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A Content Analysis of Cultural Sensitivity within K-5 English Language Arts Common Core Fictional Exemplar Texts

by

Kevin D. Starks

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

A Content Analysis of Cultural Sensitivity within K-5 English Language Arts Common Core Fictional Exemplar Texts

by

Kevin D. Starks

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

3/23/18
Date

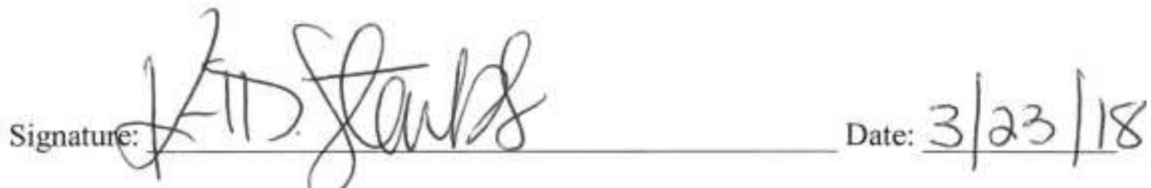
3/23/18
Date

3/23/18
Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Kevin D. Starks



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Abstract

In this study, the researcher investigated cultural sensitivity within the mandated English Language Arts Common Core exemplar fictional texts that "serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality and range" (Common Core State Standards, n.d., p. 2) for kindergarten through fifth grade, for the state of Missouri. The researcher utilized a modified version of Frances Ann Day's children's literature evaluation framework, "Evaluating Children's Books for Bias," an adaptation of the Council on Interracial Books for Children's, "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks," to test for cultural sensitivity within 50 of the 90 suggested fictional texts. Day's framework included investigating omission, illustrations, story lines, authenticity, relationships, depiction of heroes, self-image, author/illustrator background and perspective, language, and copyright date. From Day's work, the researcher created two separate frameworks, Literature Analysis Framework-First Round, and Literature Analysis Framework-Second Round. Literature Analysis Framework-First Round consisted of passage title, race of author, race of illustrator, copyright date, whether minority characters were present, the number of minority characters, and the number of Caucasian characters. Literature Analysis Framework-Second Round consisted of titles with minority characters, illustrations, relationships/heroes, language, and storyline.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Like adults, children read books for pleasure; however, a student's understanding was often limited due to a lack of experiences (Lukens, 2003). Children lacked an understanding of the ideas and themes beyond social comprehension and sought a simpler form of expression. In the foundational work, *Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books*, renown author and former librarian, Horning (1997) wrote, "At all levels children's fiction covers a range of subjects, themes, and styles and represents some of the best writing we find in the world of literature" (p. 20). Children subjected to the aforementioned 'subjects and themes' often shaped the way in which children grew up, viewed themselves and cultures. Picture books required readers to consider the illustrations, the words on each page, and the way the two elements combined in a special way (Horning, 1997). The researcher conducted an extensive literature review and found few references inside the suggested five-year time frame. The texts and references throughout were foundational in the timely investigation and conversation of cultural sensitivity in required readings.

Incorporating exemplary children's texts in the school curriculum was essential, considering the broad range of cultural, social, and economic differences within a school's makeup (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). Nederveen-Pieterse (2007) mentioned in her book "Ethnicities and Global Multiculture: Pants for an Octopus," acceptance of difference and multicultural inclusion was present in things, such as, "food, art, music, healing, advertising, and consumption" (p. 96). However, multicultural experiences and diversity, if depicted at all, were not depicted as appealing or even relevant in children's

literature and education in general. Many different aspects of cultural bias influenced how African American students were taught and how they learned. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were "America's first nationally agreed-upon curriculum standards" (Chaucer, 2012, p. 12) geared towards ensuring academic uniformity based on grades and ability levels in education across the United States. The CCSS generated a list of exemplar texts for classroom teachers to serve as a basis for selecting quality reading material for students. Anderson (2013) wrote, "One general definition of culture is the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought" (p.173). In Singleton's (2015) book, *Courageous Conversations about Race*, race was described as, "how we live on a daily basis in terms of our language, ancestry, religion, food, dress, musical tastes, traditions, values, political and social affiliations, recreation, and so on" (p. 178). In the researcher's experience, in children's literature a lot of minority cultures – if portrayed at all - were not portrayed in a positive light. Derman-Sparks and Olsen-Edwards (2010) declared, "Books that accurately and positively depict children from low-income or rural families are few in number" (p. 3).

The researcher investigated cultural sensitivity within the mandated English Language Arts Common Core exemplar fictional texts, "as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality and range" (Common Core State Standards [CCSS], n.d., p. 2) for kindergarten through fifth grade, for the state of Missouri. The researcher used a modified version of Day's (1999) children's literature evaluation framework, "Evaluating Children's Books for Bias," an adaptation of The Council on Interracial Books for Children's "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free

Textbooks and Storybooks" to test for cultural sensitivity within 50 of the 90 suggested fictional texts. Day's (1999) framework included investigating omission, illustrations, story lines, authenticity, relationships, depiction of heroes, self-image, author/illustrator background and perspective, language, and copyright date. From Day's (1999) work, the researcher created two separate frameworks, Literature Analysis Framework - First Round, and Literature Analysis Framework - Second Round. Literature Analysis Framework - First Round consisted of passage title, race of author, race of illustrator, copyright date, whether minority characters were present, the number of minority characters and the number of Caucasian characters. Literature Analysis Framework - Second Round consisted of titles with minority characters, illustrations, relationships/ heroes, language, and storyline.

Rationale

The researcher found many studies related to cultural sensitivity in the health field, as research related to doctors and nurses. Kline (2007) wrote, "Cultural influences are extremely salient for health educators because culture shapes perceptions and practices with regard to health, illness, and medicine" (p. 85). Guidry et al. (as cited in Kline, 2007) added, "Cultural sensitivity and willingness to use ethnic sensitivity on behalf of the minority community were cited as the top items needed in health programs to help eliminate health status disparity in minorities" (p. 85). Bishop (2012) wrote, "Many books published in the 19th century and the first two-thirds of the 20th present Black characters as objects of ridicule and generally inferior beings, representations not likely to have been created primarily for Black children to enjoy" (p. 6). In order to identify cultural sensitivity, the look-fors within each text were defined. Guidry, Fagan,

& Walker set a foundation in 1998 for cultural sensitivity conversations after the research stated, "Investigating cultural sensitivity of printed materials entails an examination of the language, format, visual presentation, and content of the written material (p. 165).

Teachers often looked toward issues outside the school system to evaluate student learning; factors such as teacher certification, daily lessons, and the cultural wherewithal of the educator mattered exponentially, along with those factors within the teachers' locus of control (Singleton, 2015). Much like a doctor's level of cultural competence hindered or helped his or her professional practice, teachers too needed to be culturally competent to successfully help the students. Gay (2000) wrote, "Too many students of color have not been achieving in schools as well as they should (and can) for far too long" (p. 1). The academic plight of African American students was a topic of discussion for several years. "Merely belaboring the disproportionately poor academic performance of certain students of color, or blaming their families and social-class backgrounds, is not very helpful in implementing reforms to reverse achievement trends" (Gay, 2000, p. xiii). When a patient was sick, the doctor blamed the prescribed medication lacked the anticipated or promised results. The researcher believed parents had the right to be upset with teachers when instructional techniques and strategies, prescribed for the wrongs and woes in academia, did not produce the anticipated or promised results. Culturally competent teachers considered the student's expectation to learn from books, passages, and other texts with characters, experiences, and incidents reflective of one's personal backgrounds and interests. Gopalakrishnan (2011) stated children's literature existed so every aspect of a child's life, both good and bad, should be included to support the child developmentally.

In the researcher's experience as a second-grade teacher, the researcher observed a countless amount of creativity and a wide range of text complexity - coupled with vivid illustrations, which allowed a platform for the author and illustrator to incorporate personal beliefs, feelings, and practices. In the book, *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books*, Horning (1997) wrote, "At all levels children's fiction covers a range of subjects, themes, and styles and represents some of the best writing we find in the world of literature today" (p. 20). The researcher chose fictional texts for this study due to the vast creative control an author and illustrator had in writing nonfictional texts, due to the sake of jeopardizing factual content. Kant (as cited in Hashemy, Hayati, & Amiri, 2011) wrote:

> Apart from the acquisition of language, the major role of fiction is to encourage children to explore relationships and to develop sensitivity in their understanding of their own behavior and that of others, and the images that children encounter when reading are a powerful means of shaping such thinking and behavior. (p. 68)

The researcher found a previous study of 18 K-1 read aloud and independent texts outlined within the CCSS. McCaffrey (2014) wrote, "Each of these dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural take place while reading and any consideration of a text set should evaluate all dimensions of reading, not merely one dimension" (p.13). McCaffrey (2014) used a different analysis tool and a different focus to conduct the research in the work, *Common Core English and Language Arts K-1 Exemplar Text Sets: A Critical Content Analysis of Cultural Representations*. McCaffrey (2014) described the importance of literature, specifically authentic cultural representation which portrayed the people and personalities present in the schools and the communities of the readers. The

researcher developed the cultural sensitivity study using McCaffrey's (2014) work and noted authors in education, such as Anderson (2013), who declared readers assessed the quality of fictitious texts through an examination of the specific texts' literary elements and other aspects of story which, to name a few, were point of view, characters, setting, and tone.

Research Questions

The researcher investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: How culturally sensitive are the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts with regards to characteristics measured by the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ2: How are the cultures and characteristics of minority characters in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts represented according to the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ3: How frequently are minority themes, characters, and cultures represented in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts?

The researcher believed there would be a significant difference in the number of cultural sensitivity characteristics in the text sets for grades four and five, than for grades two and three, and K and one.

Alternative Hypothesis 1: There is a difference between the total number of cultural sensitivity characteristics within the sample of exemplar texts divided by the total number of reading content pages between the sample grades K-1, 2-3, and 3-5.

Limitations

From the total number of 90 Common Core fictional texts, the researcher included a random sample of 50 texts to code for this study. The second portion of the study involved the researcher completing a stratified random sample of 25 books per grade-level grouping (K-1, 2-3, 4-5), placed into grade-level classification by the CCSS. Schools were not required to use the exemplar texts; the federal government made the recommendation - as each state decided to adopt the CCSS, the reading materials associated with the curriculum were suggested and served as perfect examples to teach a specific theme or standard. The researcher had no control over the types of books included as recommended exemplar texts for Common Core. Due to the researcher's background in lower socioeconomic education there may be preconceived notions unaccounted for within the study. The Literature Analysis Framework for both phases of the study contained degrees of bias, due to the researcher's use of a modified version from a previous work by a person of a different race, gender, background, and sexual orientation. The names of characters associated with specific ethnic groups were left up to the researcher's background and foreknowledge of various cultures and cultural experiences. There was a possibility that characters whose races were not specified, whose names were not popular to a specific race, were not assigned to the correct ethnicity. The researcher used illustrations to determine a character's race. This was a limitation because certain colors of a character's skin were not reserved specifically to a certain ethnic origin. Native American individuals could potentially have the same skin complexity of an African American. The books were coded independently, and may have resulted in inconsistency between texts. Some texts might have been coded differently

depending on the personal and subjective feelings or emotions of the researcher. The researcher's prior experiences with race relations played a role in which the researcher coded a book or text. Negative experiences with race might have caused the researcher to read too much into a situation within a text; whereas, positive encounters involving race could have caused the researcher to overlook key elements that shaped the study.

