the topics has potential to positively affect teachers’ practices.

Several studies support the findings that book clubs aimed at pedagogical or social issues can lead to teachers’ enhanced understanding of the topics. For example, the teachers in Pelletier’s (1993) group read and discussed titles like *Teachers at Work: Achieving Success in Our Schools* (Johnson, 1990) and *The Quality School* (Glasser, 1992). In a survey of participants, the teachers reported that the benefits of participating in the book club were engaging in professional reading and having the opportunity to discuss the text with colleagues. An additional reported result of participating in the book club was that the teachers made connections between the material they read for the book club and their own pedagogy (classroom practices). Similarly, the teachers in Selway’s (2003) group began their book club by reading and discussing *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (Tatum, 1997). Participants said that through the book club, they gained insight into issues of race that their students were facing. They
also gained awareness of how cultural and racial concerns were impacting their relationships with their students. The findings suggest that teacher book clubs are a valuable way for teachers and administrators to enhance their understandings of the pedagogical or social issues discussed in the text and potentially change their practice related to the issues. However, the research did not report specifics of what the participants talked about in their book club discussions. Analysis of the discussions themselves may have provided a more complete understanding of how the discussions supported the enhanced understandings reported by the participants.

A number of teacher book clubs have used adolescent literature as their texts. The research suggested that the outcomes of teachers reading adolescent literature as their texts were threefold. First, teachers were introduced to adolescent literature that they could use in their language arts and social studies classrooms with their students (George, 2002). Also, reading and discussing adolescent literature allowed the teachers to reflect on their own reading and comprehension processes, the same processes that they would teach their students to use when reading the literature they taught in their classrooms (George, 2002). Finally, adolescent literature presented the teachers with issues of multiculturalism dealt with by characters in the texts and provided a springboard for the teachers to discuss such issues (Bean, Valerio, Mallette & Readance, 1999; Chevalier & Houser, 1997; Flood, et. Al., 1994; Flood & Lapp, 1994; George, 2001; George, 2002; Harlin, Murray & Shea, 2007). Each of the outcomes names above has potential to help teachers improve their pedagogy.

When teachers read adolescent literature in book clubs, their classroom instruction was positively affected. For example, George (2002) initiated a teacher book
club for a group of middle school teachers who, prior to the book club, were not incorporating adolescent literature into their classes. Through reading and discussing the literature the teachers reported having an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs and practice. Additionally, the teachers began to incorporate the adolescent literature they read into their classes. They also began to use a wider variety of instructional practices like book clubs in their classes. Through reflecting on their beliefs and practices during book club discussions, the teachers were led to make positive changes in their pedagogy. However, while the outcomes of George’s (2001) research showed positive changes, the research told about some observable behaviors like incorporating new literature in the classroom. What was not reported was information about potential changes in the teachers’ beliefs that may have resulted from the opportunity to reflect. Information about the content of the teachers’ discussions would provide a more complete understanding of the reflection the teachers engaged in.

Teacher book clubs that used adolescent literature also provided teachers a pre-service teachers an opportunity to discuss issues of multiculturalism (Flood, et. Al., 1994; George, 2002). Participating in book clubs that focused on multicultural literature helped teachers to identify with characters from cultural backgrounds different from their own and develop greater cultural sensitivity toward the cultural groups they discussed (Flood, et. al., 1994). Teachers and pre-service teachers also changed their teaching or made plans to change their future teaching as a result of participation in book clubs focused on adolescent literature (Flood, et. al., 1994). For example, Chevalier and Houser (1997) studied a group of pre-service teachers who participated in a book club focused on adolescent literature. The researchers found that through reading and discussing
adolescent novels, participants initially engaged in struggle and resistance to some of the novels’ themes that they considered in appropriate based on their own cultural beliefs. Participants eventually developed heightened awareness in the form of deep reflection and revised perspectives of cultural issues discussed. An additional finding was that the pre-service teachers modified their plans for future action, an example being one teacher’s resolution to act differently toward her own future students by looking for positive behaviors in the students instead of focusing on negative behaviors. Again, the findings suggest that teacher book clubs have the potential to positively impact teachers’ beliefs and pedagogy. A question left unanswered by the research described above is how a similar book club may have impacted more experienced teachers, particularly if more experienced teachers contributed more professional experience to the discussions. Also, it would be valuable to know whether teachers would move through similar phases of struggle, resistance and heightened awareness described by Chevalier and Houser (1997) if the book club text were pedagogical in nature and did not deal with emotional charged issues like cultural experiences.

Some teacher book clubs focused on autobiographical texts as a springboard to enhanced understandings of cultural issues (Florio-Ruane, 2001). The pre-service teachers who participated in the book clubs discussed issues of culture during book club meeting that enhanced their understandings of cultural issues that they would face in schools. The texts served as a springboard for the teachers’ discussions of issues about which they were previously unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) found that as teachers read autobiographies of authors from cultures other than their own and met to discuss the autobiographies, they developed the ability to
discuss uncomfortable topics of race and culture that they avoided at the onset of the book club. Discussing the topics helped the teachers develop their understandings of cultural issues, which in turn helped them develop their identity as teachers.

All of the examples above demonstrate that teacher book clubs can be used to introduce teachers to pedagogical or social issues, multicultural issues and adolescent literature or cultural issues presented through autobiography. When teachers adopt new classroom practices or develop new understandings about social and cultural issues faced by their students, the potential exists for improvement in teaching and ultimately in student achievement. While the research described above indicated that participation in book clubs might enhance teachers’ understandings of classroom practices or social and cultural issues, few of the studies focused on what the teachers talk about when they discuss book club texts. Because the majority of the research relied on surveys and/or interviews with participants, the research provided little information about the actual content of their discussions. The content of the discussions is relevant. In the content of the discussion is where I will find the stories of the participants’ teaching lives.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant teaching is a term created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes.” Participating in culturally relevant teaching essentially means that teachers create a bridge between students’ home and school lives while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curricular requirements. Culturally relevant teaching utilizes the
backgrounds, knowledge and experiences of the students to inform the teacher’s lessons and methodology.

Ladson-Billings (2009) notes that the successful teachers she studied in *The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* believed in a “Freirean notion of teaching as mining or pulling knowledge out” (p. ). The eight teachers in the study were “teachers who did not just deposit facts, but required cognitive acts of their students, who enabled the practice of social and cultural transformation, and who learned from and with their students along the way” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. ).

Ladson-Billings (2009) studied successful teachers of African American students and determined that although the teaching styles of culturally relevant teachers are diverse, their pedagogical orientations, ideologies and worldviews are quite similar. Of the eight teachers whom she identified as culturally relevant in *The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, three were White and only one of those had a predominantly White-referenced personal history (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Indeed, most of the teachers described in the culturally relevant literature have a cultural background like that of their students or have adopted a worldview similar to their students by living in their students’ home communities for many years (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (2009) specifically defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 38). Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current
status quo of the social order. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy is a way for schools to acknowledge the home-community culture of the students, and through sensitivity to cultural nuances integrate these cultural experiences, values and understandings into the teaching and learning environment (Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2010) and others have contributed to an understanding of the key philosophical, relational, and political orientations, attitudes, beliefs, and related practices that mark culturally relevant pedagogy. The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children, Ladson-Billing’s empirical work about culturally relevant teachers, finds that culturally relevant teachers strive for excellence with their students by assuming the responsibility for their students’ success. They believe that all students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some. Culturally relevant teachers share a belief that children are capable of academic excellence, which is matched with classroom practices that insure high academic performance. They view knowledge as socially constructed and teach their students to critically analyze information. Finally, they root learning in issues relevant to the students’ lives and help students make connections between their home community and broader national and global issues. In The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children (1994, 2009), Ladson-Billings describes the basic qualities of a culturally relevant teacher as follows:

- Teachers who practice culturally relevant methods can be identified by the way they see themselves and others. These teachers have high self-esteem and a high regard for others. Ladson-Billings (2009) writes, “Too often teachers have a poor opinion of themselves and their profession. In contrast, teachers who practice
culturally relevant methods not only see themselves as professionals but also strongly identify with teaching.” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 17)

- Teachers with culturally relevant practices see their teaching as an art and themselves as artists. “These teachers do not view teaching as a technical skill that requires minimal training and they do not believe that as long as one follow a kind of recipe or prescription one can predict outcomes.” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 45)

- Teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community. They see teaching as giving back to the community and they encourage their students to do the same (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 41).

- Teachers with culturally relevant practices believe that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some. “This notion that all students can succeed may seem trite because it is constantly repeated in the pedagogical literature; however, it is not until you see it in action that you know it can be more than a slogan.” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 48)

- Teachers with culturally relevant practices help students make connections between their community, national, racial, cultural, and global identities. These teachers comprehend the importance of knowing who their students are and how they are connected to wider communities. They understand that students’ diverse cultural background is central. (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 53)

- Teachers with culturally relevant practices see teaching as “digging knowledge out” of students. One of the commonalities among the diverse group of teachers in *The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994,
2009) is an overriding belief that students come to school with knowledge and that that knowledge must be explored and utilized in order for students to become achievers. (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.56)

- Culturally relevant teachers can also be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions. Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness between the students. They encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 60)

- Culturally relevant teachers are identified by their notions of knowledge. They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled and shared by teachers and students alike. They view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills, they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning. (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 88)

The eight teachers in study went to great lengths to ensure their students’ success because they not only understood their roles as teachers, but also because of their deep connection to their students and the political struggle of African Americans in the United States of America; therefore the foundational belief, rooted in a deep connection to students and their communities, is that all students will succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These teachers were part of the students’ home community and saw teaching as giving something back to the community. In short, culturally relevant teachers strive to build strong relationships with and understand the worldviews of people in that community.
Gay (2000) describes a culturally relevant teacher as one that teaches to the strengths of ethnically diverse students and one that also understands that connection between school and culture. Although culture is an everyday experience for us that we often do not notice, all of us make sense of the world through our different cultural experiences. Culture shapes how we communicate, what we do in our work and play, how we interact with one another, what customs we follow, and how we view the world. The ways in which we learn cannot be separated from these cultural contexts. We all bring a set of cultural understandings, perspectives and expectations to school with us. Sonia Nieto (2002) defines culture in the following way:

Culture consists of the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion. Culture includes not only tangibles such as foods, holidays, dress and artistic expression, but also less tangible manifestations such as communication, style, attitudes, values, and family relationships. These features of culture are often more difficult to pinpoint, but doing so is necessary if we want to understand how student learning may be affected (pp. 139-140).

Over the past twenty-five years, scholars have started to understand the crucial relationship between school and culture. Schools have a culture – a set of norms and ways of working, thinking, talking, valuing and behaving. When the culture of the school reflects the culture of the home or community, the classroom is more familiar to children. When school reflects different ways of thinking, knowing and valuing, children must cross boundaries, making the learning process more complex. School can be a foreign, mysterious or intimidating experience for students whose home or community context is
substantially different from what they experience in school. If the school does not incorporate aspects of students’ home and community life in the learning process, students may feel alienated by the classroom environment (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In addition, if teachers do not understand the cultural norms that guide their students’ thinking and behavior, they may misinterpret or miss entirely what students understand (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

For many years, scholars observed that not all students who enter schools come from the same culture, i.e., not all schools are a homogenous environment (Giroux, 1988; Freire, 2005). Just as the student body is not homogenous, teachers may come from a culture quite different from that of their students, resulting in cultural clashes that can potentially lead to gaps in learning. For viable teaching and learning to take place, there must be connections between the home-community and school cultures. This connection demonstrates the value of cultural and social capital that students bring with them to school. Such intentional inclusion of students’ backgrounds becomes a direct demonstration of the distinction between difference and deficiency; in other words, difference does not imply nor translate as deficit (Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

Gay’s (2000) guidelines for culturally responsive teaching emphasize using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. More specifically, culturally relevant teaching “acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught” (p. 29).
Inequities in schooling can be addressed in part by taking into account the range of experiences, histories and cultures that students bring to the classroom. Banks (2002) describes four ways scholars and teachers might consider educating for cultural diversity: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and empowerment of school culture. Content integration is “the extent to which teachers use examples, data and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories in their subject area or discipline (Banks, 2002, p. 5). Curriculum materials and textbooks can serve to marginalize students of color when they fail to represent students’ lives and histories or when they represent them in a superficial manner. Conversely, curriculum resources can be selected to reflect the language, history and values of a diverse range of peoples and perspectives. Content integration occurs not only in history and reading classes but also in science classes when scientists and inventors from many cultures are discussed or in mathematics class when teachers draw on examples from students’ experiences outside the classroom. When classroom resources reflect the lived experiences of the students, students feel validated and can better connect to learning.

Knowledge construction occurs when “teachers help students to understand how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by the racial, ethnic and social-class positions of individuals and groups” (Banks, 2002, p. 6). Banks provides two examples of this in his discussion of how mainstream U.S. history typically describes the settlement of the West and the experience of slavery. Early historians created the impression that Europeans brought civilization to the West as though no other people were living there. Early historians also created the impression that slaves were content and loyal to their
masters. More accurate histories that represent the experiences of people from various vantage points allow students to see the world from different perspectives. Although many blatant stereotypes and racist depictions have been eliminated from textbooks today, current textbooks continue to give little attention to different groups of color (Gay; 2010). When teachers seek out materials that reflect multiple perspectives, students can learn to think critically about how text and other media represent a particular point of view.

Prejudice reduction involves “interventions to help students to develop more positive racial attitudes and values” (Banks, 2002, p. 6). Similarly, teachers’ attitudes about race and ethnicity are developed before they enter their first classroom (Nieto, 2002). Teachers’ expectations for their students’ achievement appear to be a more significant factor in how students actually perform than other variables, such as class or race (Nieto, 2002). The assumptions people make about race and ethnicity can come from what they have been told, what they have read, and what they have seen on television.

Beverly Tatum (1999) suggests that these assumptions can come also from what people have not been told: “Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion; usually based on limited information...we all have prejudices, not because we want them, but simply because we are so continually exposed to misinformation about others” (p. 5).

In addition to teaching in ways that counter this lack of information and misinformation, it is important to encourage teachers and students to reflect on their own attitudes, biases and practices in their lives and in the classroom. As Nieto (1996) suggests, being antiracist and anti-discriminatory is not about assigning blame or feeling guilt, but “paying attention to all areas in which some students are favored over others;
the curriculum, choice of resources, tracking, teachers’ interactions and relationships with students and their families” (p. 106).

Developing an empowering school culture involves “restructuring the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment” (Banks, 1991, p. 32). An increasing body of research illustrates that students of color, as well as others, are succeeding in many new small schools featuring structures that foster more cooperative modes of learning, less departmentalization and tracking, a more common curriculum for students, stronger relationships between teachers and students that extend over multiple years, greater use of team teaching and participation of parents, students and teachers in making decisions about schooling (Darling-Hammond, 2005). For example, Darling-Hammond (2005) and her colleagues found that when schools clustered students and teachers together in ways that allowed them to work for longer periods of time with a smaller group of students, teachers were able to understand better how their students thought and learned and go to know them as people. Such structures also provided the time required to develop complex performances and a setting for more challenging forms of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Acknowledgment of diverse experiences helps teachers and students create new associations and understandings of one another. Crossing cultural boundaries is essential to social learning. This is true for learning across disciplines, for learning across communities and cultures, for learning across ideas and ideologies, and for learning across the many groups of individuals—parents, teachers, staff and students—who make up a school.
Schools can actively strive to construct and incorporate diversity, rather than trying to suppress it. Doing so requires a conscious effort on the part of both teachers and students to understand and embrace diverse perspectives. Lisa Delpit (1995) reminds us that “we all interpret behaviors, information and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level on conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply the way it is” (p. 151). Educators must develop a keen awareness of the perspectives they bring and how these can be enlarged if they are to avoid what Edmund Gordon (1990) calls “communicentric bias—the tendency to make one’s own community the center of the universe and the conceptual frame that constrains thought” (p. 19). This bias can limit teachers’ understanding of their students and students’ understanding of others.