Definition of Terms

Authenticity, for the purpose of this study referred to accurate and appropriate representations and portrayals of cultures and lifestyles.

Coding categories, for the purposes of this study included the criteria used in each column of the Literature Analysis Framework.

Common Core was "simply a set of standards — a listing of what students should know, aspirational words on a page" (Hess & McShane, 2013, p. 62).

Connotation, for the purpose of this study was the magnitude, affect, or impact a word had in any given context.

Cultural sensitivity, according to Resnicow et al. (as cited in Bauer & Wayne, 2005) was "the extent to which ethnic/cultural characteristics, experiences, norms, values, behavioral patterns and beliefs of a target population as well as relevant historical, environmental, and social forces are incorporated" (para. 11).

ELA, for the purpose of this study was 'English Language Arts,' which included the academic content areas of reading, writing, spelling, and phonics.

Evaluating Children's Books for Bias was a guideline used to detect bias in books (Day, 1999).

Exemplar texts "serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms" (CCSS, n.d., p. 2).

Grade-level grouping, for the purpose of this study was the manner in which the CCSS paired grade levels K and 1, 2 and 3, and 4 and 5.

Heroes were highly admired individuals who "possess the power, take the leadership roles, and make the important decisions" (Day, 1999, p. 6).

Literature Analysis Framework was a set of criteria established in part by Day (1999) and McCaffrey (2014), and was used to analyze stories and poems for cultural sensitivity.

Minority, for the purpose of this study included African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian ethnicities.

Minority characters were African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian major and minor individuals within a text.

Race, for the purpose of this study, was the color of an individual's skin.

Resolution of problems referred to the ability in which conceived, presented, and resolved issues were handled (Day, 1999).

Self-images were noted by Day (1999) as "norms established that limit any child's aspirations and self-concept" (p. 5).

Day (1999) defined **standards of success** as the requirements for acceptance and approval within a story's characters.

In Day's 1999 foundational work on the evaluation of culturally sensitive books, **stereotypes** were defined as "over-simplified generalizations about a particular group which usually carries derogatory implications" (p. 4).

Story Line, for the purpose of this study was defined as the plot which included the order and location of events.

For the purpose of this study, **suggestive comments** were words or phrases that included subtle, yet offensive terms. Day (1999) wrote, "examples of offensive terms included: 'savage,' 'primitive,' 'conniving,' 'lazy,' . . . 'Indian givers'" (p. 6)

Symbolism, for the purpose of this study referred to the use of colors, objects, or any other form of substitution in place of a physical being or idea. "Consider the effect of the use of the color white as the ultimate in beauty, cleanliness, or virtue (angel food)" (Day, 1999, p. 6)

Tokenism was described as "one person from the group presented as having admirable qualities while all the others of the group are stereotyped" (Day, 1999, p. 4).

Summary

Gay (2000) wrote, "Much intellectual ability and many other kinds of intelligences are lying untapped in ethnically diverse students. If these are recognized and used in the instructional process, school achievement will improve radically" (p. 20). Underdeveloped areas within the psyche prevented minority students from being able to perform at the same level, if not higher, than a student's Caucasian counterpart, when presented with culturally sensitive materials. McCaffrey (2014) wrote, "Children rely on books to teach them about the world. Likewise, literature informs the way in which young readers come to view the world, as well as how they view themselves as individuals within the world" (p. 19). What teachers do or do not do drastically affects the learning outcomes of minority students, more specifically African American students. Furthermore, 'culturally responsive teaching' required teachers to build upon the

backgrounds and experiences of all students by incorporating academic and social understandings to maximize the students' potential for mastery of a particular concept (Gay, 2000).

Chapter Two presents a literature review of previous work based on cultural sensitivity. After extensive review, the researcher did not find much research within the last five years. Chapter Three describes the methodology for the research in detail. Readers found a detailed account of the process for analysis of Common Core texts included within the then-current research. The researcher provides the data analysis in Chapter Four. Chapter Five reviews the data and shares next steps in terms of a relevant and real-world application of the data obtained through the then-current research. Chapter Five also includes a discussion of the results and information pertaining to cultural sensitivity, which future researchers may need to know.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

After extensive research of previously published literature, the researcher was unable to find recent works within the expected five-year time frame. The researcher's study showed how the content within the children's books reviewed during data collection, tied closely with previous works. The literature review includes accounts from foundational literary findings relevant to the researcher's thesis and problem of practice, which were the basis for the doctoral study.

Student Assessments

Student assessment was a key topic in cultural sensitivity conversations because student performance was dictated by the outcome of the assessments. "Educational achievement among many students of color continues to be disturbingly low, even after more than five decades of deliberate legal reforms and funding policies designed to improve it" (Gay, 2005, p. 236). African American students were subject to unfamiliar concepts and themes on assessments advantageous to Caucasian counterparts, whose backgrounds, experiences, and status aided in the assessment performance. "Some students are tested over things they have not experienced in their lives. One teacher said a recent test had a passage about grasshoppers, but her students did not know what grasshoppers were" (Davis, 2012, p. 104). Student assessments included concepts that were not essential to determine whether skills were mastered and were not applicable in real-world situations. "This does not mean that assessments should cover only what students know, but rather that it should avoid items or tasks that are not central to what is being assessed and require knowledge that students are not familiar with" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 72) to make assessments fair since, "most European American students do not have . . .

contextual-interference problems. They are familiar with both the context and the performance format because these formats are extracted from cultural orientations the students share with schools" (Gay, 2005, p. 230). Unbeknownst to members of a specific culture, norms were embedded within groups of people and those norms determined how individuals from specific races and backgrounds responded. "Cultural activities are represented in cultural scripts, generalized knowledge about an event that resides in the heads of participants. These scripts guide behavior and also tell participants what to expect. Within a culture these scripts . . . are hard to see" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 5). While on the other hand, "Achievement tests may embed skills in scenarios about situations that are not relevant to the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of students of color. These students have to decipher the contexts in order to extrapolate the skill content" (Gay, 2005, p. 230). Not all Caucasians were aware of the advantage since cultural scripts were not taught explicitly; instead, formed subconsciously from implications through reflection, inspection, and engagement (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

There was a degree of assessment that was beneficial to measuring the performance of students and the efficacy of teacher instruction. Sleeter (2005) noted, when implemented properly, "assessment can be empowering when used as a tool for students to show what they know and can do . . . to articulate clearly what they are working toward, judge progress and give feedback using understandable yardsticks" (p. 79). However, in 2005 Ford wrote, "Educators need to recognize the limitations of information gathered from tests normed or standardized on middle-class White students" (p. 389). A key factor to remember was "Test results are only as good as the test-taking situation, including the qualifications and competencies of the educator administering the

test" (Ford, 2005, p. 389). Sleeter (2005) wrote, "Assessment tends to drive curriculum. Teachers across the nation feel caught between test-driven conceptions of assessment and more authentic forms" (p. 64). Educators were perplexed by the requirement to assess students through the most popular forms of assessments, and not based on the students' individualized needs. "Assessment controls what gets taught; the press to standardize curriculum reduces the possibility of creating curriculum that is culturally relevant to one's own students, and substantially narrows how teachers think about learning" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 69). Irvine added,

> Minority students constantly face situations in their surroundings that require critical thinking skills. . . . Even when minority students do not live in ghettos and barrios, they need...critical thinking skills to respond to . . . racist behaviors they are likely to encounter. (1990, p. 15)

Gopalakrishnan (2011) stated working with students from diverse backgrounds required knowledgeable educators who understood the challenges students faced; specifically literacy centered. Specialists in education who created assessments struggled to create assessments including differences in language; frequently encoded or scored as a deficit in language (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). School districts periodically adopted new curricula to stay current with the latest academic trends and strategies in education. When the outdated textbooks left the classroom and made room for new textbooks, decision makers in education encouraged others to adopt a new mindset as well. Cross (2010) wrote, "Cultural sensitivity is the knowing that cultural differences exist as well as similarities, without assigning values, i.e., better or worse, right or wrong, to those cultural differences" (para. 11). Educators learned that culturally sensitive

environments could not place the backgrounds and experiences of the groups represented the least in a hierarchy; all cultures were created equal. "Teachers and administrators are awakening to the reality that not all students embody white, middle-class values, experiences, and cultural norms" (Sato & Lensmire, 2009, p. 365).

In Singleton's (2015) book, *Courageous Conversations about Race*, the author wrote, "Many prominent educational researchers and practitioners express solid understandings of other diversity topics but fail to explore or even recognize race as a viable factor affecting school culture and student achievement" (p. 101). The races typically underrepresented in traditional schools appeared to fail compared to the Caucasian counterparts. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) documented, "Across the board, students from African American, Latino, and Native American backgrounds average significantly lower scores on a range of standardized achievement tests than do their counterparts from the White majority" (p. 192).

Despite how skewed the results of standardized assessments were, school systems continued to use assessment instruments that ultimately stated how specific groups of students were better than others. "A long-standing recommendation is that standardized tests that sort and rank-order students, particularly IQ tests, should not be used because they are not culturally neutral nor are they used in a culturally neutral way" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 191). "It is difficult to ensure fairness in testing across cultures, and educators should exert real care in drawing conclusions based exclusively on test scores" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 154). Typically, from kindergarten to senior year in high school, in non-Afrocentric schools, curriculum focused on European men (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Additionally, "Achievement tests should be based on the curricula the

students have actually been taught, with criterion references rather than norm references, and used only to improve instruction" (1994, p. 191). "Culturally unfair criteria . . . may be used to validate tests expected to predict differences between Whites and People of Color. Differences in experience in taking tests may put non-White students at a disadvantage in testing situations" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 154). From the time students started the academic journey in kindergarten, until the time of commencement the senior year, students participated in assessments. "Beginning with kindergarten, children gain feedback regarding their ability to perform school tasks, in the form of verbal praise or criticism, grades, test scores, and assignment to an ability group" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 99).

Educators learned from the conversations many African American students had outside of school. "The verbal creativity that is apparent among some African Americans in informal social interactions is recognized as a storytelling gift and used to teach them writing skills" (Gay, 2000, p. 34). Delpit (2006) recounted a conversation with a colleague about the fluency of the African American students she serviced, "Our children have no fluency . . . they ought to read some of the rap songs my students write all the time. They might not be writing their school assignments but they sure are writing. Our kids are fluent" (p. 16). Assessments and writing prompts were often written with one type of student in mind and did not always take into account that they, just as lessons, should be differentiated to fit the needs of all learners; assessments must take differentiation into account for various types of test-takers as well. "One of the most urgent issues facing this perilous era and the cadre of teachers who serve in it is that of being able to more accurately measure what students know and are able to do" (Ladson-

Billings, 2003, p. 255). “A test may measure different characteristics when administered to members of different cultural groups” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 154). Standardized assessments had the exact same questions and the exact same format for all test-takers, yet rendered different results based on each test-takers’ non-standardized backgrounds.

Finding the perfect assessment tool, which measured with the precision the instructor initially desired, was paramount in education. In her book, *Testing and Standards: A Brief Encyclopedia*, Wilde (2002) discussed how standardized tests, created to be fair, simply made it impossible for any student who fell outside the top 10% of the classes academically. Tests similar to the ACT provided each type of learner the same amount of time to correctly answer a set of questions, based on information that may or may not have highlighted previous experiences and cultural understandings. Kaplan and Saccuzzi (1993) stated, “Assessment is used to evaluate an individual so that he or she can be described in terms of current functioning and also so that predictions can be made concerning future functioning” (p. 219). With one assessment instrument, educators were told where students were academically, and where students would end up based on one measurement of skills. “Standardization has adverse effects on students, teachers, and schools because it leads to bureaucratization and to a focus on low-level knowledge and skills that can be easily measured by norm-referenced tests” (Sleeter, 2005, p. x). However, “If assessment is used to help guide instruction, constructing it as a tool to help the teacher become more familiar with what students know makes assessment not only fair to students but also instructionally useful to the teacher” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 72). Principals and teachers alike knew “teachers pay more attention to assessments than to

standards, especially when the stakes attached to the tests are high" (Rothman, 2011, p. 19).

"With the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, raising student achievement and closing the 'achievement gap' have become the nation's highest educational priorities" (Noguera, 2008, p. xi). "The critics of the Act [NCLB] argue that standards-based reforms driven by the NCLB Act have had many negative consequences on the curriculum and on school life" (Sleeter, 2005, p. ix). "The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required states to implement tests in grades three through eight and once in high school" (Rothman, 2011, p. 21) Under the government mandate, Missouri students participated in a statewide assessment each year, known as the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and intended to measure each student's percentage of academic growth from one year to the next. "Schools and teachers are to be held accountable to the state through testing, with the requirement of meeting annual targets, including targets aimed at closing achievement gaps" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 21). "Some school leaders in high-minority, low-achieving schools have applauded the NCLB Act because it requires school districts and states to disaggregate achievement data by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency," (Sleeter, 2005, p. ix) seemingly taking into account the cultural classifications that separate predominately Caucasian districts from districts with large African American student populations. "Most critics of NCLB take issue with the idea that evidence of learning should be limited to performance on state-mandated standardized tests" (Noguera, 2008, p. xi).

"Teachers face a dilemma when they try to teach in culturally responsive ways as well as help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to perform successfully on

state and national standardized tests," (Sleeter, 2005, p. x) because the reputation as a good or bad educator was contingent upon student assessment performance at the end of the year. "The No Child Left Behind Act is being widely interpreted and implemented as a testing and assessment initiative. . . . In too many classrooms testing and test preparation are replacing teaching and learning" (Banks, 2005, p. 4). "Virtually every state in the nation is working to develop high standards for what students should learn in school, along with means for assessing students' progress" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 1). "States have responded somewhat differently to this legislation. . . . California had been establishing a system of detailed content standards, testing, and accountability targets" before NCLB's inception, while the school districts in Nebraska chose the assessments given and the desired curriculum, "districts [in Nebraska] may either adopt them or develop equally rigorous standards of their own" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 19).

In this researcher's experience, as both classroom teacher and principal, the MAP assessment results arrived with individuals grouped into a category of either below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced in each content area, based on the student's assessment performance. Marbley, Bonner, and Berg (2008) stated, "There is an inherent bias to most assessment instruments being used in education-primarily that assessment is done by the dominant culture and limited by a western, Eurocentric paradigm" (p. 15). "Much has been eliminated, but often bias remains because of the cultures in which we live. Even though test makers scrutinize tests, the playing field is far from level" (Davis, 2012, p. 104). There were some situations in which bias within an assessment or curriculum was not always as blatant and appeared balanced, yet the assessment was created with the intent of measuring the performance of diverse test takers against a universal rubric, thus

essentially making the test unfair (Marbley, Bonner, & Berg, 2008). In this researcher's experience as a classroom teacher, the MAP assessment was an example of an assessment used by socially and culturally diverse individuals yet graded against a universal rubric void of considering diverse conditions, and made the test an unfair assessment. For instance, poverty was a diverse condition, not considered when grading an assessment against a universal rubric. To adequately assess students of poverty, the assessments used to drive instruction needed to be evaluated for cultural sensitivity. Ravitch (2003) described bias as, "anything in a test item that might cause any student to be distracted or upset" (p. 20).

Despite the negative view, "Assessment is a useful part of curriculum planning and instruction when used as a guide to improve student learning," (Sleeter, 2005, p. 71) and not as a method of classifying, labeling, or comparing students who did not perform as well as a student's peers. Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), a new push in education, held classroom teachers responsible for the growth or lack of growth present among each set of students those teachers serviced. The researcher predicted, student assessment data spoke to how well a student did or did not do, but the cultural wherewithal of the classroom teacher was the difference in that student's college graduation or high school dropout. Payne (2013) explained that students, with teachers who worked to establish a genuine connection outside of the school setting, performed better academically.

Teacher Cultural Competence

"Cultural differences exist in values, styles of communication, the perception of time, the meaning of success, community" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 15). Students and

teachers alike 'learned biases' about personal groups and the groups of others, which filtered what students did or did not perceive (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010). "Because assumptions guide what teachers do, it is worthwhile to spend time examining the basis on which one makes teaching decisions" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 30). In *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, Diller and Moule (2005) stated, "A first step toward cultural competence involves developing an awareness of the ways in which cultures differ and realizing that these differences may affect the learning process" (p. 15). Sleeter (2005) described his previous work involving teachers' understanding and interpretations of an education multicultural in nature, "Perspectives of the White teachers tended to differ from those of teachers of color. . . . to a greater degree than they realized, their conceptions were rooted in their life experiences and the communities with which they were affiliated" (p. 31). With that being said, to better relate to diverse groups of people, teachers put aside any personal biases and experiences to see the value in all students' experiences. In addition to a lack of personal encounters with other cultures – Caucasian teachers, more than any other race, misunderstood cultural background (Singleton, 2015). Oftentimes teachers refused to mention culture and race, due to the fact both topics made teachers uneasy. "This color-blind philosophy is linked to educators' uncomfortableness in discussing race, their lack of knowledge . . . of their students and the students' peers, and their fears and anxieties that open consideration of differences might incite racial discord or perhaps upset . . . racial harmony" (Irvine, 1990, p. 26). School systems could not put an end to systemic racism and bias because opportunities to bring both sides together did not exist. Cultural understanding between minority students and teachers were oftentimes missed, because "many school systems

have yet to attract and maintain a sizable number of educators of color or indigenous staff" (Singleton, 2015, p. 142). "Racial conflict among educators and between educators and students cannot be resolved when White educators are unaware of their racial culture and people of color and indigenous people feel unsafe to reveal the prevailing characteristics of Whiteness" (Singleton, 2015, p. 195).

"Even teachers from students' same ethnic background can make unwarranted assumptions about what students know" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 107) so heterogeneously paired student and teacher relationships required a great deal of work. Parents and teachers worked together to align, value, and respect the home expectations at school, and the school expectations at home. Oftentimes teachers overcompensated at school because "even though it is the primary caregiver's job to teach the child how to act and what appropriate responses are, if that has not occurred, the school must step in and do the job" (Davis, 2012, p. 99). Some students experienced expectations at home vastly varied from the rules and expectations at school. "Once again, unless we make our expectations clear and model them for students, we may be placing our culturally diverse learners in an uncomfortable classroom situation" (Davis, 2012, p. 63). "Many times students of poverty don't respond the way a teacher expects or considers appropriate" (Payne, 2013, p. 117). A teacher unfamiliar with a student's cultural background may have placed the student in a situation in which the child faced disciplinary actions. Gay (2005) stated "Educators tend to operate on the assumption that school codes of behavior are universal and commonly understood and are acquired from simply living in the broader culture that surrounds schools" (p. 211) missing out on opportunities to teach students holistically in preparation for life beyond the classroom. "To assign an assumption to any child at any

level can be dangerous" (Davis, 2012, p. 96). Whether grade level, age, race, or other commonalities existed, each child was unique and could not be assigned a general label.

"Social class may influence teacher expectations directly or indirectly through test scores, appearance, language style, speed of task performance, and behavior . . . Moreover, teacher expectations are influenced more by negative information about pupil characteristics than by positive data" (Hodges-Persell, 2005, p. 98). "Teachers need to have a secure sense of their own identity, so as not to feel threatened when students or parents say what they honestly think" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 124). "Ultimately, the more we know about ourselves and what truths we hold true, the more courage we may develop to be open to learning from other[s] and the better we can reach and support our diverse learners" (Davis, 2012, p. 19). The negative views and overgeneralizations teachers made began to manifest in the teachers' expectations, conversations, and overall opinion of students of color (Diller & Moule, 2005). In 1999, Day described a conversation with African American author, Mildred Pitts-Walter, who stated, "Look at different cultural patterns within our nation. They [teachers] have to search beyond what is obvious. They need to delve into writings by Asians, African Americans, Africans, etc. to know many points of view" (p. 214).

In alignment with the ramifications outlined within the CCSS, "Classrooms that have depended on excerpts, anthologies, and textbooks will find themselves needing to extend their libraries with literature and, for older students, primary and secondary sources" (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 30). "Classrooms that use only textbooks tend to reduce subject matter knowledge to words to memorize, thereby reducing possibilities for intellectual engagement, particularly if students do not share the

sensory experiences of textbook authors" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 157). Even textbooks became subjective with a biased stance as students related to the information; while the textbook became the lens in which the readers were expected to interpret the contents. Gay (2000) declared, "The inadequacies of textbook coverage of cultural diversity can be avoided by including accurate, wide-ranging, and appropriately contextualized content about different ethnic groups' histories, cultures, and experiences in classroom instruction on a regular basis" (p. 117). The inclusion of authentic materials specific to the backgrounds and cultures of students challenged teachers, because in the past, instruction simply involved the teacher's and student's acceptance of all things documented within a textbook. "[T]extbooks in all subject areas generally exclude information about unpopular perspectives or the perspectives of disempowered groups in society" (Nieto, 2005, p. 410). Gay added, "Information is not always in textbooks, [so] teachers need to develop the habit of using other resources to complement or even replace them" (2000, p. 117). Davis (2012) described how many teachers failed to create a direct link between the positive effects of building relationships with students and their overall academic performance – students who were at ease and felt welcomed in the classroom, performed better when the students received support by caring peers and a trusted adult. A vital role in improved academic achievement of underserved students was an established connection between the teacher and students (Payne, 2013). In the researcher's experience, teachers who built relationships with students learned individual cultural perspectives. "During the first months of the school year, take time to learn about your children's immediate and extended families – their important traditions, roles, and experiences –and how families identify themselves" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p.