While there are common characteristics and traits among people who share the same race or ethnicity, no culture is monolithic. Within cultural groups, there are many subcultures. People have multiple layers of identity and belong to more than one subgroup simultaneously. For example, I am an African American female who works in a southern city and attends a United Methodist church; thus, I have a racial, gender, geographic and religious identity. What is culturally relevant to my life may not be culturally relevant to a 28 year old African American woman who works in a northern city and attends a Catholic church. This illustration can be expanded by defining culturally relevant pedagogy as intentional behavior by a teacher to use gestures, ethnic or gender group to engage students belonging to that group in authentic student centered learning (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally relevant teaching empowers diverse students to develop an identity and socializes
them as they acquire knowledge for their own purposes. In the words of my mother, my first teacher and my favorite teacher, “In order to teach you I must know you.” I pray for all of us the strength to teach our children what they must learn and the humility and wisdom to learn from them so that we teach them better.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing, and interpreting texts. (Clandinin, 2013, pp. 12-13)

Significance of the Research

There is clearly a need for this study because book clubs that explore and seek to understand elementary school teachers’ professional development have rarely been subject to serious academic inquiry. More specifically, there is little research that addresses issues related to elementary teachers’ learning during the school day with their grade level peers and administrators in the context of a book club. I argue that the study of how teachers and administrators learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study together will help teachers, administrators and other school personnel understand how book studies can help support their learning needs and enhance their professional practices.

My study is unique because the kindergarten team represents a diverse group of educators that include White teachers, African American teachers, female teachers, a male teacher, novice teachers and veteran teachers. Most of the literature I reviewed focused on one specific demographic, i.e., women or novice teachers or a comparison of the experiences of novice teachers versus veteran teachers. This study is also unique because the informal book club setting provided teachers an opportunity to tell their
stories and share their lived experiences. In my analysis, I hone in on the specifics of the stories and in my findings, I share the specifics of what the participants talk about in their book club discussions. Analysis of the stories include discussions about the teachers’ and the administrator’s lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom. My hope is that this analysis provides a more complete understanding of how the book club stories support the enhanced understandings and learning needs of the participants. As an educational researcher and narrative inquirer, I hope to become more aware of how story is used to understand the influence that teachers’ families, cultures, personal development and current teaching circumstances might have on their professional practices as well as their ability to become more culturally relevant educators. I will share my findings and what I learn with educators and researchers with the hope that my suggestions will encourage school based personnel to work collaboratively to find ways to support the learning needs of adults through book clubs with administrators and other unique job embedded professional learning opportunities.

My interest in exploring what endures from job embedded book studies leads me to seek qualitative theories and methods that are sensitive to individual stories and flexible enough to allow connections between stories. The principles of narrative inquiry and action research are well suited to the study of such phenomenon; hence, they form the methodological framework for my research. In particular, I use the case study approach to hone my focus on the experiences and perceptions of the seven kindergarten teachers at Wesley Avenue Elementary School. “Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience; therefore, educational experiences should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Narrative inquiry in educational settings
is much more than seeking out and hearing a story. For my research, narratives are an entry point for examining the influence that teachers’ families, culture, personal development and current teaching circumstances might have on their professional practices as well as their ability to become more culturally sensitive educators. A qualitative case study approach requires researching lived experiences (Merriam, 2009; Mishler, 1996). As a result of this study, the lived and storied experiences of these teachers will hopefully provide insight and help me formulate implications for job embedded book discussion groups.

Research Questions

Framed by constructive developmental theory, this qualitative study will examine how the learning needs of seven kindergarten teachers is influenced through participation in an eight week book study of *Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson Billings. I will explore the following questions:

1. In what ways can book studies support the learning needs of teachers and administrators in public school settings?
2. What do teachers and administrators share when they participate in a book study with their colleagues? How do teachers and administrators connect these stories to their professional practice?
3. What do teachers and administrators learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy?

My hope is that the findings of this study will help to transform Wesley Avenue Elementary School by informing teachers and administrators of factors that influence the
pedagogical decision making of educators who are teaching in underachieving public schools.

Research Design and Rationale

*We do not find stories; we make stories. We retell our respondents’ accounts through our analytic re-descriptions. We are storytellers and through our methods, we construct the story and its meaning.* (Mishler, 1995, p. 117)

Introduction

The starting point for my qualitative research study is my own interest and inquiry into teaching, teacher knowledge and teacher pedagogy. In qualitative research, “the focus is on process, meaning and understanding. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 266). Qualitative research attempts to understand the way things are and what they mean using narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection to produce knowledge that can be used by teachers (Guskey, 2000; Mills, 2000). In a qualitative research study, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. Qualitative design is appropriate for my study because qualitative research views teaching as a highly complex, content specific, interactive act that acknowledges issues of context by capturing differences across classrooms and providing insights into connections between theory and practice (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003; Schon, 1991). I have chosen qualitative research methods to study how book clubs support the learning needs of teachers and administrators in public school settings, to learn what teachers and administrators share when they participate in a book study with their colleagues including how they connect these stories to their professional practices.
and to explore what teachers and administrators learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Case Study Qualitative Research**

Prominent characteristics of a qualitative case study include the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigation strategy and the end product being richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). Merriam also suggests that case study can be further defined by three distinct features: particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. Finally, case study is heuristic which means that case study may bring the reader new meaning, extend the reader’s experience with the topic or simply confirm what is already known. In addition to these three features, deMarrais and Lapan (2004) add another special feature. In their work, case study is considered an evolving process where the researcher must be willing to allow questions that guide the study to change and new questions to emerge that fit the focus of the study. The evolving nature of case study requires a reflective, focused researcher and aligns with the principles of action research.

I choose case study as a component of my methodology because I am interested in a process of inquiry that will help me understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. Therefore, this study is designed to be an in-depth description and analysis of a weekly job embedded professional learning experience (a book club for teachers and an administrator). This case
study will embrace all of Merriam’s characteristics: particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. I hope to learn how the participants interpret and make sense of their experiences as the book club discussions evolve over the eight week period.

**Conceptual Framework**

Constructivism is the conceptual framework for my study because constructivism offers a broad orientation for the study of teaching and learning. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism. Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality (Merriam, 2009). Rather, there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event. Researchers do not find knowledge; they construct it. Constructivists choose complex, relevant problems because they believe people learn best when they are able to construct their own knowledge while shifting perspective from the individual to relationships (Dietz, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Assumptions are challenged, cognitive conflict emerges, solutions are tested and conflict is resolved by building on prior knowledge and through open discussion and reflection. In this process, learning is constructed through engaging in reflection, decision making and problem solving rather than delivered. The new learning or knowledge is not created alone but through the interaction of existing knowledge, beliefs and values with new ideas or experiences in a social context (Gordon, 2004).

Constructivism influenced my study because the participants were able to construct their own learning during the book club discussions. The knowledge the
participants constructed for themselves as they learned and evolved in the book study will hopefully impact their professional practices in progressive ways.

**Narrative Inquiry**

*Narrative is itself a way of knowing—one particularly suited to capture the complexities and mysteries of teaching.* (Bruner, 1986)

“Narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry developed as a research methodology in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Clandinin, 2013). Since that time there has been an explosion of interest in this methodology. Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) assert that narrative inquiry is a ubiquitous practice because human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. “These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in
building lives and communities” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 11). Story is one of the most common and most powerful forms of human communication; the narrative form is the universal way in which people make sense of their experiences (Spalding, 2004). People communicate and reinterpret their life experiences through stories (Riessman, 2002a; Bruner, 2007). “Storytelling performs the dual cultural functions of making the strange familiar and ourselves private and distinctive” (Bruner, 2007, p. 1). The Nigerian-British writer, Ben Okri, shares a poignant metaphor, “Like water, stories are much taken for granted. They are seemingly ordinary and neutral but are one of humanity’s most powerful weapons for good or evil.”

The field of narrative research is extremely diverse both methodologically and theoretically (Riessman, 2008b). There are a wide range of definitions of what is meant by “narrative,” as well as of methods and theoretical underpinnings (Webster et al., 2007). Riessman (2008b) argues however that this diversity is a major strength in narrative studies. She describes “narrative analysis as a family of analytic approaches to texts. As in all families, there is conflict and disagreement among those holding different perspectives” (p. 151).

Studies using narrative inquiry as a methodology are found in a wide range of disciplines. These include education (Brunner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999 & 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988), medicine (Frank, 1995), sociology (Riessman, 1990 & 1994), social action (Bell, 1988) and development (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Bruner (1991), Clandinin and Connelly (1999, 2000) and Polkinghorne (1988) agree that much of the knowledge we acquire about teaching and learning is a result of people relating their stories of educational experiences. Narrative inquiry is therefore concerned with critical
analysis of the stories we hear, read and tell on a personal level, as well as the larger societal narratives embedded in our social interactions (Webster et al., 2007). Narrative approaches are often used in educational settings to help students and teachers to understand their own teaching and learning processes and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). In fact, the main justification for the use of narrative inquiry in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Clandinin, 2013). In this study, I employ narrative analysis to explore how teachers impose order on the flow of experience as a way of making sense of actions and events in their teaching lives. I chose this type of analysis because it allows the depth of the teachers’ lived experiences to be heard and better understood. As a researcher, giving the teachers a voice through story demonstrates how deeply I value the experiences the teachers share including their knowledge, beliefs, perspectives and opinions.

Additionally I selected narrative inquiry as my methodology because I am curious about how the teachers’ stories illustrate their ways of knowing and I want to learn about the role culture plays in their lives and teaching. Narrative, the oldest and most natural form of sense making, is an appropriate choice for this study because the stories that are born in the book club will help me make sense of our experiences as educators as well as how we communicate and support one another. The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data and more specifically, first person accounts of experiences told in story form having a beginning, middle and end (Merriam, 2009). Narrative as a means of accessing human action and experience has been accompanied by discussions as to how to best tell people’s stories, the role of the researcher in the process,
and how trustworthy these narratives are. Mishler (1995) reminds us that as storytellers, we retell the participants’ accounts through our analytic re-descriptions. In this sense the story is always coauthored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others’ texts and discourses (p. 118).

As with any human endeavor, there are limitations to narrative inquiry. Critics and supporters of narrative inquiry note that humans might be inclined to fictionalize stories in a way that portrays the storyteller in a positive light. According to Mary Andrews (2002), editor of The Center for Narrative Research web newsletter, “The murky side of narrative myth as a core narrative can constitute the seductive yet hidden structure of social or political theories and personal life stories” (p. 1). Andrews is referring to the human tendency to add or take away from individual stories. This dilemma in narrative is closely related to the subjectivity inherent in telling one’s own story. In response to the criticism concerning subjectivity and a propensity to embellish or fictionalize stories, Kathy Carter (1993) sees this problem with narrative as a crisis in the field of education. According to Carter, this type of analysis of narrative “leads directly to a rejection of all generalizations about teaching as distortions of teachers’ real stories” (p. 8). Carter urges narrative researchers to address this criticism “by helping teachers come to know their own stories” (p. 8). As a narrative researcher, it is my responsibility to build trust and communicate openly with the teachers. Additionally, in my role of narrative researcher, I made a conscious effort not to have preconceived notions of what I might hear from the teachers in the book club discussions. My goal was
to explore what I could learn from their stories and how their shared experiences impacted their professional practices.

**My stance as researcher.** I had two roles in the book club: researcher and participant observer. These roles enabled me to be both inside and outside of the group’s process. Assuming this dual role is a stance that many school reform researchers claim is essential in helping schools navigate the complexity of change (Shank, 2006). Furthermore, according to Sarason (1990), school reform researchers must dispense with the role of dispassionate observer in order to get to know and enlist the trust of educators as research participants. From this passionate position, researchers can then understand the contextual complexities in their student sites and make realistic recommendations (Shank, 2006).

As an insider, I participated in the discussions of the group by framing questions, offering insights and suggesting courses of action. In these instances, I acted as the group’s coach and colleague. On other occasions, I participate as an observer, looking from an outsider’s perspective, trying to understand what was happening. Unlike study participants who might have their noses pressed right up against their work, I was able to view the book club discussions with an open stance. This insider-outsider position allowed me to shift my perspective back and forth between a distant and near view (Shank, 2006).

**Data Collection**

The eight week book study took place at Wesley Avenue Elementary School. The principal facilitated her book club meetings with the fifth grade team and I facilitated my book club discussions with the kindergarten team. We decided to work with these grade
levels because of the teacher diversity represented on the kindergarten and fifth grade teams. Table 3.1 presents a profile of the kindergarten team. As a part of their profile, the kindergarten teachers’ educational philosophies and quotes about their classroom culture are presented in table 3.5 and table 3.4 respectively.

Ethics Approval - My study received clearance from the Institutional Review Board before any participants were approached. After the application was approved, I met with the kindergarten teachers to explain that their grade level was chosen to participate in this study. I made sure the teachers understood that they did not have to consent to participate in the study. I explained that although, I was the assistant principal, for purposes of this project, I was a novice researcher who would both observe and participate in the book club meetings. I further explained that the data would not be used for evaluative purposes and all communications related to the book discussion meetings would remain strictly confidential. My next step was to schedule a time to have an informal conversation with each of the teachers before I asked them to complete the Participation Letter, the Consent Form and the Participant Profile. During the individual meetings, I reiterated the purpose of my research and answered questions that the teachers had. I asked the teachers to complete the paperwork and place it in my mailbox by February 19, 2015. All of the teachers agreed to participate; all of the teachers returned their paperwork before February 19, 2015.
Table 3.1 Teacher Profiles – The Kindergarten Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Teacher Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>BA/MA</td>
<td>TU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>TU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>TU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>BS/MA/JD</td>
<td>TCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>TFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>WBU</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>TCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>TU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TCP** – Teacher Certification Program  
**TFA** – Teach for America  
**TU** – Traditional undergrad with student teaching  
**HBCU** – Historically Black College or University  
**WSU** - White State University  
**WLC** – White Liberal Arts College  
**WBU** – White Baptist University

F – female  
M – male  
B – Black  
W - White  
BA – Bachelor of Arts, Elementary Education  
BS – Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education  
MA – Master of Arts, Elementary Education  
JD – Doctor of Jurisprudence

The Data Collection Process

The initial book club meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 1:15 p.m. during the kindergarten planning period. I invited everyone to my office for the first meeting. They were pleasantly surprised and incredibly excited about the healthy snacks – yogurt, granola bars, fruit and water. I noted snack preferences and diet restrictions. There were multiple requests for popcorn, almonds and diet coke. I have two vegetarians on the team and one lactose intolerant participant. This first gathering was dedicated to housekeeping matters. I shared the purpose of my study and I outlined the
expectations. Then I invited the participants to ask questions about the study and the expectations. I expressed my gratitude to the teachers for their participation. Next we created group norms (Table 3.2) and decided how we wanted the meeting to flow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2 - Group Norms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be active and engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I asked the teachers to decide whether they wanted to volunteer as discussion leaders (a different person needed to volunteer each week) or discuss the book each week with no assigned discussion leader (extemporaneous discourse). Everyone agreed to take turns being the time keeper. The participants decided not to assign discussion leaders. I was relieved about that decision because I also preferred an open, informal, less structured format. I felt strongly that the teachers should decide how the discussions should flow. I wanted them to fully participate in the construction of their own processes and developing understandings. Since I selected the first book, I felt the participants should be able to choose the meeting format. Next everyone selected pseudonyms. Time passed quickly; there were about 10 minutes remaining and I still needed to pass out the books. Once everyone received a book, we discussed the expectations for the reflection journals. We decided to read the prologue and chapter one for next week. Our window of time expired and the teachers rushed off to join their students in the classroom. Table 3.3 outlines the book club timetable and the timekeeper assignments. After this initial meeting, the kindergarten team and I met eight times to discuss the book. The ninth
meeting was a joint meeting with the principal and her participants (the fifth grade teachers). The principal and I thought it might be insightful to have one culminating book discussion with all of the participants in her book club (5th grade teachers) and my book club (kindergarten teachers). This meeting took place during lunch on the second day of post planning, May 27, 2015, in the principal’s office.

Data Sources - I used multiple strategies to capture the stories of the seven kindergarten teachers who participated in the eight week book study of Gloria Ladson-Billings’ book, Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children. First, each session was audiotaped. I recorded the sessions on a Sony portable audio tape recorder and I recorded each meeting using the voice memos tool on my cellular phone.

I used two devices to ensure that I captured all data. I did not want to lose valuable data due to technology issues; therefore, I taped each of the eight sessions on two devices. After each session, I listened to the audio recording and wrote my reflection on or re-telling of the book club experience. I reflected and wrote with the research questions in the forefront of my thoughts. As soon as possible after each meeting, I listened to the recording and reflected. I asked myself, “What stands out? What do you hear?” I listened to each session more than once and sometimes more than twice.