71). "Learning about the cultures of our students and learning how to build relationships across cultures are strategies to support classroom instruction" (Davis, 2012, p. 15). "It is the teacher's responsibility to find out, become familiar with, and respect knowledge students bring to school, and to organize curriculum and learning activities in such a way that students are able to activate and use that knowledge" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 106). A student's cultural attributes should be nurtured to encourage student achievement and a sense of belonging, not only inside the classroom, but within the entire world as well (Lynch, 2011). Sato and Lensmire (2009) reported, "When we believe there is value in what a child brings into the classroom from their home culture, we listen for that value and build formal educational experiences on what the student brings with them" (p. 368). Teachers who incorporated students' backgrounds into lessons and activities within the classroom, allowed the students' voices to be heard and feel a part of the social and academic environment, thus promoting motivation and engagement. "Finding ways for students to make connections to their own lives and to other texts can build motivation in the most stubborn of readers," (Davis, 2012, p. 156) which essentially kept students focused and engaged. A balance needed to exist within the curriculum for all cultures and backgrounds of the entire student population since "inequitable opportunities, privileges, and life experiences based on economic class deeply affect young children's lives" (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010, p. 101). "When life experiences are ignored, dismissed, or devalued, students infer that their personal perspectives and world views are nonessential to their learning experiences" (Burke, Adler & Linker, 2008, p. 66) and left students disengaged academically and socially.

In *What Teacher Preparation Programs Can Do to Better Prepare Teachers to*

Meet the Challenges of Educating Students Living in Poverty, Hughes (2010) wrote, “The role of education in combating poverty must focus not only on the curriculum and policies implemented in schools but also on teacher attitudes, beliefs, and classroom practices” (p. 57). Teachers oftentimes were unaware of desensitized attitudes and behaviors towards students who may appear different or were actually different. In 2005, Diller and Moule stated, “Most teachers regularly, though unknowingly, discriminate against culturally different students by lacking the sensitivity, knowledge, and skills necessary to teach them properly” (p. 2). Being culturally sensitive required teachers to remain reflective and open to uncovering areas beyond a personal cultural scope. In 2010, Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards noted, “Ongoing learning about yourself, as well as about the children and families you serve, makes it possible to effectively decide what to say, what to do, when to wait, and when to act in many different kinds of settings” (p. 21). According to Burke, Adler & Linker (2008), “While the [Caucasian] teachers are academically qualified and well intentioned, their insights often lack an appropriate cultural framework and serve to act as barriers to effectively make use of their knowledge to localize and humanize the curriculum” (p. 68). In 2014, Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) found:

> The deficit paradigm is rooted in the outdated belief that intellectual and temperamental differences between racial groups are innate and unresponsive to educational intervention, such that students from some groups are less likely to achieve at high levels compared with their peers from the dominate cultural group. (p. 193)

Some groups of individuals understood the differences in achievement between African

American students and Caucasian students and described the differences as inevitable due to the natural human makeup – regardless of intense academic and social exposure. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) attributed the paradigm responsible for the achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasian counterparts as an absence of "culturally responsive curriculum" in which the students related (p. 194).

The use of culturally considerate curricula and assessments helped students feel capable of success, which in turn boosted a student's level of confidence and overall motivation. Marbley et al. (2008) stated, "Subjective testing denies children of color enrichment opportunities and the realization of their competence and fosters the belief these children can't learn" (p. 16). The connection between the lack of motivation and decrease in academic achievement of African American students, and the curriculum and resources used in school systems, absent of culturally relevant content, did not come as a surprise. A predominately African American school in Atlanta, Georgia, piloted a full curriculum infused with African American culture and content and found the school performed higher than the previous years after adapting culturally sensitive curriculum (Amuleru-Marshall, 1990). "[W]hen educators assess student performance, much of the process and content of the assessment has more to do with the teacher's culture than the student's culture" (Singleton, 2015, p. 195). Not only should the curriculum and assessments be culturally inclusive, teachers needed to be culturally competent to adequately assess a wide range of diversities. According to Cartledge and Milburn (1995), when students displayed cultural behaviors, individuals outside of that culture viewed the behavior as erratic, unacceptable, and unfit for general education settings (as cited in Delgado-Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). Children who displayed 'culturally

based behaviors' grew up to be adults, who later became parents, who displayed similar behaviors outside of the norm. The researcher believed a deeper understanding of cultural sensitivity provided teachers a better method for handling 'culturally-based behaviors' without passing judgment.

Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards (2010) mentioned families of a lower socioeconomic makeup often did not have the means to supply children with essential academic materials to strengthen learning (2010). A teacher unfamiliar with a parent's cultural practice often viewed an action as neglectful and indecent, while families who experienced financial hardships often could not afford to miss work to attend conferences, to volunteer, or attend various school activities. Parents were merely a part of the culture of individuals working hard to survive and less about the parent's disinterest (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010). In the researcher's experience, a lack of cultural competence prevented teachers from comfortably grading African American students' writing in the home-language, and resulted in lower grades on assignments and were unable to set a baseline to reference for remediation in writing. Diller and Moule (2005) discussed, "It is also critical for teachers to familiarize themselves with a student's culture so that behavior may be understood within its own cultural context" (p. 16). For example, in the African American community, the expression 'Shut Up' was used in response to something that was too good to be true. A teacher without a cultural understanding could have mistaken the term as a form of disrespect. Delpit (2006) described an experience as a houseguest in which an African American mom told her young son, "Boy, get your rusty behind in that bathtub!" (p. 34). Caucasian mothers typically posed questions on what the parent wanted the child to do –

instead of a direct request to do so. Miscommunications between teachers and students oftentimes stemmed from a lack of understanding, due to cultural ignorance or insensitivity.

Teachers needed to eliminate the blanketed education approach of what worked with one group, should work with the other group, because no two learners were the same. Davis (2012) mentioned that teachers should never make general statements or assumptions regarding student abilities. Conchas (2006) wrote, "It is not self-evident that what works for the majority, usually middle-class Whites, also will work for others" (p. 111). Protheroe (2004) noted, "Within any given ethnic group, individuals vary greatly in their experiences, beliefs, individual preferences, and personalities" (p. 38). Any teacher worth certification, prided themselves on tailored instruction to meet the needs of each of the students, even if the instruction did not fit the large majority. Teachers used culturally engaging resources and materials to grab the students' attention for the students to master unfamiliar mainstream concepts (Protheroe, 2004). "Not understanding, accepting, or using their culture as instructional tools means that these students do not have access to high-quality instructional opportunities and interactions comparable to those of their European American counterparts" (Gay, 2005, p. 237). Without the same cultural inclusion of content as the Caucasian students who sat in the same classrooms, under the same instruction, with what appeared as the same opportunities, African American students failed.

Several possible theories and explanations existed for the achievement gap between African American students and Caucasian counterparts and the necessary steps toward combating the issue. "There is no single cause or origin for the current crisis in

literacy education for African American males, although there are contributing factors, like poverty and lack of access to culturally relevant books" (Hughes-Hassell & Rawson, 2011, p. 17). "Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor health and mental health. Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young" (Sleeter & Grant, 2009, p. 6). "Children of Color are often at risk, and it is especially critical for their parents to create within them a good psychological base grounded in a strong and positive sense of self" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 101).

Schools and classrooms were supposed to be a safe place for students to escape poverty, yet not thinking of poverty was nearly impossible with so many unintentional triggers in school. Unfortunately, students were reminded of the impoverished lifestyles each time the students compared personal hygiene to a classmate or when the student desired a toy or supply another student had (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). Young people were able to read adults well; children knew how to observe others to determine how to feel or respond in certain situations. (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010) Diller and Moule (2005) argued, "Students of Color are highly sensitized to the nuances of prejudice and racism and can identify such attitudes very quickly" (p. 37). "Students are also reminded of poverty through observing a teacher's response to other disadvantaged individuals in literature, the neighborhood, or within their own classrooms" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 182). A popular belief of Hughes (2010) in work on teacher program preparation was, "[I]f educators and policymakers want to close the achievement gap between poor children and their middle-class counterparts . . . special attention must be placed on the social and educational needs of poor students" (p. 62). "When the cultures of students and

teachers are not congruent, someone loses out" (Gay, 2005, p. 237). Sato and Lensmire (2009) wrote, "There seems to be agreement on many fronts that teachers need better models, practices, and frameworks for teaching students from a multitude of backgrounds, especially if the students represent cultures and social classes that are different from the teacher's" (p. 365). "It [teaching] is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students, are included in its implementation" (Gay, 2000, p. 21).

Students were too complex and too dynamic to educate through veils of prejudice and preconceived notions. "When black students use a more informal, nonstylistic manner of verbal communication, they are likely to speak black English. School personnel consider this language an inferior dialect or a variant of standard English" (Irvine, 1990, p. 30). Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) explained the language barrier between Caucasian and African Americans, when two African American siblings were labeled as learning disabled based on a speech teacher's assessment, due to the use of 'Black language' instead of grammatically correct sentences. Socio-economic differences not only affected the social experiences of impoverished children, but money, or a lack thereof, also impacted the language acquisition of impoverished families (see Table 1).

Table 1

Research about Language in Children, Ages One to Four, in Stable Households by Economic Group

Number of words exposed to	Economic group	Affirmations (strokes)	Prohibitions (discounts)
13 million words	Welfare	1 for every	2
26 million words	Working class	2 for every	1
45 million words	Professional	6 for every	1

Source: From *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* by B. Hart & T. R. Risley, as cited in Payne, 2013, p. 33).

Research revealed educating impoverished students required a skillset, not necessarily innate, and called for teachers to reflect on the differences in personal practices and experiences, to better understand the needs of the individuals served. Sato and Lensmire (2009) stated, “Preparing teachers to support students who live in poverty begins by helping teachers understand how their own values and experiences might differ from their students” (p. 365). Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) expressed the importance of uncovering underlying issues or voids in the adults’ cultural understanding when dealing with adult behaviors and the relationship to student growth. The aforementioned adults should reflect consistently through journaling or through honest conversations with other trusted adults (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

“It is impossible to appreciate the impact of culture on the lives of others, particularly students, if one is out of touch with his or her own cultural background” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 15). Teachers understood the value they had in shaping the esteem and cultural pride of students. “Young children need caring adults to help them construct a positive sense of self and a respectful understanding of others. A person’s early childhood years lay the foundation for a developmental and experiential journey that continues into adulthood” (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010, p. 11). “Our job as teachers is to reach and teach all learners. What might seem an overwhelming task can be better accomplished through understanding ourselves, as well as understanding the cultural practices of the learners in front of us” (Davis, 2012, p. 59). “Educators should be diligent in ensuring that curriculum content about ethnically diverse groups is accurate, authentic, and comprehensive” (Gay, 2000, p. 142).

Since the beginning years of a child’s life provided the groundwork for the

remaining years, incorporating relevant, adequate, and culturally sensitive texts played a huge role in the type of adult students later became. Diller and Moule (2005) explained cultural competence "entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awarenesses and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching" (p. 2). Adequate preparation, training, and experience required more work on the teachers' behalf, but the researcher found cultural understanding benefitted students and improved student-teacher relationships.

Some teachers "understand and even endorse the importance of being aware of cultural differences in classroom interactions" (Gay, 2000, p. 13) Teachers needed to tie the curriculum to things which captured student interest. A student would rather not try something and accept failure and a consequence, than to try hard to do well at something the student believed did not matter (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Gay (2000) defined Culturally Responsive teaching as "using the 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" (p. 29). Sleeter and Grant (1994) stated teachers who supported the idea of teaching all students, regardless of the cultural background, went to great lengths so the students reached specific academic goals. Culturally competent teachers used the vernacular of African American students to teach the techniques and mechanics of standard American English through recording what was spoken to apply the proper writing skills against what was stated (Gay, 2000). "Students vary in ability, motivation, persistence, learning style, and numerous other personality traits and behaviors" (Irvine, 1990, p. 11). "No classroom is completely

homogeneous. Teachers learn to expect differences among their students. Invariably, for any set of standards to which a class of students is expected to adhere, some students adhere better than others" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 61).

"Language diversity is also increasing among the nation's student population" (Gay, 2000, p .vii). "Educators tend to worry excessively about whether students whose native language is not English will learn English, and in the process these educators do not focus sufficiently on the students' overall academic development" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 63). "Most teachers now in the classroom and in teacher education programs are likely to have students from diverse ethnic, racial, and language groups in their classrooms during their careers" (Gay, 2000, p. vii). Sleeter and Grant (1994) believed students needed to be taught the English language and given time and experiences to practice using the English language without being made to feel intimidated by the complexity.

"When teaching reading and writing to students whose native language or dialect is not Standard English, teachers need to distinguish between mechanics and meaning" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 65). "Language is a powerful and transformative part of culture. Like culture, language is learned, it is shared, and it evolves and changes over time. . . . It is a forceful instrument for giving individuals, groups, institutions, and cultures their identity" (Ovando, 2005, p. 289). Schools with predominate Caucasian student and teacher populations, viewed the culture and language required by minority students as voids, While Black communities and minority stakeholders viewed culture and language as a powerful platform to enhance student learning (Sleeter, 2005). Teachers learned to embrace the home languages of students to realize differences in

language were not seen as difficulties in language. Outside of standard English, students' home-languages, "have their own grammatical and phonological rules and appropriate cultural styles, and they are valid means of expression rather than 'deficient' language systems" (Ovando, 2005, p. 309). Students wrote outside the traditional grammatical structures of standard English, but the writing made complete sense in a student's home language. "Effective communication is simultaneously a goal, a method, and the essence of quality classroom instruction. Yet communicating with ethnically diverse students is often problematic for many teachers" (Gay, 2000, p. xv) "Communication styles differ among groups and within groups. Understanding student communication styles is critical. When we don't understand our students' cultural communication style, we may be contributing to their school failure" (Davis, 2012, p. 61). "Cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students result in conflict, distrust, hostility, and possible school failure for black students" (Irvine, 1990, p. 26). "Numerous misconceptions and confusions surround interactions among communication, culture, and education" (Gay, 2000, p. xv).

Theorists well versed of differences related to culture, debated the reason African Americans and various minorities failed at such high rates when compared against Caucasian counterparts; many attributed the difference to an inconsistency or complete contradiction of the norms and practices at home, versus the norms and practices at school (Perry et al., 2003). Culturally competent teachers tapped into the findings to educate beyond the textbook. The desire to improve, charged teachers with educating students holistically; in which vital lessons and skills students needed, were now taught. "All learning is not limited to the classroom" (Whitby, 2014, para. 4). "Supporting

teaching and learning requires addressing students' social service needs, as well as their academic ones, and this broad-based support is essential to closing achievement gaps" (Van Roekel , 2008, p. 1). When a teacher met the social needs of students, he or she also met the academic needs and progressed closer to mending the cracks in academia and the two types of students; intellectually sound individuals and those who struggled intellectually. Cultural competence not only benefitted the students, but the teachers as well. In 2005, Diller and Moule declared, "Gaining cultural competence can also provide enormous personal growth in the form of increased self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, nonjudgmental thinking, and broadened consciousness" (p. 27).

African American Student Achievement Implications

"Education is a conservative institution that is slow to change, but make no mistake – changes are occurring" (Whitby, 2015, para. 5). With that being said, however, "significant changes are needed in how African, Asian, Latino, and Native American students are taught in U.S. schools" (Gay, 2000, p. viii). A certain group of schools and districts exhibited policies and rules advantageous for the White majority, but provided grave hindrances for students of color (Diller & Moule, 2005). "Minority students, especially in desegregated schools, do not have access to the same degree of cultural fit" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 68). "Indeed, black students must take responsibility for their behaviors and attitudes that lead to nonachievement, but the educational profession must bear the responsibility for its failure to provide an equal educational opportunity" (Irvine, 1990, p. 16). "The total environment and culture of the school must also be transformed so that students from diverse groups will experience equal status in the culture and life of the school" (Sleeter, 2005, p. ix); "to be successfully educated is not enough to learn only

the dominant culture" (p. 183). "The cultures of schools and different ethnic groups are not always completely synchronized" (Gay, 2000, p. 12). "As children grow, they internalize and become progressively more comfortable and proficient with learning styles congruent with their own culture" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 99). "As children gain exposure to the wider society and its evaluation of themselves and people like themselves, their self-esteem and esteem for their reference group is affected" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 99)

Many factors led to the underperformance of African American students, but the literature noted teachers as the essential component for academic gains in students. "The role that teachers play in the school performance of black children is central and critical. Teachers' personal and cultural attributes as well as their attitudes and behaviors are important" (Irvine, 1990, p.46). According to Willie, Garibaldi, and Reed (1990), "The quality of teaching is the main issue [regarding the academic achievement of African American students] . . . teachers and counselors must have an understanding of the cultural realities of African-American children" (p. 66). The 'cultural realities' were so deeply rooted within African American children, to the requirement to separate themselves from the culture for eight hours during a school day was nearly impossible. According to Losen and Orfield (2002), African American students, grades primary to post-secondary, underperformed in relation to the Caucasian counterparts in reading ability, mathematical performance, and writing. Many children believed teachers did not like them. "These students feel isolated, discouraged, and eventually fail academically" (Irvine, 1990, p. 48). "To give all children the fair and equitable education they deserve, schools need to analyze how it is that they are serving or not serving their students of

color" (Singleton, 2015, p. 59). "When teachers' perceptions are that students of a specific ethnicity or race are not capable of higher levels of academic performance, they will not push such students to perform to the level of their potentials" (Conchas, 2006, p. 42). Americans who thought academic inequality between races was unescapable was due to the lack of sizable social and financial capital in all schools (Singleton, 2015). "We must consciously fight against stereotyping students as poor students, feeling sorry for them and lowering expectations for them. All students need to be held to high standards" (Davis, 2012, p. 101). Sleeter and Grant (1994) stated, "It is important for teachers not to lower their expectations for children's learning" (p. 69). "Many children of color come to believe that they are destined to fail, and they act accordingly" (Gay, 2005, p. 230). " [B]lack children and their parents saw no possibilities for reaching their goals and ambitions, they simply gave up and failed to take school seriously because school had no relevance to their lives or the lives of significant others" (Irvine, 1990, p. 4). "Failure to learn . . . is scrupulously created through policies, practices, attitudes, and beliefs. In a very concrete sense, the results of educational inequality explain by example what a society believes its young people are capable of achieving and what they deserve" (Nieto, 2005, p. 404). "Some Americans seem to believe that disparity and disproportionality in achievement among racial groups is inevitable –the results of obvious differences in the economic and educational resources that different groups can access" (Singleton, 2015, p. 83). Children were "aware of the different expectations teachers had for them, and they noticed differences in the way teachers treated them" (Hodges-Persell, 2005, p. 99). Singleton (2015) added, "Likewise, people of color and indigenous people may distrust the motives of White people collectively without actually

discussing this distrust with the individual White people in their lives" (p. 67). Thus, "Children become what we believe they are: assumptions about childhood have the potential to become self-fulfilling prophesies" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 80)

The academic environment had increasingly become progressive to fit the needs of all types of learners. "We do not need rows of desks to ensure attention" (Whitby, 2015, para. 4). With huge advances in technology and students' added interest in video games, the day and age in which students all sat quietly in the classroom, with desks in straight rows and listened to hours of instruction no longer existed. Fore, Burke, and Martin (2006) wrote, "Schools must become more researched-based, data-driven, and outcomes-oriented when seeking effective approaches to meet the needs of African American children and youth" (p. 16). Just as a student who sat quietly at his or her desk appeared to learn, students who were rambunctious who uncontrollably paced back and forth or wandered the classroom appeared to be distracted, but that was not the case. Whitby (2015) stated, "Quiet and complacent kids are not necessarily signs of students engaged in learning" (para. 4). In the researcher's experience as a classroom teacher in urban education, oftentimes teachers confused student compliance with student engagement; students were quiet so as not to be called on for the answers, not because the students were interested.

Alson (2003) and Taylor (2003) identified several factors related to African American achievement, some of which included: inadequate assessment usage, unbalanced and irrelevant instruction, declined teacher expectations, and a decreased pool of community role models (as cited in Fore et al., 2006). "There is no doubt that male role models both in school and in the home are essential to the academic success of

young African American men" (Conchas, 2006, p. 51). African American students could have more community role models by emphasizing when students received special recognition or earned an award. African American students had more negative images in the neighborhoods than positive ones (Tatum, 2003). Children could be very perceptive and impressionable even at a young age. "Children learn who is important enough to be visible and valued from sources such as children's books, videos and toys, and even their early childhood curriculum" (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010, p. 103). Teachers had to work hard to combat environmental issues students faced, and had the level of cultural competence necessary to respond to and or help students work past issues. "Teachers who are 'real' with students – who talk honestly with them about real issues – can serve as influential role models and can prod students to think about their beliefs" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 95). In the researcher's experience a student's culture played a huge role in how well a student performed academically.