Transcripts of the book club meeting are my second data source. I hired a professional to transcribe each session. Each week I transferred the voice memos from my cellular phone to a drop box on my computer. The transcriber accessed the data from the drop box, transcribed the information and sent a PDF version to my electronic mailbox. The transcription process lagged behind the immediate availability of the audio tapes. The transcriber’s turnaround time was typically 48-72 hours.
My third data source is reflection journals. Both the participants and I maintained journals throughout this process. Reflective journaling requires that we think through issues for ourselves, ask questions and seek out relevant information to aid our understanding. Reflective learners tend to be motivated and pro-active and know what they are trying to achieve. They are able to identify and explain their strengths and weaknesses, understand new concepts by relating them to previous experiences as well as use their existing knowledge to help them develop their understanding of new ideas (Moon, 2006). As the administrator and facilitator of this book club, I encouraged teachers to write in their journals after each book club meeting. Teachers were not assigned specific writing prompts. Instead, I asked them to simply reflect on the experience they had during the session each week because “their learning can be enhanced through the process of writing and thinking about their experiences” (University of Worchester, 2006). Journaling also provided a space for the participants and me to think critically and analytically about our experiences (inside and outside of the classroom). I did not read the participants’ journals during the eight weeks. I collected the journals two weeks after the final book club meeting. During the two week window, I asked participants to reflect on the eighth book club discussion meeting and share final comments and overall thoughts about their experiences in the book club.

In summary, data was collected over a period of eight to ten weeks from both written and oral sources: audio tapes of the book club sessions, transcripts of the audio taped discussions in the book club sessions, reflection journals from the seven kindergarten teachers and the administrator, the Chalk (Post-It) Talks as well as the reflections and stories that I wrote. Throughout this process it was important for me to be
realistic, flexible yet keeping the “end-in-view.” Dewey’s notion of ends-in-view as practical work proceeds, the idea being that one never does things blindly, but rather holds in mind an end-in-view to help shape the doing which in turn shapes the end-in-view (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Although I had a plan, I remained open minded, flexible and open to changes as my group evolved over the course of the book study always remembering that narrative form is like Dewey’s end-in-view.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Timekeeper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Melissa’s office</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Conference Room</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Dorothy’s classroom</td>
<td>Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Dorothy’s classroom</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Dorothy’s classroom</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>1:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Dorothy’s classroom</td>
<td>Clara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>April 17</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Aaron’s classroom</td>
<td>Maxine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 23</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Taylor’s classroom</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Mary’s classroom</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>12:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Anita’s office</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4 – Classroom Culture in Kindergarten at Wesley Avenue Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>“We try to incorporate a culture of community &amp; family in our classrooms!”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>My classroom culture is a vibrant, energetic environment conducive to collaborative social and academic development. The students are given the tools to take ownership of their own learning. Through small group instruction, students receive individualized instruction to meet them at their skill level. While academic success is our primary goal, social consciousness is equally stressed and is closely linked to their educational attainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>I make it a point to get to know my students on a personal level. I make time for sidebar conversations with them so that I learn what motivates them, what they like, what they don’t like, and what they do on the weekends. I make time so that they will know that I care. I believe in establishing that rapport and maintaining it all year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>In my classroom, it’s a little chaotic but it’s structured chaos! Learning is not quiet; it’s interactive. So we are noisy sometimes and moving around most of the time. I constantly tell them and try to show them how we are a family. I teach my students that they have to take care of each other and be kind to one another because we are all family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Listening to Maxine talk about her students sharing at her table in the mornings helped me to see where there is room for improvement in my classroom for fostering a sense of family. I didn’t realize how much emphasis I placed on students being responsible and accountable for themselves but not to their fellow classmates. I made some adjustments after our book club meeting and now I have a family theme in my class. During morning meeting we discuss what it means to be a family and how family members support and help one another. I have already seen a difference in the sensitivity and desire to help fellow students in just a short period of time. I encourage my students to dream big dreams, to believe in themselves, and to know that they will make a tremendous difference in this world. Failure isn’t an option and excellence is the expectation. This is mixed with a healthy dose of love, nurturing, understanding and empathy towards the challenging family backgrounds many students come from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>My classroom culture is centered on supporting each other to reach our goals. To do this I focus on helping students internalize classroom routines so we can minimize distractions and increase learning time. I focus on teaching teamwork and cooperation so that the students are able to help their classmates succeed. My classroom environment is warm and caring so that students feel comfortable expressing their wants and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>My classroom culture is positive and nurturing. Every student is valued for what he or she brings to the classroom. Learning is expected and my students understand that learning is their job when they come to school. Everyone is encouraged to do their best and every student is provided with whatever tool is needed to succeed. Collaboration is encouraged. We can all learn something from each other. Everyone is treated with respect and my goal is for students to be confident learners. I want students to feel good about what they accomplish and have a love for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>In my classroom, I begin establishing the classroom culture on day one. Building a family within the classroom helps establish a strong bond and trust between students and students as well as students and teacher. With this, students are encouraging of others and support others when needed. Students collaborate with their team and seek guidance from Ms. Stallings, the paraprofessional, and me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 – Educational Philosophies of the Kindergarten Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Philosophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>I believe that it is the obligation of every educator to do everything in their power to meet the needs of every student in the classroom. While teachers need to be aware of their students’ needs, both in school and at home, they often have the most control over those at school. Being as every student learns differently, it is the obligation of the teacher to adapt lessons that adequately reach the learning needs of every child. This commitment includes being available for individual consultation for those who need additional attention. I believe that it is the obligation of every educator to provide their students with a positive role model. For the majority of the year, teachers spend significantly more time with their students than the parents. For some students, their teacher may be the only stable authority figure in their lives. It is for these reasons that the teacher must present himself in an appropriate fashion that provides his students with a model of a moral, socially conscious figure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>My teaching philosophy is to inspire students to want to be life-long learners. I want to build them up academically and emotionally so that they will be confident, well rounded productive citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Teaching is an opportunity to make an investment in our youth. In order for my students to become 21st century leaders, I will teach social responsibility and community as well as academic content. I will empower students to think critically and take charge of their own learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>I believe teaching is a calling rather than a profession, and only those truly and whole heartedly committed to the call will have longevity and success in this challenging arena. I believe that each child has unique strengths, talents, and abilities. I believe it is my job to create memories, rituals, and traditions, which embrace their developmental stages while setting my academic expectations very high. I believe in scaffolding and differentiating instruction to enrich or support all students. I believe it is my job to help students develop positive attitudes about learning. I am dedicated to ensure all students reach their fullest potential. I believe positive reinforcement goes a long way in encouraging students to be and do their best, even for students with behavior challenges. I believe some of the best resources, teaching strategies, and ideas come from fellow teachers, thus collaboration is a vital part of teaching success. I believe teachers should use data and grade level appropriate tools for measuring student proficiency and mastery of standards taught. If teachers are reflective and analytical about the success of their students, reassessing and remediation become second nature in the classroom. I believe in fostering an atmosphere of love and family in the classroom. Students are accountable to themselves, their teachers, and each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 – Educational Philosophies of the Kindergarten Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Philosophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Mary** | Teacher’s Role - I believe teachers should be positive influences, leaders, role models, as well as information providers. I think that students will be more cooperative if their classroom environment is positive and comfortable. It is the teacher’s role to ensure that students know the classroom is a place to learn new things, make mistakes, and freely communicate with one another. Teachers should act as leaders in the classroom and community. I agree with researcher and former teacher, Robert J. Marzano that the optimal teacher-student relationship consists of high dominance and high cooperation. Teachers should present themselves as leaders and take control of the classroom. However, they should remain cooperative and show students that they genuinely care about them. I believe that teachers are role models for students. Teachers and students spend significant amounts of time together. Consequently, teachers’ behaviors and actions will influence students whether they know it or not.  

Student’s Role – I believe that the student’s role is to be a cooperative community member, an explorer, and an active participant. Students should recognize that although they are responsible for their own learning, they are a part of a classroom community. I will hold individual students accountable, but will also group students together to foster a sense of accountability. Students should act as explorers in the classroom. They should be curious and want to know more about classroom topics and the world around them. Students should also be active participants in the classroom. They are responsible for listening, discussing, and giving their best effort. |
| **Maxine** | I believe that an interactive classroom is essential to fundamental learning. When students have a voice in the learning process then they are more likely to pay attention. When students are motivated and interested then learning takes place. The basic goal of teaching is to foster learning. I find this often takes place when they are able to make personal connections to the curriculum. When the classroom is interactive students to bring their own stories, experiences, and ideas into the classroom. I believe that if I am able to help students make personal connections to the curriculum then they become actively invested in their own learning process and their knowledge base expands. The more students learn the greater their confidence. I believe that as their confidence increase so does their critical thinking and deeper learning takes place. |
| **Taylor** | I believe every student is capable of learning no matter their background. This learning should take place in a positive environment where students are encouraging of others achievements. Together, we will reach our full educational dreams! |
Data Analysis

How Does Story Stand As Narrative Analysis?

According to some qualitative researchers, the goal of data interpretation is to facilitate the participant’s experience of the story through a narrative form (Polkinghorne, 1998). Narrative forms are produced by constructing a coherent story from the data and looking at the data from the perspective of one’s research (Polkinghorne, 1998). This study embraces the data gleaned from the participants’ stories of their lived experiences. I believe that the true magic of qualitative research lies in the processes of using data rather than in the processes of gathering data (Wolcott, 2009). The usefulness of this study depends on the methods I used to gather, analyze and report the data found in the participants’ stories. Since narratives provide a rich detailed experience that is often ignored in teacher education (Phillion, 2005), I have taken extreme care to bring forward an analysis that is non-traditional in presentation yet theoretically and methodologically sound.

I present the findings of my data analysis through a story entitled, Head, Heart and Hands: We Construct a Legacy. I stand on the shoulders of qualitative researchers and narrative scholars who believe that narrative researchers analyze the participants’ stories by retelling or re-storying them into a framework that makes sense. This often involves identifying themes or categories of information within the participant’s stories. Researchers may then rewrite the participants’ stories to place them within a sequence (beginning, middle, end) that incorporates characters (participants) who experience a conflict or struggle that comes to some sort of resolution (Creswell, 2013). I have used
the words of the participants to re-story their lived experiences in the first narrative, *We Gather Together*. In the second narrative, *Share My World*, I offer a set of self-study essays that reveal some of the intimate details of my life that have shaped me into the teacher and learner that I am. So how does story stand as narrative analysis? Narrative and story are the data collected by the researchers. People tell their stories to the researchers. The stories and narratives are the study data. There is usually an assumption that the stories are waiting to be told and when asked, people will tell their stories, usually in the Western tradition of a beginning, middle and end with characters and a resolution. Sometimes these stories and narratives follow other cultural formats but the underlying assumptions are the same. Narrative or story itself is the object of analysis. (Clandinin, 2013).

**Data Analysis – The Process**

The steps below outline the detailed process I engaged to analyze my data. The analysis process is also detailed in tables 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8.

**Data Analysis**
- 1st reading - I read the transcript from each book club discussion without making notes or markings.
- 2nd reading – I read the transcript and listened to the audio tape taking note of what stood out to me and making the notations in the margins of the transcript.
- 3rd reading – I color coded the transcript for each book club meeting using the following categories: things from the text that “stuck” with participants (yellow), participants conversations about the book outside of the book club (green), key issues that surfaced during the book club (blue), what the participants think the
problems might be (pink), current events (gray), participants mention their parents or families (mint), and things participants are working towards (turquoise).

- The next step involved transferring the participants’ words and phrases from each color coded transcript to a color coded spreadsheet for each session. Each of the color coded categories listed above became a heading for a column on the spreadsheet as follows: yellow column (what “stuck” with the participants), green column (conversations about the book outside of the book club), blue column (key issues that surfaced during the book club), pink column (what participants think the problems might be), mint column (participants mentions their parents or families), and turquoise column (things participants are working towards).

- Once the data was organized in a color coded chart, I developed each code by writing kernel narratives about key ideas using only the participants’ words and phrases. The color coded spreadsheets allowed me to easily recognize pivotal events like things that were troubling the participants, references to their families and things that participants wanted to work towards improving.

- After I wrote the kernel narratives, I cross checked the stories with the participants’ journal entries to make sure I captured all of the pivotal issues and to make sure the messages were being conveyed accurately in the kernel narratives.

- Once I was comfortable that there was not discrepancy between the transcripts and the journal entries, I felt more confident about the accuracy of the text in the kernel narratives.
Lastly, I texted the participants and asked them if they would be willing to read the narratives. I asked them to highlight areas that were unclear or inaccurate based on our book club meetings. My purpose was two-fold. I wanted and needed the participants to cross check for accuracy. Secondly, most of the teachers check in periodically to ask how the research findings are developing. They are curious to see the final project. I promised to update them periodically. Throughout the cross checking process, I received helpful feedback from the participants. There were no major concerns or discrepancies.

Once the triangulation process (transcripts, journals and participant cross checking) was complete, I combined the individual narratives into one story – a story of experience entitled, Head, Heart and Hands: We Construct a Legacy.

Note: Once the triangulation process was complete, I combined the kernel narratives into one story of experience, Head, Heart and Hands: We Construct a Legacy.
### Table 3.6 - LEVEL 1 ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; reading</td>
<td>Read the transcripts without making notes or markings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; reading</td>
<td>Read the transcript and listened to the audio tape taking note of what stood out to me and making notations in the margins of the transcript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; reading</td>
<td>I color coded the transcript based on those topics that were mentioned repeatedly. This was my first layer of coding. Categories were formed based on the topics that were mentioned repeatedly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Categories are created. | - Yellow – what stuck with the participants  
- Green – Participants have conversations about the book club outside of the book club.  
- Blue – Key Issues that surfaced during the book club conversations  
- Pink – What the participants think the problems might be  
- Gray – current events  
- Mint – participants mention their parents, families  
- Turquoise – things the participants are working towards |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Set-up a spreadsheet based on the categories that were established in Level 1 | Transferred the highlighted text of the participants’ words/phrases from the color coded transcripts to a spreadsheet with the same color code. Each of the categories became a heading for a column on the spreadsheet as follows:  
  - Yellow – what stuck with the participants  
  - Green – Participants have conversations about the book club outside of the book club.  
  - Blue – Key Issues that surfaced during the book club conversations  
  - Pink – What the participants think the problems might be  
  - Gray – current events  
  - Mint – participants mention their parents, families  
  - Turquoise – things the participants are working towards |
| Develop the codes (categories) by writing narratives.                | Once the data (participants’ words/phrases) was organized in the color coded spreadsheet, I developed the codes by writing kernel narratives using only the participants’ words and phrases. The spreadsheet allowed me to easily recognize pervasive events: experiences that reflect the influences of their families, cultures and current teaching circumstances, obstacles that impede student progress, things participants are confused about, and participants’ successes or future steps. |
| Read participants’ reflection journals.                             | Cross checked the kernel narratives with the participants’ journal entries to make sure  
  1. I covered all pervasive issues.  
  2. I checked for possible new categories.  
Once I verified that there were no discrepancies between the transcripts and the journal entries, I felt more confident about the accuracy of the text in the kernel narratives/ |
| Member Checks                                                       | I asked the participants to read the kernel narrative and highlight areas that were unclear or inaccurate based on what happened during the book discussions. There were no major concerns or discrepancies. |
### Table 3.8 - LEVEL 3 ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>Description of Major Themes</th>
<th>Kernel Narratives</th>
<th>FINDINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sharing Our Stories     | Participants share lived experiences that reflect the influences of their families, cultures and current teaching circumstances | ▪ We Are Born and Raised in Narrative Spaces  
▪ Fair Means Everybody Gets….. to be Successful  
▪ Literacy: Interactive and Communal  
▪ Imagine  
▪ Working at Wesley  
▪ A Mother’s Dilemma – A Daughter’s Decision  | 1, 2, 3 |
| Troubling the Way Things Seem to Be | Participants question some of the obstacles and barriers that impede student progress | ▪ Let Them Shine and Have Their Glory!  
▪ Black Culture: White-Black and Black-Black  
▪ Talking White Acting White  
▪ My Name Isn’t Oreo  
▪ A Solid Foundation  
▪ STOP  
▪ What Am I Supposed to Do with This?  | 1, 2 |
| Confused about What to Do | Participants admit that we don’t know all of the answers                                 | ▪ Fresh Out of Ideas  
▪ Racked with Guilt  
▪ What Is the Culture?  
▪ Is Immersion Really a Solution?  
▪ The Cupid Shuffle  | 1, 2 |
| Conclusion              | Participants celebrate successes and/or consider next steps                                | ▪ M.C. Hammer vs. Shakespeare  
▪ Why Am I Singing All of These Songs  
▪ It’s My Choice  
▪ Whatever It Takes  
▪ Community Building in the Classroom  | 1, 2 |
CHAPTER 4

HEAD, HEART and HANDS: WE CONSTRUCT A LEGACY

PROLOGUE

Zeroing In!

There are many things I didn’t know would happen to me on my scholarly journey - a journey started at birth and currently entering the home stretch.

An astute professor asserted, “This is the first time in all this time that you’ve had a chance to really focus on your scholarship instead of doing all those other things.” And of course, she’s right, but there’s one minute caveat – I needed to do all those other things in order to zero in on the story I am destined to share - a story that began in a modest red brick bungalow in the early 1960s with my mama, my daddy and my brother - a story that ended last May after sixteen years as an educator in urban public schools.

Through all those other things, I’ve finally learned who I am and my purpose for being alive. Every childhood challenge brought me to the fulfillment of my purpose which is to educate children and cultivate effective teachers. I lived and survived the childhood experiences so that I would have the understanding and compassion to hear, listen and embrace the students’ pain. I know; I’ve been there. That’s the bottom line. But in order to educate and cultivate, I had to go through all those other things as a child and as an adult that would make me strong enough and sagacious enough to do the work because this work is incredibly demanding and absolutely unimaginable! How do I edify
children in urban areas who are from extreme poverty - brilliant children who do not recognize their potential to be world changers, worthy children who do not realize that dreams do come to fruition with focus and determination? Furthermore, how do I retain well cultivated teachers long enough to build the relationships and understandings needed to bridge the ever-changing cultural divide? They exit the urban classroom as quickly as they enter because they just don’t have the stamina and cultural awareness to deal with the daily grind.

Someone has to care enough to figure this out and someone has to be courageous enough to speak out. We continue to lose our children daily. There are many distractions that steal their attention and consume their intellectual potential. The problem is magnanimous so I have decided to tell my story and share the teachers’ stories hoping that something on the pages of our lives will inspire you so that we might seek solutions together.

My approach for sharing is two-fold. The first narrative, *We Gather Together*, is a combination of individual stories shared by seven kindergarten teachers and an assistant principal during an eight week book study of Gloria Ladson-Billings’ book, *The Dream-Keepers*. My goal of the meetings was to provide an informal, intellectual space for the teachers and me to consider ways to become more culturally relevant in our professional practices as a result of reading the book. The stories are divided into three sections. In the first section, *Sharing Our Stories*, the participants share lived experiences that reflect the influences of their families, cultures and current teaching circumstances on their professional practices. In the second section, *Troubling the Way Things Seem to Be*, we question some of the obstacles and barriers that impede student progress. Lastly, in the
third section, *Confused about What to Do*, we admit that we don’t know all of the answers. In fact, we are fresh out of ideas. We conclude our story by celebrating successes and considering next steps.

The second narrative, *Share My World*, is a collection of self-study essays that burst on the scene while I was engaged in analyzing my original data sources. This is where I surprise myself by facing painful situations I’ve experienced and by sharing the intimate details of those experiences with my audience. However, my choice to yield to the emotional uprising within and let go to commit these life changing moments to paper have allowed me to heal, forgive, recharge and move forward. Because I confronted *all those things*, I am now free to begin a new chapter in my life. No more shackles! I am free and I choose to make a difference from a different place – another type of space.

I believe that there are millions who care and are ready to make a difference from a different place. Surely, I am not the only administrator and certainly, my teachers are not the only teachers who are ready. I invite you to *zero in* on our stories.
WE GATHER TOGETHER
On 9 days from March 2015 to May 2015
*Just the kindergarten teachers and me*

**Part I - Sharing our stories**

In this section, we share lived experiences that reflect the influences of our families, cultures and current teaching circumstances on our professional practices.

We are Born and Raised in Narrative Spaces

Aaron: My dad’s got a bookshelf of everything from *Zen: The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to *History of Rock ‘n Roll*. He’s always reading and so is my mom. I think I was probably four when I really started reading on my own. By the time I got into like first or second grade, my mom bought stacks of the Boxcar Children’s books. I thought they were boring. I didn’t care for the activity of reading then and I don’t really enjoy reading now. I’ve got all kinds of books on the shelf at home, *Slaughterhouse Five, Of Mice and Men* and all the classics I need to read but I just can’t get into them.

Alex: I started reading like at five or six. My mom liked to read and she taught me how using “Hooked on Phonics.” In the mornings, my mom would review our spelling words with us. We had to know the meaning of the words too. I knew how to use the dictionary, including the guide words at the top of the page, from learning with my mom. I loved to read especially comic books; my brother and I read comic books together. Reading a lot made me confident in school which was good since I wasn’t naturally gifted in math. Starting in 5th grade, my mom would have me read things from the politics and business sections of the newspaper even though I wasn’t interested. Then she would ask me
questions to make sure I understood what I read. She always emphasized education and reading.

Clara: I think for me, now as an adult, I like reading. But as a child, comprehension was a struggle in school. My parents didn’t like to read so I would read to my younger brothers all the time. The problem was I never could comprehend what I was reading. So I could read the words, but I couldn’t tell you anything about it. When I got to middle school, it started to come around and of course, I’ve got it together now. I guess seeing how Evanston is and how I grew up – at times, it’s similar. Like my parents didn’t like to read so they didn’t care. But I loved to read even though I didn’t understand what I was reading. I just needed more influence at home to push me.

Dorothy: Growing up my dad had a big book of words. Every week he would assign us 15 to 20 words for us to define and use in sentences. We had to take his test at the end of the week. But then, because of different stress factors, he didn’t do it as much. He kind of weaned us away from that. For my children, they were reading before they went to school because I was home with them and I emphasized that. We had a place in the house where they would definitely do their work before they did anything in the day. The kids are in middle and high school now but we still expect them to read every day. The goal is to read 30 to 45 minutes aside from their homework.

Mary: I feel like I was immersed in it! I think I was reading at three or four. My mom bought “Hooked on Phonics” and my brother, my sister and I started to read using that. I think it really took off for me in third grade when my teacher read aloud the first Harry
Potter book. After she finished, I was hooked! Also, at my elementary school, we had the Accelerated Reader program and great incentives for the best readers. I really, really enjoyed that!

Maxine: Both my mom and my dad were educators. My mom was a kindergarten teacher. She taught my sister and me how to read with Sam and Jane books before we entered kindergarten. We had to sit and read with her every day. Because of all the things that my mom did with us at home, we were ready for kindergarten. My mom continued to work with us during the school year to make sure we were strong students. My sister was so adept at reading, writing and math that she went from kindergarten to second grade; she skipped the entire first grade!

Melissa: My momma was a teacher. She taught me how to read when I was three years old with Dr. Seuss books and *Highlights* magazine. I remember going to the mailbox every month to get a brand new book and a shiny, new magazine. Although *Hop on Pop* was the first book I learned to read, *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* and *Green Eggs and Ham* were my favorites. Momma said that I read those two books so many times that I committed them to memory. Every night when we finished reading, momma would tell me stories about her childhood until I got sleepy. I remember those special times like it was yesterday.
Taylor: When I was growing up, we had an abundance of books. My sister is older and she loved reading to me. My parents were involved in my homework and supported the teacher to provide extra practice at home with different skills. One of the things I remember the most is car rides with my mom. This was a time we would practice ABCs, recognize letters on signs and billboards and look for words along the roadside.

Our childhoods were important. As we remembered how we learned, we often referenced the influences of those formative years – how our mothers and fathers supported us and insisted that we be prepared for school so we would get a good education. We didn’t address how our stories evidenced the multiple ways our families offered that support: some bought magazines, books and packaged programs such as “Hooked on Phonics”…one father had a “big book of words”… one mom relied on billboards and road signs……one taught lessons through storytelling…not all were “readers” even today.

Alex: Working at Wesley feels like family. I feel like we are supportive of each other just as our families supported us when we were kids.

Maxine: Yeah, I don’t ever think I’ll work with another group of people like at Wesley. Each one of us likes the people that we work with from kindergarten through 5th grade. I don’t feel like there’s any interpersonal drama here. I don’t walk down the hall thinking here comes so-and-so……

Taylor: Even you and Ms. Willis, you are always so supportive. You are fair and I’m never confused about what to expect. I know I’m never going to find another team or school like this no matter where I teach – Georgia, out of the country, wherever.
Alex: When people asks, “How do you work collaboratively with your team?” I’m like that’s number one….like that’s my life. I mean we work well every day of the week and not just when we have collaborative planning. We meet outside of that.

Dorothy: Yeah and we stay until the job is done even if it’s 6 or 7. It requires sacrifice but we find a way and we get it done.

Mary: I kinda enjoy how we bring in breakfast on teacher work days…just our team sitting down to eat and you know, just being together. That quality time we get makes me feel closer to you guys. It’s like we’re our own family.

Taylor: And when we meet after work or on a weekend sometimes just to hang out and see everybody’s family, that’s pretty special too.

The experiences the teachers share have helped them build a collaborative cohesive working relationship that transcends beyond the school’s perimeter. They care about each other and the work they share. They admit that they are pleased to be together in this teaching and learning space. When a team is cohesive, the students are the winners. They are the beneficiaries of the collaborative preparation of the teachers. The kindergarten team is a family unit whose combined intellectual savvy trickles down to their classrooms where students are learning to live and work together as family members.

Clara shares, “I really like what the author stated about the notion of equality as sameness only makes sense when all kids are exactly the same. In my classroom, I have a poster that says, Fair Isn’t Everybody Getting the Same Thing. Fair Is Everybody Getting What They Need to be SUCCESSFUL. So that was my section from the book, the part
that stuck with me because no two students are the same….and I believe that is why we have to teach in different ways.”

_There was a lot of buzz in the room at this point. Differentiation has been a focus in our learning community. During my first year at Wesley, teachers were mostly engaged in whole group lessons. The principal and I knew immediately that this was an area we’d address sooner than later. There was considerable push back but the consultant who supported the teachers was really amazing. She was positive, patient and persistent. After working with the staff for two years, the teachers were able to shift to a new way of organizing their classrooms and presenting instruction to their learners. If you walk in on any day at any time now, you will see small group instruction, centers, student led activities, students working together, solving problems together, just lots and lots of work talk between the students. Now the teachers are comfortable with grouping strategies and lots of movement in the classroom throughout the day. They like this better because they can actually meet with kids individually or in small groups in order to meet their needs._

Clara continues, “And so, our students come in contact with many different situations. All of the students that I have come in contact with have very different situations that impact them on a daily basis. Some have trouble at home; they’ve lost one or both parents for different reasons. Some have multiple siblings and live in environments that are not conducive to academic learning. And I believe that that is why – why we have to teach in different ways.”

Alex then shares, “The things that stuck out to me were the four possible teacher behavior patterns. That was the part where Ladson-Billings talked about the tutor, the
general contractors, the custodian and the referral agents. I believe I am a tutor. Tutors believe that students can improve and that it is their responsibility to help all students improve (Ladson Billings, 2009). General contractors also believe that improvement is possible but they look for ancillary personnel to provide academic assistance rather than take on the responsibility themselves (Ladson Billings, 2009). Custodians do not believe that much can be done to help their students but they do not look for others to help them maintain the students at these levels (Ladson Billings, 2009). Referral agents do not believe that much can be done to help their students to improve either, but they shift the responsibility for maintaining students at these low levels to other school personnel like the school psychologist” (Ladson Billings, 2009).

She continues, “So in my mind, Ladson-Billings was really talking about responsibility which made me think about how we differentiate instruction in our own classrooms. I have twenty four students and they all have different needs. So giving the same assignment to all of the students is not meeting the needs of all the students. It just made me think about in my classroom how I adjust my lessons because I’m not going to make Jalil read sentences when I know he doesn’t know letters. And I’m not going to make Renaya practice letters when I know she can read. So it’s just that I’m trying to meet the needs of all of my students. It’s my responsibility to break it down to what each child needs and then try my best to get them where they need to be.”

Taylor chimes in, “Although the standards tell us what our students should know, understand and be able to do, there are twenty three 5-year olds that are culturally diverse, humanly diverse, and cognitively diverse coming to my classroom every day. I am responsible for their success. That’s a lot to think about because each of my kids is
unique and each one has their own voice even at this young age. The best part is they are bursting with potential!”

Aaron says, “For me differentiating for my kids has helped me become a better listener. Now I am listening for their responses so that I can take notes on their progress. Before it was not really possible to know where every student was on a particular skill. Because I see them in small groups and I’m observing and listening and instructing only a few kids at once, I know a lot about what every child knows and what every child needs to do next.”

_Literacy: Interactive and Communal - Ladson-Billings (2009) states, “In a culturally heterogeneous society, literacy ceases to be a characteristic solely in the individual. It becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated as the individual transacts with the socio-culturally fluid surroundings” (p. 112). When I read this statement, I wondered what the teachers felt about literacy as a communal and interactive process; therefore, I started the session by asking, “In what ways is literacy an interactive process and a communal activity?”

“Dorothy shared, “This is not a one man job! It involves the teachers as well as the parents as well as the students. Bringing in different parts of the community – including volunteers, people who want to get involved – reading with students or doing whatever they can do to help. It takes everybody working together to make it happen.”

Then Aaron reflected, “What jumped out to me, as far as being communal and interactive, it reminded me of cultures who used storytelling to communicate. I picture a group of people sitting around a campfire just sharing stories as part of a community building activity. We still see that today. When I go to a party with friends, we’re sitting
around and talking and sharing stories, making jokes and things like that.” During this discussion, the teachers and I shared stories that reflect the interactive and communal nature of literacy in our lives.

*It seemed easy and natural for us to expect and appreciate that we each had life stories and socio-cultural expectations, that story was central to our ways of being – in school and out of school. It’s interesting that this recognition didn’t have us wondering about the stories our children and their families shared. Imagine what our classrooms could be if we knew more about our students’ stories.*

*Since the beginning of time, people have always needed to reach out to others. Humans need to express their thoughts, dreams, and feelings. Today, we do this mainly by writing and talking, but my ancestors were not allowed to read or write. Sometimes they weren’t even allowed to talk to each other.*

Imagine……….. We were not allowed to learn how to read.

Imagine……….. We were not allowed to learn how to write.

Imagine……….. We were not allowed to talk.

*When I reflect on my African American heritage, I am reminded that I am from a rich, narrative based culture. We are a creative people who learned communication through song, dance and quilting. Information about family, culture, survival, and freedom was passed along through storytelling. When slaves sang songs, they were really telling stories. The patterns and knots in the hand woven quilts were actually maps and routes to freedom. Thank God, the masters never learned the varied ways of communicating!*
Part 2 - Troubling the way things seem to be

The teachers and I start troubling the issues that we face.

Why is it such a struggle to let them shine and have their glory? Alex reacted to current statements made by the media in response to a popular artist’s acceptance speech at the Academy Awards; this is her story.

When I see African American men represented in the news or in the popular media, it is often in a negative light like the violence and social unrest in Ferguson, New York and L.A. Even with successful African Americans on the news, there’s generally a polarizing effect.

Well, recently, musical artists Common and John Legend teamed up to write *Glory*, a song from “Selma,” a film about the 1965 campaign for Black voting rights. As a result of their collaboration, the artists won the Oscar award for Best Original Song this year. During the acceptance speech, John Legend stated, “There are more African American men under correctional control in 2015 than there were under slavery in 1850. When people are marching with our song *Glory*, we want them to know that we see them, we love them and march on.”

Alex continues, “Although both of the artists’ remarks were about justice, freedom and the will to fight for both, many media outlets isolated and repeatedly referenced the comment about more Blacks being incarcerated than there were in slavery. Legend’s remarks were candid, concise and very moving. In fact, although the whole speech was a positive, uplifting message, the media just kept going back to the stats on incarceration. The media continuously hones in on negative stuff about the African
American male. Stuff like that always sticks with me. For goodness sake, you can never just let them shine and have their glory!”

The participants opened up about their students’ perceptions of African-American culture. There was lots of discussion about how the students believe that black culture is divided between “white-black” and “black-black.” This is disturbing to hear. I don’t understand why we are still dealing with this same issue of talking white-acting white and talking black-acting black. This has been going on for generations.