Whether a student knew or not, culture attributed to what the students enjoyed, what the students did, saw, said, and who the student became. Finkelstein, Pickert, Mahoney, and Barry (1998) wrote, "It [culture] is communicated socially, through daily habits of association, rituals of performance, patterns of speech, and rites of passage" (p. 16). With such a large emphasis placed on maintaining and incorporating culture within the classroom, teachers learned more about the students' culture and tapped into parental and societal resources. Willie, Garibaldi, and Reed (1990) stated, "Educators must reach out and serve the needs and interests of African American parents and their children in a way that moves them into the larger society without destroying their ethnic identity or neighborhoods" (p. 82). Fordham, as cited in Thomas and Columbus (2009), suggested

some African American students perceived identities and cultures needed to be stripped to be successful amongst Caucasian counterparts, whenever students were outnumbered racially in any academic setting. Data and research proved school systems were not inviting and readily accessible to students from varying cultures, even more so for students of color (Diller & Moule, 2005).

"It is well established that White students have significant educational advantages over Students of Color. One need only look at differences in the amount of money and resources available in White suburban schools as compared with inner-city schools" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 63). "Our students are being shortchanged. They could be learning much more and much more deeply than they are learning now" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 5). Academically struggling schools received less funding per student each year. The "cash-strapped schools . . . have increasingly less revenue to invest in instructional resources" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 165) even though the "No Child Left Behind [Act] authorizes money to low-performing schools to bring up test scores" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 180). Lack of adequate funds made the attempts to close the ever-widened achievement gap even harder. "Moreover, inequitable conditions such as school funding and the distribution of resources for learning also help explain why some students are successful and others are not" (Nieto, 2005, p. 415).

> Rather than blaming factors external to schools for causing the racial achievement gap, educators should address the critical factors within their control that influence student achievement, such as qualifications, expectations, and cultural proficiency of educators, the rigor of the curriculum, and the effectiveness of instruction. (Singleton, 2015, p. 87)

“Having worked in schools where 98 percent of the students are on reduced price school meals, the disparities between these schools’ resources and those of the schools in affluent districts are obvious” (Davis, 2012, p. 100). Funding aside, even in the area of hiring highly qualified instructors to teach classes, Caucasians had an advantage, since the candidates resembled the bulk of the hiring pool. “The majority of prospective teachers are White, female, and middle class and have had little previous contact with Children of Color” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 168). “In many instances, teachers make such referrals [remedial services] based on misinterpretations of student behaviors” (Conchas, 2006, p. 41). “Low achievers are expected to create more disciplinary problems than high achievers” (Gay, 2000, p. 59). "When a black student...misbehaved...the transgression is evaluated with reference not only to the individual child, but to the race, sex, and class groups to which the student belongs. For black males, the outcome can be alarmingly discriminatory" (Irvine, 1990, p. 18). “Males of color, especially African American males, experience a highly disproportionate rate of disciplinary actions and suspension in school” (Banks, 2005, p. 3). Caucasian teachers questioned why African American young men appeared increasingly violent as if the young men were taught to engage in physical altercations at school – unaware the aggression found among many African American young males resulted from the unrelenting White dominance in the world (Singleton, 2015). Irvine added, “Discriminatory discipline practices damage black students’ educational progress and life chances. Uneven dispensations of punishment by teachers cause more student misbehavior” (Irvine, 1990, p. 19). “Typically, Black high school students demonstrate low levels of academic performance. Further, the rate of suspensions and expulsions is

higher among Black students than among other student population groups" (Conchas, 2006, p. 41). Black students typically received strict disciplinary action than other races of children, thus causing students to see themselves as inferior - which led to students who acted out more often, were frequently suspended from school, or forced to seek alternative education (Irvine, 1990).

"The language, style of walking, glances, and dress of black children, particularly males, have engendered fear, apprehension, and overreaction among many teachers and school administrators" (Irvine, 1990, p. 27). African American young men were setup to be viewed as scary and dangerous for quite some time now (Delpit, 2006). "[A] disproportionate use of severe disciplinary practices, which leads to black students' exclusion from classes, their perceptions of mistreatment, and feelings of alienation and rejection, which result ultimately in their misbehaving more and/or leaving school" (Irvine, 1990, p. 16). White teachers subconsciously felt connected to individuals who were always in places of authority historically, which resulted in African Americans labeled as troubled or aggressive after the social constructs of White people were challenged (Singleton, 2015).

Not only did schools discriminate against African American students, the news aided in the destruction of the African American male reputation as well. "Media portrayals of black people have depicted black youth as violent, gang-oriented, and abusive" (Irvine, 1990, p. 17). Views in the media were not completely to blame as some teachers shared in adding to the stereotypical perpetuations as well. "When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation" (Gay, 2000, p. 46). "Part of the puzzle of black

nonachievement has to be related to this predicament: some teachers are in classrooms with black and low-income students whom they prefer not to teach and, even worse, do not like as individuals" (Irvine, 1990, p. 48). "Not knowing the nonverbal cues of your students might cause you to assume they are acting in a disrespectful manner or not paying attention, rather than simply following your instructions" (Davis, 2012, p. 62). Not only did Caucasian teachers misinterpret the nonverbal clues of African American students but, "the verbal communication style of black student's baffles school personnel, especially white teachers, who fail to understand black students' expressive language" (Irvine, 1990, p. 27).

"As a consequence of their implicit beliefs about the subject, learning, and the teacher's role, all teachers appear to hold a set of beliefs about individual differences among students" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 94). Conchas (2006) described experiences from an urban high school off the west coast where students stated, "Teachers have been exposed to stereotypes for so long that they 'help in making stereotypes come true.' In other words, teachers are both passive and active agents in perpetuating inequality" (p. 17). "[S]tudents whose learning style diverges from predominant teaching styles are at a disadvantage" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 20). "The widely shared cultural beliefs and expectations . . . are so fully integrated into teachers' worldviews that they fail to see them as mutable. The more widely shared a belief is, the less likely it is to be questioned – or even noticed" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 100). "Teachers must be aware of the cultural values that inform their teaching and recognize that these may be at odds with the cultural styles of their students" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 51). "[C]urrent pedagogies and practices are often defined in terms of dominant Northern European cultural values and

norms and, therefore, limit the ability of teachers to adequately address and serve the needs of non-White populations" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 151). "[M]uch of the usual classroom instruction discourages some students, turns off others, and fails to engage the minds of many. Further, those who tend to become turned off, disengaged, or frustrated are disproportionately lower-class students and students of color" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 21). "[A]ll people generally feel more interested when material relates to them, and they are generally 'smarter' when they can connect it with what they know already" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 152). "Everyone needs to see her or his own reality mirrored in the curriculum. Students who experience curriculum mainly as a window into someone else's world often disengage after a while" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 150). "Thus, students who feel unwelcome in their classes may become unmotivated and uninterested in learning" (Ford, 2005, p. 390).

"People of Color have for many years watched their children being placed in remedial classrooms or tracked as having special needs" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 154). While, "lower class students tend to be sorted into lower-ability and remedial classes, whereas upper-class students tend to be sorted into college-bound classes" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 134). Many African American students received special education as a consequence for underperformance, but rarely were education systems proactive in determining the cause of the underperformance. "Children whose school performance is far below average are often considered mentally deficient" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 59). "Many African American...students who are labeled mentally retarded function normally and are considered normal in their homes and communities. . . . the percentage of students of color in these programs [special education] is too high" (Banks, 2005, p. 19).

"Rather than build on what the students have in order to make their learning easier and better, the teachers want to correct and compensate for their 'cultural deprivations" (Gay, 2000, p. 46).

Teachers in the United States had a narrow vision of what an education for African American males meant and as a result of the teacher's vision, often categorized all African American males from the primary to the post-secondary level as 'at-risk', which placed a stigma on the psyche and hindered literacy development (Tatum, 2003). "[S]ome equate poverty with lower academic achievement" (Davis, 2012, p. 99). "To better understand students and adults from poverty, a working definition of poverty is, "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (Payne, 2013, p. 7). Nieto (2005) wrote, "[C]onsidering students to be 'at risk' simply because of their ethnicity, native language, family characteristics, or social class is another clear sign that some students have been defined by conventional wisdom as uneducable based simply on their identity" (p. 404). Davis (2012), mother of a biracial son, author, and teacher with over four decades in education, described the classroom experience; "As a White female, I belong to the majority of public school teachers in the United States, and I operate, often unaware, from an unofficial handbook of White Women's Hidden Rules that guide my behavior" (p. 7). Teachers oftentimes subconsciously created academic crutches for African American students with a, savior to the helpless Blacks, approach of teaching. "Even though they [students of color] must attend school, their willingness to engage in the learning process with the teacher whom they are assigned may be seriously compromised" if the student suspected racist or culturally biased teacher behaviors (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 42).

Teachers worked towards reaching each student so each student thrived without fully relinquishing a cultural identify. “It is important to assist children from culturally diverse backgrounds in maintaining the identity of their home culture while simultaneously helping them to function effectively in the mainstream environment” (Delgado-Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997, p. 79). Completely disregarding a student’s cultural upbringing was impossible, due to the upbringing, which directly enhanced or hindered students’ academic progress. Teachers must have met the cultural demands of every child for the child to fulfill the academic demands of the teacher (Marbley et al., 2008). Davis (2012) wrote, “My culture is so familiar I do not recognize it as specific to my culture and assume others can adapt easily” (p. 7). Due to a teacher’s upbringing, the possibility existed he or she was unaware of any displayed cultural insensitivity. Eurocentrism populated both social and behavioral norms at such a magnitude, the people who were raised within the culture were oblivious to the experiences and occurrences of different cultures (Lynch, 2011). Davis (2012) described a realization of cultural differences and the unintentional impact those differences had on students, “I may assume my culturally diverse learners will know and understand them [cultural expectations] . . . I may expect them to adapt to my White female culture because it is the ‘air I breathe’ in the public school classrooms where I teach” (p. 7). “Many serious mistakes can be avoided if the teacher prefaces each attempt at motivating students and encouraging academic success by considering what it might mean within the context of the student’s cultural group” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 16).