Alex: To be black-black means that you are a part of the biggest/best/most popular gangs, listen to the newest rap songs, and have a strong social media presence at your school. In contrast someone who is white-black follows the rules, gets good grades, and has a successful career other than rapping, singing, dancing, being a reality TV star or playing professional ball.

Aaron: I was speaking with Dorothy this morning when we got in. And I was mentioning that there was a passage in the first chapter on page 12 talking about how many people equate exemplary performance in school with the loss of African American identity. And that doing well in school is seen as acting white. If kids don’t want to act white and lose their African American identify, the only option is to refuse to do well in school. And that doing well in school equates with acting white and doing poorly equates with acting Black.

Maxine: Too often when you’re in the African American community, if you speak proper English, then you’re acting white or talking white.

Dream-Keeper Hilliard: I get so sick and tired of people trying to tell me that my children don’t need to use any language other than the one they come to school with. Then those
same people turn right around and judge the children negatively because of the way they express themselves. My job is to make sure that they can use both languages. They must understand that their language is valid but that the demands placed upon them by others mean that they will constantly have to prove their worth. We spend a lot of time talking about language, what it means, how you can use it, and how it can be used against you (p. 90).

Maxine: I went to school in my community. The student population at school was predominately African American. Because my parents were educators, there were certain expectations – how I spoke, how I did everything. Then I school, I still had issues. “Oh, you think you white. You wanna be white.” It was me and one other girl, we were constantly taunted and taking the heat for being too white, talking to white, acting white and thinking we were white. We would just stand there and take it. I mean, what else were we going to do? It was annoying, hurtful, and unnecessary.

Dorothy: I was bused to a mostly white school. Everyone in my neighborhood said I acted like a white girl and my name was Oreo instead of Dorothy. They said I talked too proper.

Maxine: I be, we seen, my bad, we be doin’ it, what up? My momma didn’t play that. You couldn’t come in her house speaking that way. She wasn’t having it! I tried to talk to my mom about how uncomfortable I was with the constant verbal nagging. Her response, “Tell them you speak Standard English.” That’s what she told me to tell them.

Dorothy: Aaron and I talked about it this morning. Even in the book, Ladson-Billings made a reference to there being value to the kind of language that students bring to the classroom.
Ladson-Billings (2009) states, “schools place little value on ‘nonstandard English’ that African American children bring to school even though that language is rich, diverse and useful in both community and work settings” (p. 19).

Mary: It’s disheartening how African Americans have to lose their culture to find education or act white. Schools and classrooms should be places where everybody’s culture matters.

Dorothy: It’s generational. Years later my daughter experiences the same nonsense at her high school which is mostly African American. She asks me often, “How a white girl talk and what does exactly is white talk? I just speak clearly, do my work and mind my business but it won’t go away. They won’t stop; I’m tired. I should not have to give up my own identity to fit in with any culture!”

Dream-Keeper Hilliard: It is time for teachers to look at specific cultural strengths of African American students and the ways these strengths can be leveraged effectively to enhance academic and social achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Aaron reflected, “You know Europeans came here by choice, set up shop and said, this is what we want to do. In other countries around the world, people travel to that place, set up shop and say, this is what we’re going to do. So what about Africans who initially came to this country, did they have a choice. No! Africans did not come to America by choice! They were netted and brought here forcibly under unimaginable circumstances. They were torn from their families. And it’s like I don’t choose to be here and I don’t know what to do. The family was ripped apart – the man was taken away from the family which disintegrates the family. So I think we are still struggling from that today. I believe that is why there isn’t a strong sense of a family unit and family values. And that’s a real
problem. Unfortunately, this situation has perpetuated itself down to this day. We still have the daily challenges of the African American male absent from the home. His absence is detrimental to today’s family. Our children need their fathers."

Well, the question that resonated with me after today’s time together is this. When did academic excellence become separate from what we know as black culture? We come from a long history of slaves who learned to read by candlelight – sneaking around, risking their lives – just to be able to read. They weren’t allowed to read. The definition of power is the ability to create and control someone’s mental reality – and that’s how the slave masters had control over my ancestors. They didn’t want them to get knowledge because when you expand your mind, you can control your destiny. That’s when you are powerful.

Dorothy: Yeah and knowledge is power but no teacher I had was trying to empower me or even make me feel in touch with my community. Reading about the whole culturally relevant thing…..it made me think about basically growing up….I was bused out for school. My parents did not send my sister and me to the school we were zoned to go to. I went to a completely Italian, White, pretty much segregated type of school. I was that only token black. I can see how it is kind of damaging to an African American child to be in a setting where they don’t really have anything they can relate to….and so there is a desire to want to be like that other group of people that you are around. No teacher was trying to make me feel in touch with my community; instead, I was trying really hard to be in touch with their community. I ran into a lot of racism like they said in *The Dreamkeepers*, but still I got a really great education. And those kids that I could bond with at
school, I did, but it was definitely tough. So I think it’s absolutely the responsibility of the teachers to make sure that they bring some cultural relevance to all of their students.

Aaron: Dorothy and I were talking about a lot of the media perception of African Americans in the news and in the popular media. There’s often a negative connotation especially with all the social unrest in Ferguson, L.A., New York and things like that. But also, when I see successful African Americans in the news, there's generally a polarizing effect to that. For example, when Herman Kane ran for president, al of people couldn’t negotiate in their minds an African American Republican running for president. There was a level of discomfort with that.

Mary: Because they didn’t know the history

Aaron: Well, after the Civil War as slavery ended and Reconstruction began, the Republican Party was very supportive of the African American community.

Dorothy: And one thing that stuck with me, it really sums up why we’re all here. In the book, the author reminds us that there is “no challenge more daunting than that of improving the academic achievement of African American students burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education and relegation to unsafe, substandard inner city schools. The quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community” (p. xv). I mean that sums it up. Why is it such a struggle? We still have his disparity between our community and other communities when we know that it’s not because African American children are stupid. They can learn; they can achieve. But we still have this huge gap that always exists.
Mary: Although the students were really very challenged at the beginning of the year….the more I taught them, the more I saw that they can learn. God only knows where they’d be now if they came in with a solid foundation.

Alex: I’m thinking that my sister and I were ready for kindergarten. We were prepared because of all the things my mom did. Although momma never went to college, she taught us how to read. My mom really set that foundation.

Dorothy: You have to know that it’s the teacher’s responsibility to get kids to their highest potential.

Taylor: Well, I’m thinking lack of exposure…if somehow all of the kids could attend a pre-k program…just to get exposure to what school is like. This would be an opportunity to work on social skills. They could get used to what it’s like to have routines and maybe work on basic skills like letter recognition and number recognition. They come with no foundation and they haven’t attended a pre-k program.

*Ladson-Billings (2009) says that when teachers provide instructional scaffolding, students can move from what they know to what they need to know.*

Maxine: We’ve just been really blessed to come into contact with teachers that really, really care and work hard to catch kids up. All of us work to lay the foundation for every kindergarten student…really set that foundation.

*While the teachers do indeed work tirelessly to ensure students have the fundamental skills they need, I wonder why there is no wondering about the foundation that the families are trying to provide. Just as their family influences continue to resonate and mold who they are, these same things could be going on in our students’ lives. There
are certainly influences and those influences are actually constructing our students’
foundations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that the more we know the better
we act. In the book club sessions, we have seen how the more we know and learn about
our own personal histories shapes who we are. We are human beings here participating
in this shared learning space – human beings with a history that still sits with us. We see
how this awareness of these lived experiences is manifesting itself again in our current
situation. We’ve been sharing our adult stories. I wonder, are we now at a place where
we need to hear our students’ stories? Are we ready to hear our children’s stories?
Part 3 - Confused about what to do

And now we’re at a loss. We don’t know what to do. We’re fresh out of ideas.

Mary: My classroom is all about literacy. I’m all about getting my students to read. It’s all around my room. There are words everywhere. That’s my family culture.

Unfortunately, right now, I have a broken family. We’re dysfunctional. The relationship that we built and the standards that I was able to hold them to….it’s gone. Now my kids see all of these extreme behaviors. They see students tearing up the classroom. They see these same students being disrespectful over and over again no matter what strategy I try. I don’t know anymore. What is my culture? During morning meeting, we talk about how we’re going to have such a good day. We review the expectations but there is a disconnect. I give lots of praise and positive reinforcement for right choices but it’s not working anymore and I’m fresh out of ideas. (Uncontrollable sobbing......total silence in the room)

Aaron: I was sitting with another teacher and we were sharing stories about a particular student of mine and just how much this student gets under our skin and really drives us nuts. That night I actually had a nightmare that myself and this teacher went to the student’s house and it was just the worst experience we could have had. I woke up in the middle of the night, just so racked with guilt. From everything I know his parents are still together; they’re married; they live together. Academically, their son is one of my best kids. I think a lot of what’s bothersome is he’s very impulsive and has difficulty
controlling those impulses. But, he’s also incredibly lazy. Like I said although he’s one of the smartest kids in my class, he won’t even try to do the work. Whenever he’s placed on a task on his own, he’s off task. It gets frustrating because if you could focus, you would be knocking this stuff out of the park. But for one reason or another, you’re not.

When I woke up, I felt bad that I was focusing so much negative energy on this student…when like I said, I don’t know his story. And as I think about where I grew up and how I grew up, I realize that my teachers didn’t know my story either. Although both my mom and dad were doing their best, I wasn’t exactly the perfect kid. Even my brightest and best behaved students, at the end of the day, I don’t know their story. I’m not doing home visits. I rarely see the parents – maybe sometimes a few come to parent conferences. They pop up for ten minutes and they’re out the door before I can say hi. So I have very little understanding of who my students are or where they really come from. I make assumptions that my better behaved students perhaps get more love or more attention at home and my less-behaved students, maybe they get ignored or they get shuffled between mom, grandmother, babysitters, or neighbors. Sometimes it seems that the kids that need the most love are the hardest to love.

Clara: The main thing that comes up in every conversation – How do we define culture in our community specifically? How does Evanston gain understanding of the culture to help us relate to our students?

Aaron: The teachers in the book show lots of rigor in the classroom to improve the students’ lives. We could talk about best practices, rigor, differentiation, specialized instruction, but I want to be able to teach with cultural relevance.
Maxine: Ladson-Billings talks about the importance of allowing African Americans to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African American culture. I wonder, how do we teach with cultural relevance if we can’t define it?

Alex: You know we can do both, teach and teach well, while being culturally relevant to our students. The author also says that in order to improve the academic success of African American students, teachers must reach them socially as well as bring their culture to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). So I understand this as showing my students what’s relevant about what they know.

Taylor: More African American males are under the control of the criminal justice system than in college. I wonder, if we are being culturally relevant in our classrooms, if we’re actually doing it with fidelity, would this decrease jail time and increase the high school graduation rate?

*We have a crisis in our community. What could we do to change this?*

Aaron: When the cadets walked in the classroom on Junior Achievement Day, the kids were like, “Oh there’s the PoPo. They’re gonna take us to jail.” It was amazing how high school students in uniforms translated to police.

Dorothy: Students do not trust policemen. They’ve seen their parents, family members, neighbors, people they know – they’ve seen them get arrested.

Aaron: Some of my kids won’t come to me when there’s a problem. They tell me, “We don’t talk; we don’t snitch!” Like authority figures are bad? Handle problems on your own?
Clara: It’s difficult for them to accept that policemen are helpers because of what they deal with every day. Tatianna’s dad was arrested in front of the school last week as the kids got off the busses. There are all of these barriers.

Alex: That’s true like some of them have been picked up here at school by the police or DFACS because of different situations with their parents. This is what our kids see, what they live and so it’s what they understand.

Clara: Today I was teaching nouns and the students had to give a noun and put their word in the correct category (person, place, thing, animal). When I asked Mason for his noun, he said, “jail.” I knew what was on his mind because his mother is in jail. What I took from the chapter is that students have their own knowledge base for which they are experts, even if it’s not academic knowledge.

Maxine: This is what they know and they act on it. They have their own culture that they respect and understand. How do we get them to apply that same dedication and expertise and knowledge awareness to their academics?

Mary: Do I really want to take those types of things that they are very familiar with and try to turn them into something instructional? Am I better off doing it the way I’m doing it? How do we make their learning culturally relevant?

Alex: Just trying to be culturally sensitive is why I sometimes talk the way they do so I can really understand what’s going on with my students. It’s tough on some kids especially at this age. You know, we just have to be more sensitive to that, especially for African American males….because we are quick to put them in a category. I just feel like we need to dig a little deeper into this and be a little bit more sensitive.
Mary: At first I was like…it’s not like I’m racist but you know, I realize now that I did have those biases. I think the biggest part of culturally relevant teaching is like how my views are affecting what I’m doing so you have to kind of self-reflect. I get it now.
Conclusion

They Know More Than They Think They Know

**DO WE KNOW MORE THAN WE THINK WE KNOW?**

*Dream-keeper Hilliard gave them a familiar rap song that they really like because she knew they could relate to it. She gave them the lyrics and asked, “I don’t understand some of the language so can you explain it to me?” They were able to interpret the meaning of the song.*

Clara: She chose M.C. Hammer over Shakespeare and it was still literature. The poetic elements are there. The students didn’t even realize. She probably could have kept them going on and on and on because it was something they were passionate about.

Dorothy: Some of those rap artists are extremely, extremely talented. If you strip away the obscenities, if you strip away that hard core gangsta mentality of it, there’s a lot of stuff in there. So I thought it was a real powerful tool.

Mary: This was the most culturally relevant thing that I recognized in the book so far and this type of thing most likely didn’t take too much prep time.

Dorothy: A little more prep time to make the knowledge stick with them would be worth it. I mean generally speaking it’s when I pull something out that my kids can’t relate to, I have the most behavior problems. They don’t listen.
Aaron: I can see how when the teacher puts it in their context, the students are able to create more knowledge from that. They know more than they think they know.

Alex: They didn’t even understand how much knowledge they had. When they explained it to her, they didn’t realize the power and strength that they had. I thought it was a smart idea.

Yes, I believe that our children do know more than they think they know. I also believe that much of that cultural knowledge could be applied in the classroom to make learning more meaningful. Do we know more than we think we know? Absolutely, when we combine our working knowledge and experiences, we are stronger and better. Adult learning that supports improved practice and student achievement often does not happen when adults work in isolation (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman and Hensley, 2012). As a team of socializing knowers, we have learned the power of working collaboratively towards a common goal and routinely reflecting on our practices. We are smart, creative educators but we must constantly work to make sense of our experiences. “Schools become better places for kids when teachers become better teachers, when they relentlessly improve their practice, when they are learners (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman and Hensley, 2012). And as learners it is important for us to learn everybody’s song.
We Need to Learn Everybody’s Song!

I’m from New York where it’s very diverse – not just mostly African American and Hispanics like here in Georgia. There were Puerto Rican, Dominicans, Italians, Jewish people and more. At my school, we had to sing a lot of songs to represent different heritages. So for example, after we sang the national anthem, we had to sing Lift Every Voice and Sing which is the Black national anthem.

Back then I was confused; like, why are we singing all of these songs – most of them in different languages? I didn’t know what I was singing but I was singing. Now of course, I understand. We had to learn to sing everybody’s song that was represented in the student body. And that’s culturally relevant because we had many different cultures represented in our school.

When my mom moved us from Harlem to Riverdale, Georgia, I was surprised to learn that students didn’t know the Black national anthem. I thought to myself, “How is it that you don’t know the Black national anthem? You’re 13; you’re in 8th grade.” Like I had to sing it all the time. It was only the first verse, but I knew it like I know the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. In New York, the way they made us learn about and respect all of the different cultures that were represented in our school – that was culturally relevant.

When we sing everybody’s song, we celebrate. We learn empathy, awareness and respect. We become a chorus, a group of teacher performers and student performers who connect on the main action by speaking and moving together. This is what we need in our classrooms, in our school and in our Evanston community. We need to become a chorus,
working together for one common goal - meaningful and relevant education for all children. Educated children will produce a society of productive citizens who are skilled and equipped to make positive choices and contributions.
It’s My Choice

Mary: Ladson-Billings says “Most teacher candidates are young, white and female and would prefer to work with students with backgrounds similar to their own.” And that insults me because I am young, white and female. And that’s not what I want!

Alex: So Clara, do you prefer to work with students similar to your own?

Clara: I don’t think so. I think when I first started teaching I preferred that because that’s all I knew. Being here has taught me it doesn’t matter where you go, there will be challenges. Now I’ve gotten my feet wet and I am in my comfort zone. I thank God that I’m here.

Alex: Ladson-Billings also states, “Teachers’ ideologies about the likely academic success of African American students remains unchanged. Deep down, they don’t believe that African American students can be successful academically.” I don’t think that anyone at this table thinks like that; the statement makes me really angry. It sounds like we’re just here – that we don’t believe in the children. Well, I know I can make a difference and I know these children can learn. That’s the reason I became a teacher. I wanted to teach kids in an urban community. I see the problems and honestly, basically all my life, I went to school in urban areas. So I want to give back and help close the gap. I choose to be here.

And what a great choice you’ve made! It’s difficult and we don’t have it all figured out but let’s consider what we do have. This team has collaboration, collegiality, cohesiveness and collective responsibility. This is what you do have. So now we should
consider ways to build on those strengths to make sure that teacher expertise is
maximized and powerful learning is occurring at all times. I am thinking that one
adjustment should be creating opportunities for teachers to observe each other. Just as
we created space to learn in this book club, we will create space and time for you to
observe each other in action. You might think of planning lessons that include your
students’ foundational knowledge and then inviting each other to observe those lessons
and give feedback. This might be an avenue to embedding culturally relevant learning in
our classrooms.
Sharing My World

Surprised

I expected the process of studying culturally relevant teaching with my group would be intellectually enlightening; however, I didn’t expect it to be so emotional. The kindergarten teachers and I participated in our book study of Gloria Ladson-Billings’ book, *The Dream Keepers*, at the end of the school year. We were tired; we were trying to retain hope.

After facilitating, recording, transcribing and analyzing hundreds of pages of data, my emotions surged once again. Memories flooded forth as if the pressure release valve on my life was finally working or maybe I just felt myself coming apart at the seams. It was clear that the experience of participating with colleagues in this context was forcing me to turn toward a self-study as well as a group study. Connelly and Clandinin (1998) urged teachers to take on the work of self-study:

> For each of us, the more we understand ourselves and can articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be. The process of making sense and meaning of our curriculum, that is, of the narratives of our experience, is both difficult and rewarding. It, too, has a curriculum in that the narratives of experience may be studied, reflected on, and articulated in written form. (p. 11)

Ultimately, as Paulo Freire (In Macedo, Koike, & Oliveria, 1998), proclaimed,

> We must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all of these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with crucial reasoning. However, we never study, learn, teach, or know with the last only: We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. We must dare so that we can continue to teach for a long time under conditions that
we know well: low salaries, lack of respect, and the ever-present risk of becoming prey to cynicism. WE must dare to learn how to dare in order to say no to the bureaucratization of the mind to which we are exposed every day. We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring. (p. xviii)

I was surprised by my emotions but I dared to put them on paper and I dare to share them in this work. I offer a candid and courageous glimpse inside my life from birth to 2015 through a set of self-study essays, *Share My World*, which burst on the scene while I was engaged in analyzing my original data sources. These accounts are based on what escaped from me and what stuck with me and to me in the living of this work.
My Family and Me

On Thursday, September 22, 1960 around 7:20 p.m., I made my grand entrance at 7 pounds 7 ounces.

I was raised in a modest three bedroom one bath four sided red brick bungalow located in the Fourth Ward community, in Atlanta, Georgia.

My parents, Andrew and Johnnie Ruth, were both educators and retired after 30 plus years of service to Atlanta Public Schools.

My mother, my FIRST and FAVORITE teacher, was an EXEMPLARY educator! Then I thought she was quite hard on me, very demanding and downright mean sometimes but now I would describe her as stern and no nonsense.

She had a brilliant mind – academically sound, her phenomenal knowledge base spanned numerous content areas – math, science, language arts, home economics and music. In fact, she was my 7th grade math and science teacher. Even at age 10, I marveled at her effortless ability to present abstract math concepts in numerous ways. She kept coming with different ways to arrive at the same destination until every student in the class understood the concept.

Momma was also an incredible writer. She taught me how to write. She’d always say, “Arnetta, this is boring. I don’t hear your voice anywhere in this paper. Try it again and this time write it like you’re my daughter.” Everyone loved her writing. She wrote speeches for other people in the community. She was always speaking at church too.

Momma was so strong and selfless. She did everything for us, my brother and me – including enduring 35 years of physical, emotional and mental abuse from our father.
This has been and will always be the most difficult part of my life…the one that I don’t have an explanation for or an understanding of. It’s almost too much for my memory bank to bear. I miss my momma so much but I am blessed to have many fond memories of a mother who loved unconditionally.

I only had one sibling – my brilliant brother – Andrew Orlando Hill, III. He was a genius and I’m not exaggerating. His intellectual capacity was greater than momma’s. Imagine that! I miss him so much. He was a great brother and I adored him immensely.

God is so gracious and good to me at all times. Although my mother and my brother have transitioned, I have been blessed with a spectacular family. I have much to be thankful for. My husband Fred Charles is my Prince Charming. He is tall, handsome, patient, kind, considerate, and extremely bright. He is a remarkable husband and an extraordinary father. He is my soulmate. We’ve been blessed with three beautiful and brilliant daughters, Ashley Alexandria, Alexia Nicole and Arynn Maria. I can’t express in words how much I love my daughters. They are priceless jewels. In fact, the older they get, the more I enjoy them. It’s hard to believe that the girls are 25, 22 and 15 now and Fred and I have been married for 27 years. WOW! Although time has passed quickly, the future awaits us and I look forward to the blessings that are in store for my family and me!
My Childhood – Tumultuous and Unsettling

Why was it such a struggle?

In the next three narratives, *A Responsible Dad, Deacon Hill and Me*, and *Under My Piano*, I share glimpses of the troubling side of my upbringing. These are a few of the memories that were squashed in the posterior of my memory but rushed to the front of my remembrance during this process of reflection, writing and data analysis.

I was inspired to write *A Responsible Dad* after reflecting on the participants’ encounter with the concept of responsibility during our second book club meeting. Who is responsible for our children’s success? Is it the parent or the teacher or a combination? And what exactly does it mean to be a responsible parent or a responsible teacher? My dad felt that he was a responsible parent; however, he demonstrated responsibility in extreme ways most times. I can understand his stance in that he was raised in extreme poverty. Indeed it was a major accomplishment for him to make it out of the ghetto successfully.

My father’s story is particularly sad because his mother passed away a few minutes after he was born and his father denied him until he was an adult. After high school, my dad went to the military for ten years so that he would have a way to pay for college. After serving in the Army, he attended college, became a teacher and later earned a master’s degree in education. He believed that education was the means to a secure future and he expected nothing less than excellence in all school matters. I share the following story to give you an idea of the immense pressure I experienced to be perfectly *responsible* for my future at all times.
A Responsible Dad

I experienced a sheltered, isolated childhood. I was not allowed to socialize with the other kids in the neighborhood. My daddy offered numerous excuses to keep me separated from other children; some of the reasons given were more incredulous than others. “Those kids aren’t focused. I don’t know anything about their parents. Their house isn’t clean enough so you might catch a virus.” Crazy right? Well, this was actually my reality! So my daily existence was boring, humdrum, mundane and predictable. Go to school, come home, practice the piano, study, go to school, come home, practice the piano, study……this was my story.

I was not given the opportunity to make any choices and I was not allowed to make any decisions. Just follow all directives and don’t ask questions because he knew best. I was given explicit directions for everything and they were to be followed or else…

Expectations were always very clear in the house especially regarding education. I often felt the expectations were unreasonable but I was never unclear about my responsibilities.

Daddy: Why did you make a B?

Me: It’s so abstract. Dr. V’s accent is very thick and she talks so fast. I did my best.

Daddy: If it’s not an A, then you are not doing your job. Start writing now.

The penalty for not earning an A = copy textbook from the title page (cover) to the index (cover) verbatim. I will never forget that May weekend in 10th grade. I wrote, I cried, I wrote, I cried. I still don’t understand Chemistry. This memory is so vivid.

What was so tragic about making a B?

Was I irresponsible?
Deacon Hill and Me

Deacon Hill was my dad but I don’t have a lot of fond memories to share. The best two memories - he taught me how to ride a bike and he taught me how to drive a car. I remember those rare days when he was kind and patient. He didn’t yell at me or throw anything towards me or even backhand me across my face. Imagine that. My brother says it was because I was his favorite. Don’t believe that!

He always yelled at Momma and he threw things at her too. One sunny Sunday morning - it was such a beautiful morning at first – daddy was backing out of the driveway in the spankin’ brand new 4 door Buick Electra 225 (the deuce and a quarter). We were on our way to church and I thought this was going to be a happy day for all of us. But no, out of nowhere, without warning, he threw the house keys at my Momma really, really hard. Those house keys hit her light brown cheek and it turned red immediately. There was silence in the car as she continued to stare ahead; she didn’t even flinch. Did she know it was coming? Was she expecting that?

My heart was racing as usual. My brother slowly slid his hand across the back seat and clinched my hand tightly. One single tear at a time slowly slid down the side of momma’s face. My brother’s palm was wet and that sealed our grip. That was one of many long family car rides.

We arrived at church and he whispered to my brother and me, “You’d better not say anything to anybody.” Those were the first words spoken since the incident in the driveway. This was the only warning we would receive as we walked across the street
and approached the front doors of our church. All four of us…..just one happy little family…..WHY IS IT SUCH a STRUGGLE?

Deacon, you are cruel and God sees the way you treat my momma, my brother and me.

That’s what I was thinking to myself.

We went inside the church and he took his seat on the front row, the Deacon’s row, until it was his turn to pray – Deacon Hill, did you ask God to forgive you?

I wonder…..
Under My Piano

Why was it such a struggle? I didn’t know.

It was not supposed to be such a struggle. I don’t understand.

I prayed - starting on my 9th birthday – I prayed that God would bring peace into our home.

That’s when I got my baby grand piano. It was a birthday gift from them to me. So now the expectation is that you will practice longer, harder……ok that’s great because when I play the piano, I don’t have to be silent and when I play the piano, I can be anywhere I want to be. I don’t have to be here in this bungalow of unhappiness. I can retreat to happy spaces and beautiful, peaceful places and I don’t have to return until I decide. So actually the K. Kawai was a perfect gift for this 9 year old.

I prayed for peace in our home and God blessed me with a place to find peace and a perfect, private place to pray…………under the piano. YES! Perfect! Perfect peace! Perfect place! Under my piano. I loved it!

Why was it such a struggle? I didn’t know.

It was not supposed to be such a struggle. I don’t understand. And Momma would always recite this scripture and then have me repeat it after her……

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. Lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

Under my piano, I prayed this prayer….Lord, I trust you; I acknowledge you, and I believe your Word. I need you Lord, please hear me Lord. I’m not sure how much more this family can endure. We all need you Lord. Please direct us Lord.
Under my piano, I learned to focus so that after high school, I would earn a scholarship and not return to the red brick bungalow except to get my Momma. And that’s exactly what I did. When I left for college at age 16, I only returned to pick up my Momma and my piano.

Why was it such a struggle?

I’m still not sure but I think the struggle was about making me stronger and preparing me to fulfill my life’s purpose.
Tell Me About the Good ‘Ol Days

Whenever I had a hard time going to sleep, I’d ask my momma to tell me a story about the good ‘ol days. She would tell me all about her childhood and all the fun things she did when she was growing up. Although her family was poor, her father always made sure they had the necessities. Her mother never worked. She stayed home to care for eight children - five sons and three daughters. I wish I’d asked momma to write the stories so that we could pass them on and on to future generations. She was a phenomenal storyteller – some stories were lessons to be learned and never forgotten, some stories were very funny, some stories she learned from my grandmother, some stories were her lived experiences, all of her stories were quite entertaining. “Get Outta Dat Tree” was one of my favorites.
Get Outta of Dat Tree

Ruth, get outta dat tree!
You ain’t even had no breakfast yet. Get in this house rat now!
We’re goin to the store and then we’re doin chores
Don’t you go back out back, you hear?

Ruth, get outta dat tree!
Have you finished yo homework?
Then get in this house, come help with dinner and
Stay outta dat tree before you break your neck!

Ruth, get outta dat tree!
For goodness sake, stop eatin them apples!
Girl, them apples ain’t ripe, it’s ain’t time yet
You gonna have a aching stomach.

Ruth, get outta dat tree!
I just washed, just straightened yo hair!
Careful child, please watch where you steppin’
You just a tomboy makin me a nervous wreck!

Ruth, get outta dat tree!
It’s yo 13\textsuperscript{th} birthday and you at the high school now.
You can’t be a tomboy no longer
Why won’t you stay outta that darn apple tree?

Momma, it’s hard to stay out of the tree!
It’s real cool up there believe it or not and
I can see everything around me.

Momma, it’s a special place for me!
I love to shake the branches and watch apples fall down and plop to the ground.
There’s a bird’s nest and beetles too.
It’s really nice up in that tree!

Ruth, I understand but you movin towards womanhood and a woman don’t climb no trees
so from dis day goin forward you gon stay outta dat darn apple tree! Promise me!

Momma, I promise.
Big Brother Boo, I miss you!

My nickname for my one and only sibling was Boo. When I was a little girl, he would always scare me by jumping out in front of me or coming up behind me with a roarin “BOO” in his deepest adolescent voice. He also liked to eat my potato chips. Chips were my favorite snack. When mom shopped, we both could choose one snack to put in the buggy. She’d say, “Boo, if you want chips, get chips. I don’t want to hear it when we get home.” His immediate response, “Naw Ma, I’m getting Fritos.” “Ok, fine but do not touch her chips,” she’d warn. Are you kidding me? He’d sneak in my bag every time. Of course, he’d always replace the chips later but the teasing was a real source of aggravation for me. Needless to say, he enjoyed every minute of it. Since he was eleven years older than me, it always seemed like he had the upper hand. He’d get me every time and that was just so incredibly funny to him.

Although my brother was academically swift, he was well-rounded. He had a great sense of humor, loved to have a fun time and had lots of friends. He was a runner and an excellent pitcher. He even considered pursuing baseball professionally but you can imagine that our parents were not about to entertain that idea. After high school, he attended Clark Atlanta University on a full scholarship. He continued to thrive during his four years there and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a double major in History and Philosophy. After graduation in May 1970, he joined Air Force and served his country tirelessly and honorably for the next twenty years. At first, I was sad because he left mom and me, but his career choice was actually a blessing.
Our family didn’t go on vacations often because my dad always said that there was no money for that. But once my brother established himself as an Air Force officer, Momma and I made up for lost time. We would visit him wherever he was stationed. We went to San Diego, Kansas City, San Antonio, Knoxville, and Virginia Beach. My favorite trip to California was summer 1975. He was working on a master’s degree in Criminal Justice at Pepperdine University. Momma and I spent the entire summer romping around California. I will never forget spending that quality time with two of my favorite people on the Pacific Coast. The Pacific Coast highway views are simply spectacular. Every summer was a blast but this was by far the best of the best vacations!

When he married, things got even better because his wife Anna was kind and down to earth. In fact, we’re still like sisters although they divorced when Adriana, their only child, was nine years old. Adriana was the first grandchild so it was a very big deal when she was born. I was sitting in my dorm room at Spelman College when Momma called to announce her arrival. Mom went to Texas to be with Anna for the impending birth because my brother was on a mission that took him out of the country. Luckily, he was able to make it just in time for Adriana’s arrival. Those were good times…..so many wonderful memories.

Unfortunately, during my brother’s stint in the Air Force, he was exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam. His lung capacity was severely diminished and he was diagnosed with lung disease and congestive heart failure. Although his quality of life was affected by this diagnosis, he lived a relatively active life for 22 years after he retired from the Air Force. He passed away since I’ve been on my doctoral journey which is super sad and disappointing. You see, earning a PhD in Criminal Justice Administration
was one of his goals. In fact, he was almost finished with his coursework at George Washington University when he had a heart attack and ended up having open heart surgery. Due to the decline in his health, he was never able to complete his journey.