“Because racism sometimes expresses itself in subtle ways, it’s not always easy to identify” (Nodelman, 1996, p. 127). "Racism and the devalued position of blacks in our

society cannot be ignored as a primary contributing factor to black underachievement" (Irvine, 1990, p. 4). “It [racism] is the source of, or at least a contributing factor to, many of the problems that culturally different students face in schools” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 35). Davis (2012) shared, “As a White teacher, I want to believe that I treat all students the same. Yet my students do not all come to me with the same needs and experiences . . . [they] come with different racial experiences . . . I can never truly understand” (p. 25). “Some students experience academic difficulties related to dealing with racism” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 36). Factors and features in all systems separated one type of person from another type of person. “Look in any classroom in any school and you will immediately notice differences in children’s height, weight, style of dress, hair and skin color, and other physical characteristics” (Heward, Cavanaugh, & Ernsbarger, 2005, p. 317). “Even within racially homogeneous programs, hierarchies and divisions exist. They usually reflect differences in social class and occupations, which, in turn, influence access to resources, child-rearing expectations, and leisure activities” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 70). “For children, poverty can be a very difficult situation to handle, as usually there is extreme discrimination associated with poor or homeless people” (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 182). Teachers subconsciously paid more attention to students with more affluent parents, because those parents were typically more boisterous when requesting resources and services for children (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). “Families that have been historically well served by schools expect far more . . . for their own children: They expect and demand complex intellectual work that will prepare their children for top colleges and leadership roles as adults” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 128).

“Low-income students represent more than 42 percent of this country’s student

population" (Davis, 2012, p. 99). "The poverty rate in the United States was 11.7 percent in 2001, with 6.8 million families and 32.9 million people living in poverty" (Banks, 2005, p. 430). While "Poverty contributes to lower test scores, psychological stresses, and lack of language acquisition" (Davis, 2012, p. 98). "If we want to help teachers develop awareness and pedagogies that are sensitive to children who live in poverty, we must first challenge the misinformation that is being disseminated and set a new course" (Santo & Lensmire, 2009, p. 365). A misconception existed where African American children did not want to learn or be challenged when in reality, "some educators, sadly, steer some Students of Color, particularly African American and Latino males, away from academically challenging courses, thinking that the students need to take more 'practical' classes or classes in which they will not fail" (Davis, 2012, p. 102). European-American teachers needed to get rid of personal biases specially related to culture and learn about the background of the students in the classroom (Lynch, 2011). "Blacks' physical and emotional well-being depended on the ability to judge credible sources, look for alternatives and evidence, detect bias, distinguish between facts and opinions, understand contradictions of words and behaviors, and analyze the unstated as well as stated" (Irvine, 1990, p. 15). Children of poverty dealt with unimaginable issues; from increased disease and sickness, to the subjection of intense violence, drug abuse, and oftentimes physical abuse (Books, 2004). Having to deal with racial concerns and regular racial hatred was stressful to students of color, and explained why a significantly higher number of African American males, when compared to Caucasian males, were placed in special education programs (Diller & Moule, 2005). Despite impoverished children's complicated backgrounds and lives at home, Books (2004) noted children were

"assigned, again in skewed numbers, to the nation's worst public schools – schools in the worst states of disrepair and with the lowest levels of per-pupil funding" (p. 5).

"Many Students of Color are poor and have limited resources and skills for competing in a White-dominated school system" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 36) Singleton (2015) stated, "Whiteness is also the dominant culture that governs the American school system. Rather than being defined as a separate and equal culture, it is most often understood as the 'correct' culture or the 'right' way of learning" (p. 207). Often, older children in impoverished households functioned as the parent – with little to no adult supervision or input, and many raised younger siblings in place of parents. (Payne, 2013, p. 112). Poverty extended beyond not having enough food, raggedy clothes and terrible living conditions; students internalized poverty and what living impoverished and the perception of poverty meant. Poverty was as a heavy load on impoverished students' minds (Wrigley, 2013). Since "poverty takes an enormous physical, emotional, and economic toll on families, neighborhoods, and communities" (Books, 2004) a student's upbringing and background played a huge role in the academic success of the student. The activities and materials exposed to students should involve the input of students. Hughes-Hassell and Rawson (2011) stated teachers should "utilize enabling texts with African American males and involve them in the selection of texts that the young men identify as significant and meaningful" (p. 15) to keep African American males engaged in reading. "Teacher preparation programs must be reformed to place greater emphasis on the concept of poverty and how it relates to education and academic achievement of students who live in poverty" (Hughes, 2010, p. 62). "The key to addressing and eliminating racial achievement disparities is increasing teacher effectiveness with

students of color and indigenous students in the classroom" (Singleton, 2015, p. 216). Sato and Lensmire (2009) wrote the following:

> Research on the role of cultural relevance in the classroom teaching identifies how students' culture – the values, beliefs, practices, and experiences they bring with them from their homes, communities, and heritage-can be an integral part of a student's successful academic experience when teachers know how to relevantly build on them. (p. 367)

School systems operated like ethnicities; cultures with specific ways in which the students behaved, how the students felt about things, and personal attitudes about education. When students did not adopt the school's culture, the students felt a lack of belonging (Diller & Moule, 2005). "Parental involvement . . . acknowledges the importance of parents in the lives of children, recognizes the diversity of values and perspectives within the community, provides . . . a collaborative problem-solving structure, and increases the opportunity for all students to learn school" (Banks, 2005, p. 425). "When schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enroll in higher level programs" (Van Roekel, 2008, p. 1). "Teachers need to know the expectations parents have for their children, the languages spoken at home, the family's values and norms, and how children are taught in their homes and communities" (Banks, 2005, p. 426). When all stakeholders cooperated, and had the students' best interest at heart, students were more academically successful.

"Building stronger relationships between schools and communities also can be important in providing support for Black students" (Conchas, 2006, p. 60). "The African

American community sees not hiding feelings from Whites until their trustworthiness can be assured as dangerous and potentially self-destructive" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 78). Parents with students of color were apprehensive about partnering and supporting school systems because "the schools that are failing their children are the same ones that failed many of them when they were students" (Gay, 2005, p. 235). "Parents are supportive of the teachers they believe like their children and want their children to succeed" (Banks, 2005, p. 432). In the researcher's professional opinion, each student adopted the attitudes and feelings of grandparents, parents, and even older siblings subconsciously; students adopted the parent's opinion or view of teachers or the school as a whole. "They [children] often imperceptibly, pick up parental prejudices with little awareness (at least at first)" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 30).

A parent's behaviors and experiences as a former student, coupled with whether school systems embraced and identified with parents as adults, played a factor in the student's academic experience (Whitby, 2015, para. 4). Diller and Moule (2005) wrote, "Students and parents may not trust the motives or abilities of educators because of past experiences with the system. They [students and parents] may believe they will not be understood culturally or have their needs met" (p. 2). "Likewise, people of color and indigenous people may distrust the motives of White people collectively without actually discussing this distrust with the individual White people in their lives" (Singleton, 2015, p. 67).

"How a teacher teaches is also important and could suggest or influence a point of view" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 132). "Schools are places where one must put aside personal values and beliefs in order to hold a position of wholesome neutrality in areas of

difference" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 37). Just as "the language used in the curriculum and by the teacher should be nonsexist" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 187), both curriculum and teacher language should be absent of any implications of a superior or dominant culture. "Caucasian students essentialized African Americans when they assumed the culture and experiences of characters – unlike themselves, and when depicted in a text were representations of the entire race or demographic" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 129). Minority students were charged with working hard academically in order to compete or remain relevant when paralleled with Caucasian peers. Nieto (2005) declared, "Students from subordinated cultures may internalize the message that their cultures, families, languages, and experiences have low status, and they learn to feel inferior" (p. 406). "Many children form definite ideas about racial/ethnic groups in the absence of any direct contact" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 102). "Biologically, race is nothing more than the color of our skin, texture of our hair, and shape, color, and dimension of physical features such as eyes and lips" but negative connotations, applied to each physical attribute, further separated races and further complicated the one simple concept (Singleton, 2015, p. 166).

"Many educators believe that students from culturally subordinated groups have few experiential or cultural strengths that can benefit their education" (Nieto, 2005, p. 407). Classrooms with students not exposed to diversity in literature, lessons, and language, subconsciously promoted the culture most frequently highlighted and allowed children to develop overgeneralizations and stereotypes for what the students were not shown. "Each of us views the world through a unique lens . . . composed of a diverse spectrum that includes many facets of our lives. . . . This individual way of looking at the

world is our individual perspective through which we judge . . . [the] people around us" (Davis, 2012, p. 7). "One of the most noticeable differences are skin color and racial features, which may become topics of prejudice or discrimination, especially in an early childhood setting" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 178). "Students learn a tremendous amount about others...by observing the world around them. . . . In school, young people also learn about others in ways that school might not intend by observing who does what or who is treated in what way" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 79). "Some children readily absorb racial stereotypes and use them to exclude others [while] others are able to see that racially related exclusion is wrong and actively resist it" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 101). "When people of color internalize negative racial messages, they may lose hope, thus buying into notions of second-class or subservient citizenship" (Singleton, 2015, p. 117). "By late childhood, children tend to 'overcategorize' and stereotype many things. Their categories will have acquired many descriptive attributes that they apply to whoever or whatever seems to fit the category" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 91). "Ignorance of people different from ourselves often breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fears, and the seductive temptation to turn others into images of ourselves" (Gay, 2000, p. 23). Singleton (2015) added, "people of color begin to believe all that they hear about their own racial image, potential, and power" (p. 117) which stressed the significance of positive minority characters and influences.

"The degree of cultural continuity between home and school can vary; the larger the gap, the harder schools need to work to construct bridges" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 57). Parents and teachers should be in constant communication to bridge the widening gap between the school and a student's home life. "In too many classrooms in America,

parents are often viewed as the adversaries of teachers" (Whitby, 2014, para. 1). Once teachers and parents began to become more collaborative, parents found value in what the schools taught, and teachers learned to respect and value what the parents taught at home as well. "Gathering some basic demographic information about the communities in which your families live will also add to your understanding of the context in which they function" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 71). "They [parents] can give teachers a unique and important view of the students as well as help the school garner resources and opportunities that are available in the community" (Banks, 2005, p. 424). Perry et al (2003) stated cultural theorists believed "the disproportionate school failure of African Americans and other racial minorities can be attributed at best to a mismatch and at worst to a conflict between a student's home culture and the culture of the school" (p. 53).

A disconnect between the school culture and the home culture caused students to become overwhelmed and may result in students who consistently misbehaved, flunked out, or dropped out of school (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). "Unless there are deliberate and concerted efforts to alter typical patterns of achievement, many African American males underperform, drop out, or are pushed out of school" (Conchas, 2006, p. 45). "Achievement can be enhanced when teachers attempt to make the culture of the school compatible with the child's culture and to work with the child within her or his zone of proximal development" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 57). School systems needed to redirect attention toward "Changing the culture . . . so that African American males are . . . provided with the support and resources needed to reach high educational goals is the most important step . . . to make high levels of academic achievement the norm among Black males" (Conchas, 2006, p. 60).