The day before his death we had a conversation and I did not realize that his words on that day would be the last ones I’d hear him speak. He said, “Head, Heart, Hands…to build a LEGACY to Go from Good to GREAT!!” I responded, “What are you talking about Big Brother?” He explained, “It’s time for our family to take this thing to the next level. We need to think about leaving the girls with a legacy.” He was referring to his daughter, Adriana as well as my three – Ashley, Alexia and Arynn. He continued, “We will do the work with our intellect (head), our passion (heart) and good ‘ol fashioned hard work (hands). Faith over fear; do not be afraid. Be bold and believe in you.” I remember clearly questioning, “What is going on with you today? What are you talking about?” His simply stated response, “Remember this conversation and execute.” He proceeded to write the goal in blue ink on a pale green post it note which is still taped on my laptop to help me maintain my focus and my faith.

He was ecstatic when he learned that I applied to UGA’s doctoral program because I would reach a level of scholarship that he and mom aspired to achieve. However, their dreams were never realized. Big Brother passed away on December 4, 2011. I sure wish he was here. I long to hear his words of encouragement. He always had a positive outlook even when things appeared hopeless. His faith was unwavering. Right now, he would probably say something like, “You’re in the home stretch….you got this…do you know the seminal thinkers for your theories? Be sure you got that.” He was
always asking me about seminal thinkers for my theoretical framework. Such vivid, unforgettable, priceless memories………Big Brother Boo, I miss you!
A Tribute to Mama

When Mary started crying during one of our book club meetings, we went to my office to give her time to exhale. I wasn’t quite sure what I was going to say to her once we closed my office door, but I thought about my mom and I said to myself, “What would she say to you right now? What would she do?” I knew those answers immediately.

Throughout the week I continued to reflect on the session and the time I spent with Mary, I was reminded of how blessed I am to have had a strong, wise, smart mother who knew just what to say and do regardless of the situation. This is a story about my champion.

Momma, Mommy, Mama, Mother……that STICKS with me!

Her power, her influence, her sacrifices, her sleepless nights, her formidable strength, her ability to make a way out of no way.

Her unwavering, unconditional love…that STICKS to me, which STICKS with me, that IS me.

She was the best friend ever! We prayed together, played together, danced together, read together, laughed together, cried together, traveled together, shopped together, worshipped together, cooked together.

She taught me how to read and she taught how to write. She helped me with my homework too.
She loved her granddaughters – Adriana Lia, Ashley Alexandria, Alexia Nicole & Arynn Maria!

Oh my goodness! She loved them with all of her being.

She taught me how to love others even when I didn’t understand. She would bring students home with her on the weekends. She treated them just like she treated my brother and me. At first, I was envious. They had her undivided time and attention. We’d all go shopping and when she took them home on Sunday after church, they had toiletries and at least one new outfit.

Mama also taught me how to be a great friend and how to cultivate a true friendship. She said, “Just be a good listener, don’t repeat what they tell you and do not share clothes. Girls sharing clothes – a recipe for disaster!”

Because my champion taught me how to love unconditionally in the face of adversity, I have been blessed to be a blessing to others and I am grateful.

Momma, Mommy, Mama, Mother……that STICKS to me, which STICKS with me, that IS me.
Serious About My Work - Subjectivities Statement

My mother and father were serious about education. In fact, they were so intense that my brother and I were expected to earn straight A's every school term. We were taught to value education, respect our teachers and work hard to reach our full potential. Education was portrayed as the gateway to a successful future and my parents made certain that I received a quality schooling experience. I was not allowed to attend the all Black elementary school located within walking distance of our home. Instead, I accompanied my mother to work daily and attended a majority White elementary school where my mother taught 7th grade math and science. After elementary school, I attended Westminster Schools, an elite Christian college preparatory institution located in an affluent North Atlanta suburb. Although Westminster was very expensive, my parents were convinced that paying the hefty tuition was a worthy financial sacrifice for my junior high and high school education.
Throughout my isolated schooling experience, I could not understand why I was not permitted to attend the elementary school and high school in my neighborhood. I inquired often and my mom responded, “Arnetta, you need a quality education. I am not sending you to school to waste time; I am sending you to school to get smarter.” During that time, her statements made no sense. I often replied, “Mom, I can learn at any school. Why do you think I would waste my time?” I could not comprehend the reasons she and daddy were protecting me from attending school with people that “looked like me.” In fact, my dad reminded me often by saying, “You will get a better education in White schools. Just trust me. Daddy knows best.”

Now, let’s fast forward to August 1998. I am the most excited first year teacher in the world! I have a job teaching 7th grade Language Arts in a Dekalb County middle school, all Black Title I middle school where test scores are very low and discipline issues are very high. “This is a great opportunity,” I thought to myself, “I can make a difference.” Before I met my students on the first day of school, several faculty members shared words of wisdom. “Don’t smile because they will think you are weak. Never turn your back to the students; they will throw pencils at you. Parents never come to anything so don’t waste time calling them when the kids act out.” The list of helpful tips was exhaustive; however, I was determined to become an exemplary educator like my mother. Therefore, those comments did not discourage me. I heard my colleagues but I wasn’t listening to them.
By the end of the first week of school, I’d been called “bitch” three times, I’d written up one student for shoving another student’s head into the hallway wall, and I learned that the thirteen year old student with the highest ITBS scores in the 7th grade was two months pregnant. This was a defining experience; I became culturally awakened to the vast array of struggles and pain facing my people quickly. This awakening experience was accompanied by a clear understanding of my parents’ decision to send me to school outside of my community. They wanted the best possible education for me and they knew the chances of realizing that goal were significantly greater if I was in a wholesome learning environment where I would not be distracted by behaviors and lifestyles that have nothing to do with becoming a productive citizen.

What is going on in our communities and how can we redirect our students’ interests, motivation and energy? How can we encourage Black children to embrace learning and the power that acquired knowledge promises? What will it take to get the attention of children’s parents and caretakers? One week as a classroom teacher and I was suddenly able to see firsthand why we have an achievement gap in our country. There is no denying. As a race and as a culture, we have great educational challenges to overcome and I am committed to being an integral part of the solution.

I am an African American mother, teacher, administrator and qualitative researcher who believes that I am responsible for all of the children in the village. I choose to use my God given talents and abilities to teach children and train teachers. Upon completion of this doctoral program, I hope to help transform urban public schools into healthy, thriving learning communities by sharing the results of this study. This work
will hopefully serve to stimulate the conversations for administrators and teachers of inner city Title I elementary schools across our country. This is my dream.

Privilege or Passion – What an Awakening!

Actually this is what I signed up for. I made a conscious and deliberate decision to be the best teacher and leader possible. There are no easy or quick solutions. If so, our problems would have been solved by now. I don’t know why parents are not responding the way my mother responded to my needs. Just because she never let my father’s abusive behaviors disrupt her care for me doesn’t mean that every parent should prioritize the way my mom did. I can be so judgmental especially when I’m frustrated and I feel that I can’t support my teachers adequately. But until I know and understand more about my families and their daily plight to survive (I mean everything I can possibly know), I am committed to giving them the benefit of the doubt. After reading, reflecting, re-reading and reflecting even more on the comments Betty shared, I was convicted and started to see myself as part of the problem and not the solution. Wow! Wow! Wow! I didn’t know it was like privilege. I really thought it was my passion, my longing, my desire to see every one of my students become their very best. Now I realize that I can be more objective, more open minded, more available to see things differently. Now I am reminded that I must stay focused and passionate even when I am bruised by painful words or unwarranted mandates. This is the time to see the innocence and beauty in my children’s eyes, to hear their laughter and the tenderness of their voices, to feel their hugs and longing to please, to touch their work products and celebrate the evidence of the progress they are making from day to day. Once I allow my experiences to lead me to better understandings of my families and their life experiences then maybe, hopefully I
will be a better person, a better leader and a better mother. What an awakening! The
dream continues…..

Another AWAKENING!

At the beginning of second semester dissertation seminar, Dr. Betty brought a
commencement program for Anita, Samantha and me to peruse. She explained, “I
thought seeing one of these might be a source of motivation. That will be the three of you
one day.” I responded, “Oh yes, soon!” I will never forget Dr. Betty’s response, “It will
come. This is a process.”

I often review that scenario in my head and I hear my professor’s voice, “This is a
process.” What did that statement mean? I complete my coursework successfully,
conquer written and oral comps successfully, write prospectus, defend it successfully,
request IRB approval, gain IRB approval, complete study, write dissertation, and defend
it successfully. These are the steps I climb to reach the goal, right? I wondered, “Is this
the process she is referring to?”
As I reflect on the last few years and my journey towards this goal, I realize that the process for me has been much more than conquering each step along the way. Writing about my lived experiences as an educator has demanded that I reach within to confront “the good, the bad and the ugly” that have brought me to this point in my professional life. This process has been an undertaking of deep introspection that demand I come to terms with past and present experiences that have shaped who I am today. It’s so amazing because I’d suppressed so many of the darker and darkest memories. But those dark windows are the reason I have the passion that I have for children who find themselves in corridors of darkness. I am a shining and resounding voice for them. “Keep fighting children. Never ever give up. There is sunshine and a rainbow and they both are within your grasp.” This process has taken enormous energy and incredible stamina. It has not been easy to face my fears and acknowledge them in writing for the whole world to read. I have been totally transparent and I hope the result will be a resounding completion of “the process.”
I truly believe that everything that we do and everyone that we meet is put in our path for a purpose. There are no accidents; we're all teachers - if we're willing to pay attention to the lessons we learn, trust our positive instincts and not be afraid to take risks or wait for some miracle to come knocking at our door.

Marla Gibbs
The Doorbell Rang…

On a typical, warm summer afternoon in July 1996, two women unsuspectingly are about to converge upon an extraordinary relationship that neither could have imagined. Anita, was a third grade teacher, bored with the long, relaxing days of summer vacation, and decided to take a brief stroll in the neighborhood; however, destiny collided with divine intervention and Anita found herself standing at the door of a neighbor who lived two doors down the street. This was to be a brief, casual, “Hello; how are you?” After all, these two women were not close friends, they were just neighbors.

Anita walked up the driveway and stood in front of the mahogany glass double doors, and rang the doorbell. Melissa, a stay at home mom and wife, answered the door. Even before the customary exchange of pleasantries took place, Anita detected that Melissa looked somewhat frazzled; however, initially she decided to avoid commenting on Melissa’s disposition and continued with “I just came by to see what you were doing.” With a look of despair and disdain, Melissa explained that she was facing a deadline for an assignment that would be due in five hours. Melissa was enrolled in an alternative teacher certification program. Anita and Melissa had discussed Melissa’s dream to teach on a few occasions. Anita took the same path to teaching a few years earlier through an alternative certification program, so it was Anita who encouraged Melissa to seek the same program. After their greeting, the following dialogue took place.

Anita: Is there anything I can help you with?

Melissa: Oh no! You’re on vacation.

Anita: Do you want me to help you?”
Melissa: What? I can’t ask you to help me.

Anita: Do you want me to help you?

Melissa: You’re on vacation.

Anita: Well, I don’t have anything else to do. I don’t mind.

Melissa: Okay. I could really use some help.

Anita: Tell me what I can do to help you.

Who would think that the ring of a doorbell would be the onset of a sister-like, friendship that has sustained nearly 20 years of unimaginable encounters, circumstances, and experiences? This was more than a chance encounter; this was more than just a friend helping out a friend. This was a teachable moment—the inservice teacher supporting the preservice teacher through collaboration. This is only the first example of the many instances in which Melissa and Anita supported each other in education for over 15 years. There were times when they worked in different schools, and there were times when they worked in the same school together. Regardless of their work locations or positions, they had always been a source of support for one another.

The convergence of this friendship and professional relationship began when the doorbell rang. By opening the door, we embarked on a journey that has taken us on adventures through a variety of terrains: hills, valleys, deserts, and depressions. Together as co-leaders of Wesley Elementary School, doctoral students and research partners at The University Georgia, we have temporarily docked at the shores of our dissertation. In our quest to construct learning spaces in schools that value the cultures of all students, we explored how teachers experience learning about culturally relevant pedagogy with their grade level colleagues and administrators in a job–embedded book study on The
*Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children by Ladson Billings* (2009). Both researchers worked at Wesley Elementary School; Anita was the principal and Melissa was the assistant principal. Melissa acted as research participant with the kindergarten team and Anita acted as researcher participant for the 5th grade team. We met independently with our groups. Each group constructed its individual identity, and met during different times of day. After the groups’ final sessions, Melissa and Anita convened a joint session of both groups. A principal and an assistant principal in the same school conducting research within their schools is a unique aspect of this study; therefore, we decided to co-author Chapter 5—Findings. The findings were derived from a convergence of analysis across Melissa and Anita’s data. Both of us mined each other’s data searching for major similarities and differences. The results of the converged analysis of both sets of data yielded the implications and future recommendations that follow.

**Convergence of Analysis - Findings and Implications**

**Finding 1 - The teachers learned to create knowledge construction zones for themselves and for each other.** They framed space for storytelling in these zones.

Through these stories, they were able to construct learning for themselves and for each other. In these zones, teachers had the autonomy and administrative trust to design a safe, non-judgmental, non-threatening, narrative environment conducive for their learning needs.

Mia (5th grade): I thought it was refreshing. It’s not often that we get a chance to talk amongst adult friends and to talk about subjects that may be off limits or maybe not
friendly all the time. We talked about culture in a non-judgmental environment and I learned a lot.

Clara (Kindergarten): I felt that I already knew my team, but after this experience, it kind of opened up doors that I didn't know about. And even within myself, like I opened up to my team, I believe, more than I did before.

Alex (Kindergarten): I agree with Clara. Me and my team, we were always close, but discussing the book, you got to know their perception on stuff that you guys might not usually talk about or discuss. So we got to experience those things and it was a no judgment, but it was good to know because they let us know some things. And we let them know some things and everybody out there like came out of there, just like smarter in other areas, that you were just unfamiliar with. Well, this is how my culture thinks and well, this is how we are and some people are. So it was interesting. And a learning experience.

Implications: The knowledge construction zone is a safe, non-judgmental, non-threatening space created by the learners that inhabit it. Zones look different for different groups of learners depending on the purpose and focus of the group. These spaces are framed to help teachers forge the path to knowledge construction in classrooms that are safe, non-judgmental, non-threatening spaces. The idea of knowledge construction zones has positive implications for schools. Constructivism is the conceptual framework for our work. As constructivists, we choose “complex, relevant problems because we believe people learn best when they are able to construct their own knowledge while shifting perspective form the individual to relationships (Dietz, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). As lead learners, we modeled our idea of knowledge construction zone by providing a
safe space for supporting the learning needs of teachers through participation in a book study. Now that the teachers have experienced this zone and designated this space as safe, non-threatening, non-judgmental and refreshing, it is our hope that they will implement knowledge construction zones, in the same manner, on their teams as well as in their classrooms. We envision teachers who are teaching children how to construct their own knowledge through this layered process. The ultimate goal is for children to create knowledge construction zones in the classroom among themselves and perhaps even transfer that learning to home. They will be able to encourage parents to construct their own learning by embracing the idea of construction knowledge zones. Indeed constructivism has influenced both studies because the participants were able to construct their own learning during the book club discussions. The knowledge the participants constructed for themselves as they learned and evolved in the book study will hopefully impact their practices and pedagogy in progressive ways.

**Finding 2** – Teachers and administrators discussing their reading among trusted co-participants creates a particular kind of reflection that can have a transformative potential either for individuals or for the group as a whole (Long, 2003). In our book studies, both teachers and administrators learned meaningful lessons about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy. The conversations that occurred in the book clubs “allowed participants to clarify their own insights and opinions and also to integrate the various perspectives other readers brought to bear on the book” (Long, 2003, p. 187).

Teachers acknowledged the value of being more reflective about their practices. In the poem “Uncommon Grace,” Grace, a white female, middle class teacher,
acknowledged that she represents the dominant oppressive culture. For that reason, reading and discussing culturally relevant teaching is uncomfortable for her and so she wondered, “Am I good enough?” She said that she has many things in common with the students even though she is white. She came from a poor family with no front yard and little to no green space in the back. She could hear the neighbors clearly through the walls. She admitted, “I feel like many of my students feel.”

As lead learners, we realized that the teachers’ reflections came through as personal stories of lived experiences which enabled us to get to know them and to learn more about them beyond their pedagogical spaces. Through storytelling, we learned about their family influences, cultures, personal development and teaching circumstances. We learned about them as learners especially during their formative years. For example, listening to and reading their narratives revealed how they learned to read. Since the way we learn influences the way that we teach, we have a tendency to teach the way we were taught. We recognize that their reflections came through storytelling which gave us a lens into their lived experiences during their formative years. We were able to reflect on our relationship with them. It gave us better insight to them as learners and as teachers.

Implications: Administrators need to employ opportunities to evoke reflection that results in learning more about the teachers. Reflection results in storytelling. Through storytelling, leaders should construct spaces that allow teachers to reflect through storytelling which allows us to build relationships with them and gain better insights to them as teachers and learners. If we want our teachers to be socializing and self-authoring knowers, we must create a learning space for them to do that type of reflective,
collaborative work. Professional development for the teachers normally focuses on instruction; professional learning is normally not interactive and leaves no opportunities for feedback. This book club was unique in that it was less scripted, less procedural and more reflective. This process is allowing teachers to see students differently. The book study discussions allowed us to gain new perspectives and new understandings about our teachers. And so we wonder, “What approaches would our teachers use to get to know students better?

Finding 3 – Through storytelling, the influences in our lives manifest themselves throughout the eight week book study with kindergarten and fifth grade. The haunting concern is we are not thinking and embracing the possibility that these same influences are going on in our students’ lives. Just because the students are not demonstrating evidence of family influences does not mean that those influences are non-existent. There are certainly influences in the children’s lives and whatever they are, those influences are actually constructing their foundations. Human beings are participating in the book study – human beings with a history that still sits with them. Our family influences made indelible impressions on who we are personally and professionally. This finding resonates throughout the poems and the stories of the participants.

The modeling the participants received from their families and how the participants credit different things, favorably and unfavorable, is apparent in the poems and the stories. The more we know about our own personal histories, the better we act. Connelly and Clandinin (1998) claim, “The more we understand ourselves and can
articulate reasons why we are what we are, do what we do and are headed where we have chosen, the more meaningful our curriculum will be” (p. 11).

Implications – During the book study, we shared our adult stories and now we wonder, “Are we ready to hear the stories of our students and their parents’ stories? Teachers and leaders “understanding of student learning is limited without the input of children’s first teachers, their parents (Bisplinghoff, 1998). As leaders, we realize now that we are armed with nuggets of necessary action that are just waiting for us to crack them open in a way that welcomes the stories of our students and their families. Some of the actions we might take to build bridges with our students and families are as follows. First, as lead learners, we should model how to get to know the students’ stories. We could model by meeting with a different student every day to hear his/her story.

Secondly, when we see students for discipline issues, if possible, we might possibly step away from the problem and have the student share his/her story. Also, there might be a school wide focus at the beginning of the school year to collect and share stories of our students’ families.

At Wesley, we have started the work of welcoming parents in to the school to tell their stories. We invited parents to make dream boards with their children on literacy night. The dream boards lined the hallways of the school and served as a bridge between home and school. Parents and students were able to write and/or illustrate stories of their choosing to share with the school community. Based on discussions with students, Bisplinghoff 1998) states, “Families are very influential in the way they use literacy in their own lives, and the varied ways they support their children’s literacy development. Teacher insights are much richer with the perspectives of parents and other family
members.” (p. 1) Reaching out to students and their families in relatable ways on an ongoing basis will increase the chances of breaking down barriers that impede student success.

**Finding 4—Job-embedded book studies as an approach to professional development met the learning needs of teachers and administrators.** Teachers from both book study groups specifically noted the appreciation and value in conducting the sessions during the day. Embedding the sessions during the school day situated learning as an integral part of the teachers’ professional practice.

Aria (5th grade): It was refreshing for me to have the conversations throughout the day and to actually address some of the topics that might be quote unquote taboo to discuss during the school day and as a professional. I really enjoyed just delving into some of the reasons why – I've been thinking about some of why our students may react in the manner that they might react.

Annie (5th grade): I like the fact that we have the time to do it during the day and it wasn’t after school. And like it was very comfortable and we didn't feel pressured.

Scheduling the book study sessions during the school day supported three major attributes: relevance, feedback, and transfer (Zepeda, 1999). Relevance is guaranteed if learning is embedded in the daily work of teachers and administrators, and if it addresses their current needs (Zepeda, 1999). Feedback from within the group is encouraged (Zepeda, 1999). The transfer of practice is essential to ensuring that the needs of teachers are being met.
Finding 5 – Trust was a major factor in the positive outcome of the book discussion groups. There was a high level of trust between the teachers and their administrators. The teachers felt they could be honest and freely speak without fear of retribution because we created a school climate that fostered an open door policy. This is how we led within our learning community. Teachers knew that it was safe to express concerns and disagreement without fear of reprisal. Blase & Blasé (2001) advise principals to “welcome and embrace conflict as a way to produce substantive, positive outcomes over the long run” (p.14). We believe that administrators must develop trusting relationships with teachers in order for them to be honest and open when discussing sensitive issues such as culture.

When we became the leaders at Wesley Avenue Elementary School, we knew that building trusting, collegial relationships with our staff would be a priority. When we arrived in August 2010, the school had been open for seven years. In this short time span, the teachers, staff, students and community witnessed the expiration of three administrative teams. Anita was the fourth principal and I was the fourth assistant principal. Needless to say, staff morale was low. There were lots of questions, concerns and wonderings. We understood and deliberately set out to build relationships at the beginning of our first school year by laying a foundation for teacher-administrator trust. First, we acknowledged that we were aware that there had previously been no stability in the leadership of Wesley. We voiced out commitment to Wesley and promised to be transparent and deliberate in our efforts to create a trusting, collegial and family oriented learning community. We promised to demonstrate personal integrity, to be accessible, to facilitate and model effective communication as well as involve staff in decision making.
We also opened ourselves to the constructive feedback and sometimes harsh criticisms of staff members. When we received the results of county mandated staff surveys, we celebrated our successes and immediately addressed areas of concern. For example, much to our surprise, the first year surveys revealed that the majority of the staff believed that our communication was inconsistent and untimely. As a result of our transparent approach, we were able to gain the trust of our staff. This was not an overnight fix. Changing the climate and culture of the school, and changing the way the staff felt about school was work that took time and patience. Our staff learned that we were not perfect people; we allowed them to witness our vulnerability so that they could see our growth and willingness to learn. As administrators, we were consistently reflective. We spent time together being candid and open with each other, growing together, struggling together, not always agreeing but always presenting a united front to our staff.

Indeed trust was a factor in the outcome of the book discussion groups. Without having the established relationships between administrators and teachers, the participants might have reservations about how honest they could be. They possibly would have only shared what they thought we wanted to hear versus what they actually felt, thought and believed.

**Finding 6 – The biggest challenge and overriding threat was time.** Time was a factor but we made the book study a priority. We worked around scheduling and state wide testing. We also circumvented the teachers’ regularly scheduled PLC data and curriculum meetings which required finding alternative means for the teachers to access this information. As we moved through the book study, it became more and more evident how important it was to have this experience because of the things the teachers learned
about themselves, the things we learned about ourselves as administrators and the things we learned about each other. Although forcing the window of time to learn together was an ongoing challenge, the participants felt that job embedded professional learning was meaningful and worthwhile. Aaron (Kindergarten) shared,

     Normally when we attend professional development, there are not opportunities for feedback. With the book club, we knew we were going to meet every week and so we could continue our conversations. We could try ideas that we discussed and then share out about what happened the next week. It really made a lot of sense.

Mary (Kindergarten) shared,

     Good teachers really do use their planning time to create engaging lessons and pull resources. I am a good teacher that wasn’t super excited about giving up this time to talk about a book. That’s honestly how I felt initially. Now I see the value and I can truly say that the experience has helped me become a better person and teacher. I didn’t even realize some of the things I was saying. And the way I was handling certain situations, I’m not proud about it. The wonderful thing is now I am aware and now I will be more cognizant of the things I say to and about my students.

Quite honestly, we believe that designating a set weekly time to discuss *Dreamkeepers* may indeed have been initially frustrating for some of our teachers. In fact, as the assistant principal, it was frustrating. It seemed that no matter how I planned ahead of time, issues would surface that required my undivided attention immediately before our book club sessions or during the book club discussions. Sometimes, these distractions
caused me to enter the study five to ten minutes after the start time or leave the meetings 5 or 10 minutes early. There were also times I was interrupted during the book study sessions. These disruptions were personally frustrating although the teachers would continue even when I had to step away. In retrospection, I am pleased that we remained focused, fought through the challenges and saw the process to the end. I am confident that all of the teachers realized exploring the text and issues of culture was a worthwhile effort. Allocating time to focus on the issues in the text provided a platform to collaborate, bond and reflect on sensitive issues that teachers and administrators confront daily. In the end, finding the time and pushing the agenda made us stronger, better more prepared educators. The lessons we learned will hopefully translate into improved student learning.

**Next steps** – Now that we have completed the book study with kindergarten and fifth grade, we anticipate doing two grade levels each semester until we have shared this experience with every grade level, pre-kindergarten through grade 5.

Now that we have modeled the experience for kindergarten and grade five, we expect the teachers to continue the book discussions amongst themselves. *Dreamkeepers* is important enough for all grade levels to experience the book. Going forward it may not be necessary for every grade level to select the same text. We expect them to select books that align with their specific grade level needs and goals. Our hope is that they continue this job-embedded professional learning experience with their administrators being included in the process. The teachers will interchange roles as facilitators and participants. The expectation that we as administrators will serve as facilitators will dissipate. We will be participants only. Hopefully, after we have modeled this process
with every grade level, it will become embedded in their practice. Teachers will automatically schedule book studies. As administrators, we will continually seek ways to carve out windows of time for book discussion groups during the school day. For example, we could possibly combine or alternate data and curriculum meetings instead of designating two separate planning periods (one planning period for weekly data meetings and another planning period for weekly curriculum meetings). This adjustment would result in the availability of one planning period for weekly book study sessions.

We would also like the teachers to implement book discussion groups in their classrooms with their students. Initially, the teachers would facilitate the book discussions with the goal of gradually relinquishing the facilitator role to the students. Students currently discuss texts in pairs and small groups during center rotations. We envision one of the 20-25 minute center rotations becoming book club time. The students would come together to discuss the various texts and write reflections in their journals about their wonderings and new learning. Our long term goal is to invite parents to participate in a book study with their children’s principal and assistant principal. This goal aligns with our overall efforts to create a welcoming school where family members are valued and embraced as an integral part of the Wesley Avenue learning community. Once the idea ignites amongst our parents, they might start multiple book clubs throughout the community.

In order to ensure the sustainability of our work, we will need to organize a committee comprised of all stakeholders including teachers, staff members, students, parents, business partners and community members. We will share our vision and seek buy in. We will embrace their ideas for building literacy, dissolving cultural barriers, and
making our school an institution where collaborative learning by all stakeholders is valued and prioritized. As lead learners and visionaries, we will also continuously seek opportunities to share our experiences with larger audiences by publishing in educational journals and presenting at conferences.

Conclusion

Educational research suggests that the more traditional, textual descriptions of qualitative findings do not adequately reflect the complexity of studying human behaviors (Butler-Kisber, 2002). Nor do they satisfy the ethical issues of voice and relationship to which researchers have become more sensitive, or permit the possibility of multiple interpretations that the postmodern world has come to accept (Butler-Kisber, 2002). We used poetry and storytelling to situate ourselves in the book studies and to work intimately with our teachers to create relationships that helped us ensure that their voices and perspectives were respected and reported.

Our first research question challenged us to explore ways book studies support the learning needs of teachers and administrators in public school settings. Indeed the book study sessions provided opportunities for the teachers and administrators to construct their learning. The teachers and administrators also embrace the job embedded nature of the professional learning experience. They felt that learning together during the context of the school day was more valuable because they were able to meet consistently over a period of several weeks. This opened the pathway for immediate feedback and opportunities to nurture collaborative relationships.

Our second research question dared us to scrutinize what teachers and administrators share when they participate in a book study with their colleagues. Both
teachers and administrators shared intimate details of their lives inside of and outside of the classroom. They shared stories of their lived experiences including their culture, family influences, personal development and teaching circumstances. They also connected these stories to their professional practices during both book studies. At times, these connections caused biases and stereotypes to surface that participants did not know they harbored. Teachers and lead learners learned what they didn’t know about what they thought they knew. What an awakening! These lived experiences were retold as a short story and represented as found poetry.

The last research question asked us to find out what teachers and administrators learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy. Because of the way the book study was framed, participants were able to come face to face with their own biases. They were able to openly voice their stereotypes to their colleagues. This was a valuable lesson to learn because the removal of obstacles that impede student success means better teaching and learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

The second part of the last research question asked the researchers and school administrators to reflect on lessons learned about leadership during the study.

1. We learned that book studies are a viable way to discuss sensitive issues that are not normally openly confronted in a workplace setting. Furthermore, book studies built with a constructivist framework in mind

2. When teachers create knowledge constructions zones they are more open to the exchange of different ideas and perspectives. They do not fear taking risks. It important
to create more knowledge construction zones in schools as a means to get to the heart of teaching and learning.

3. The book study approach not only accommodated teachers’ needs for professional growth but also created opportunities for collaboration among teachers at different developmental levels. Drago-Severson (2004) posits, “If schools are to become new centers of learning that effectively support teachers at all levels of experience and development, it will be because principals take the lead in making them new centers for learning” (p. xix) At Wesley, our new center includes job embedded professional learning in a safe, non-threatening, non-judgmental space where teachers and administrators can identify their learning needs in collaboration with their colleagues and administrators then construct new knowledge that will lead to long lasting understandings.

As we conclude our doctoral studies, we will channel our new knowings into our previous work, but with new eyes, fresh ideas, and youthful vigor. We are excited about the possibilities of ringing doorbells together, entering doors that will lead us on new adventures of creating learning environments that welcome families, embrace diversity, and support the learning needs of students and teachers.
REFERENCES


Dana, N., & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The reflective educator’s guide to classroom*
research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry.


Thousand Oaks.


Appendix A

Participation Letter

February , 2015

Dear ____________________ :

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Betty Bisplinghoff in the Department of Elementary Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled *Faculty Book Clubs in an Urban Elementary School: The Power of Text, Conversations and Stories to Support the Learning Needs of Teachers and Administrators*. The purpose of this study is to learn how the practices of teachers and administrators are impacted when they participate together in a book discussion group during the context of the school day.

Your participation will involve eight weekly meetings during your planning period on Thursdays. I will ask you to read a book, actively participate during weekly book club meetings and maintain a reflection journal.
Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The results of the research study may be published but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

There are minimal risks associated with this research. They include being candid with the researcher about professional growth areas. Your participation in these activities will not impact your Teacher Keys Walk-through evaluations, formative evaluations and/or summative evaluation.

If you have questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (404)-455-9759 or send an e-mail to eady5@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706)-542-3199; e-mail address, irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this form, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Arnetta Eady
Appendix B - Consent Form

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled *Faculty Book Clubs in an Urban Elementary School: The Power of Text, Conversations and Stories to Support the Learning Needs of Teachers and Administrators* conducted by Arnetta Eady under the direction of Dr. Betty Bisplinghoff in the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia (542-4323). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to learn how the practices of teachers and administrators are impacted when they participate together in a book discussion group during the context of the school day. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things: read a book about teaching and learning, attend eight weekly book club meetings during your planning period, actively participate during the eight book discussions, and maintain a reflection journal for eight weeks from the beginning to the end of the study.
The benefit for me is an opportunity to gain knowledge about exemplary teaching practices and culturally relevant pedagogy, enhance my professional craft and build collegial relationships with fellow teachers and administrators.

The researcher hopes to learn whether or not book study groups are an effective means of professional learning for teachers and administrators when the book discussions occur during the classroom teachers’ designated planning period. I would also like to learn what teachers and administrators learn about their professional practices as a result of participating in a book study about culturally relevant pedagogy.

There is no psychological, social, legal, economic or physical discomfort, stressor harm that might occur as a result of participation in this research. Participants will be involved in discussions and activities about teaching and learning. No individually-identifiable information about me or provided by me during the research will be shared with others without my written permission. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

__________________________________________________________  ______________________________
Researcher: Arnetta Eady  Date
Telephone: (404)-455-9759/eady5@uga.edu

__________________________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant’s Signature  Date

Please sign both copies, keep one copy for your records and return one copy to the researcher.
### Appendix C

**Participant Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Teaching Assignment including dates</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous Teaching Assignments including dates</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education (degrees earned or currently pursuing)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification/Endorsements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningful Professional Learning Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family/Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Background (Race/Ethnicity)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>