"One of the most significant social changes...in the last thirty years is the increase in the percentage of children living with one parent. The number of single-parent families is particularly significant in the African American community" (Banks, 2005, p. 429). As a classroom teacher, African American single-parent households requested the researcher's class on several occasions, due to the researcher as a father-figure who in the demographic the district served, was otherwise absent from the students' lives. Some students of color misbehaved for Caucasian teachers since the teachers symbolized the dominant cultural background, for years viewed as the opposing force to the cultural practices of minorities (Diller & Moule, 2005). Teachers needed to allow students to showcase specific cultural upbringings even as the culture differed from the students' culture.

For example, parent-teacher conferences included grandparents, childhood friends, coworkers, and neighbors in addition to just parents (Diller & Moule, 2005). In the African American community, several teams of individuals collaborated when raising children. Less trivial items in Caucasian households had the ability to become complicated within African American families. Irvine (1990) stated, "How a child feels about himself or herself is . . . determined by the child's perceptions of how a teacher feels about him/her. Students' perceptions of their teachers' feelings toward them have been found to be highly correlated with the students' self-concept" (p. 48).

Not only did children's self-concepts develop from the teachers' perspectives, "Children develop their self-concepts through interactions with other people in various contexts. The home and neighborhood provide contexts, as does the school" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 99). Students not only learned from the classroom teachers, close friends,

and family, but students also learned from the neighboring communities as well. “In addition to the vital role that parents and family members play in a child’s education, the broader community too has a responsibility to assure high-quality education for all students” (Van Roekel, 2008, p. 1). Many students lived in communities with people and families who looked similar and often had very little opportunity for the lives to intermingle until school – thus leaving individuals at a disadvantage when seeking to develop deeper, more meaningful experiences with different cultures (Gay, 2000). “[L]egalized segregation has long been abolished and anti-exclusionary laws strictly enforced, the great majority of blacks still live in highly segregated, impoverished communities” (Patterson & Fosse, 2015, p. 1). “Although teachers may not affect children as strongly as parents do, teachers nonetheless are among the most important adults in young peoples’ lives” (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 95). “The key to understanding and working with Families of Color is an appreciation of their diversity, especially in relation to mainstream White Families” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 107). Knowing the makeup of classrooms were diverse and the communities were racially segregated, a culturally responsive teacher could help bridge the racial divide in class by including the backgrounds of all of his or her students. “To know what a people believes, one should of course pay attention to what they say, what they portray in music, poetry, and stories” (Perry et al., 2003, p. 27).

Teachers learned a lot about a students’ cultural background from the stories students wrote, the conversations students led in class, and the music listened to and talked about. McCaffrey (2014) stated, “One significant way to engage all students is to have literature that is culturally representative of one’s classroom and community as well

as culturally authentic" (p. 21). Failure to incorporate a student's culture into the classroom stripped a student of the knowledge he or she had acquired prior to entering the class. Davis (2012) wrote, "A culture is the total of everything an individual learns by growing up in a particular context and results in a set of expectations of appropriate behavior in seemingly similar contexts" (Davis, 2012, p. 7). The need for teachers to be culturally competent not only benefited minority students, but students from the cultural majority who wished to become more culturally conscious also benefited. "It [ethnic literature] also is a powerful way to expose students to ethnic groups, cultures, and experiences different from their own to which they may not have access in their daily life" (Gay, 2000, p. 118).

Children's Literature

"The main thrust of children's literature is the didactic effort to educate children into sharing an adult view of the world – and also, of what it means to be a child" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 157). "Reading takes us to other worlds, offering us excitement, solace, understanding, and companionship" (Davis, 2012, p. 155). Covering a wide variety of issues and themes, "children's books are about rabbits who talk; spiders who write; weak children who successfully defeat brawny pirates, toughminded Nazis, or poverty and homelessness" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 165). Books were not only good for teaching academic and social skills, "children's literature can be a powerful, positive force in the lives of children" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 114). "Children's concepts of self result directly from the messages they receive about themselves from the world" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 101). "In other words, literary texts offer children representations of the world and of their own place as children within that world" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 91).

"We live in a society that nurtures and maintains stereotypes: we are all bombarded daily, for instance, with the portrayal of the young black male as monster" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiii). With an increase of negative depictions of youth, more specifically African American young men, opportunities for success appeared slim. Children were surrounded by practicing violence and unfortunately, bore witness to situations and circumstances that were once privy to only police officers and specific branches of the military (Gopalakrishnan, 2011).

Not only have African American youth struggled to find positive examples in the environment, shortages also existed in what the youth read. There were a limited number of books in which youth from lower socio-economic statuses positively existed (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010). If parents and teachers were not careful about the selections of books, "books may expose children to misinformation about themselves and others" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 151). Mass media was a dominant form of influence for students and teachers needed to combat the inaccurate accounts of mass media by altering the classroom curriculum to discuss such issues (Gay, 2000, p. 123). "What is worrisome in recent times, however, is the permeation of violence into every walk of life: on TV, in the media, in games, and so on" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 127). "It is quite unlikely that any one author, book or other reference is ever capable of providing a complete profile of ethnic groups and their cultures, contributions, and experiences" (Gay, 2000, p. 121) so teachers needed to use an array of resources to supplement instruction.

Children read books to learn about the world and everything in the world (McCaffrey, 2014). An author's use of realistic and relatable characters of diverse

backgrounds stood more of a chance of improving student achievement than countless fictitious adventure books about typical Caucasian boys (Gay, 2000, p. 117). “Plenty of resources exist about most ethnic groups and in such variety that all subjects and grades taught in schools can be served adequately” (Gay, 2000, p. 117). “When trying to teach about people of color. . . . White teachers commonly draw on their own interpretation of the European ethnic experience to decide what is relevant to teach, usually without being aware of doing so” (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 148). Teachers should include the students to elaborate on the cultural backgrounds in which the teacher was less familiar. “However, the teacher should not rely exclusively on members of other groups to teach about themselves; if the teacher does not know enough information to get started, there are quite a few excellent teaching resources to use” (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 105).

“Teachers and educators, therefore, can use meaningful resources, such as multicultural and rich literature, to encourage discussions around bullying, poverty, abuse, divorce, abandonment, and child labor, and other situations plaguing our children at school and at home” (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 176). “The study of different literary genres is replete with samples and examples from a wide variety of ethnic authors” (Gay, 2000, p. 30). “If we want children to view a variety of occupations, activities, identities, family structures, and their roles in society. . . . it is important that in the early years they be exposed to nonstereotypic models” (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 113). “Therefore, teachers should routinely use a combination of resources to teach about ethnic and cultural diversity” (Gay, 2000, p. 121). Due to a diverse set of authors and illustrators who exposed students to backgrounds and experiences students normally would not otherwise have, “it’s undeniably important that children of all races and colors read

stories about children of all races and colors written by authors of all races and colors" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 129). Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) wrote, "Books provide excellent opportunities for children to explore . . . the rich diversity of the many people on our planet. In a quality learning environment, children's literature enhances every child's sense of self and connections to the world" (p. 151).

Events that occurred within a book or story, the actions of the characters, and the story line itself were the basis for all fictional texts (Horning, 1997). A basic formula authors used to write substantial fiction: plot, conflict, narrative structure, characters, point of view, and theme were all elements included in all great pieces of children's literature (Horning, 1997). "Children rely on books to teach them about the world. Likewise, literature informed the way in which young readers came to view the world, as well as how they viewed themselves as individuals within the world" (McCaffrey, 2014, p. 19). "One of the main purposes of children's literature is to be inclusive of and provide validation for all children's experiences" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 5). Children's literature included both the good and the bad experiences a child faced. Difficult conversations, such as the loss of a loved one, extreme violence, terror, and war all made the way onto the pages of children's literature (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). Texts should include the points of view and experiences of the intended audience because "the texts of a white-dominated society inevitably express a white view as if it were a universal one – and, thus, ask African American . . . readers to think like whites" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 126). Due to the fact "most children's books start out as an idea in the mind of an author" (Horning, 1997, p. 4) to completely separate experiences and personal biases from the context of books was nearly impossible for authors. Anderson (2013) stated, "Style has to

do with the writing as opposed to the content of a book. It is how an author says something as opposed to what she or he says" (p. 11). The way an author wrote something played an intricate part in the reader's individual interpretation of what was read. In 1996, Nodelman wrote, "because of our differing tastes and interests, partly because each of us has responded to our different experiences of life and literature by developing different expectations and strategies for determining meaning," (p. 1) there was a possibility for several people to read the exact same text and take on completely different interpretations of the content.

Authors and illustrators followed a certain unwritten routine when writing children's texts. Typically, most audiences

> read pictures from left to right. . . . Because we often identify with the first figure we see, the main characters in many picture-book stories appear in illustrations on the lower left, and the characters they struggle with on the upper right. (Nodelman, 1996, p. 233)

The author and the illustrator worked in tandem to create literary magic within popular children's books. The artistic tricks of an illustrator drew more attention to people and things within a children's story by drawing more of it, exaggerating shapes, allowing an object to be a lot brighter or a lot darker than other objects (Horning, 1997). "A picture is a classic example of a sign. Any given picture not only represents something, but communicates further information about the thing it depicts by the ways in which it depicts it" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 185). Illustrators used "line, shape, texture, color, and value" (Horning, 1997, p. 99) to interpret the author's meaning and message behind the words. Illustrators often let readers into the hearts and minds through the way

in which they matched the author's words, with the pictures created on a blank canvas. "As with the overall effects of predominating colors, the colors of specific objects provide information about those objects. The mere fact that the objects were in colors that stand out gives them weight" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 233).

The illustrator played an important role to what the readers took away from a book. "What makes a picture book distinctive is that it conveys its message through a series of pictures with only a small amount of text (or none at all)" (Anderson, 2013, p. 11). There were some cases in which the pictures provided readers with greater insight and understanding than the actual words on the page. "A critical look at any picture's components and how they are related will help you to think about an artist's intent" (Horning, 1997, p. 106). "The most obvious context that makes the illustrations in picture books meaningful is the words that accompany them" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 240). Conflict played a huge role in determining whether a book was exciting or interesting to the readers and the authors of award winning books were sure to find the right balance of conflict. In 1997, Horning noted, a story with little to no conflict made the story less engaging for young readers. Oddly enough, too much conflict within a book may "seem shallow and contrived" (p. 154).

"Two considerations that are at times overlooked, but critical to the success of an individual's reading acquisition are student attitudes about reading and student preference of reading material. Attitude and preference factor into student engagement and motivation to read" (McCaffrey, 2014, p. 22). "Reading about children like themselves has the power to motivate them [students] to participate more in the curriculum" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 10). Anderson (2013) noted, "Children need to see themselves

reflected in stories with positive role models; this tends to increase their self-esteem and pride in their heritage" (p. 173). "Students need to interact with other students who look like them and face similar challenges" (Davis, 2012, p. 241) in textbooks, outside of the traditional European American escapades.

When selecting multicultural texts, teachers benefitted from utilizing less popular texts due to "most mainstream children's literature in North America has been written by whites of European decent, and assumes that being white and of European descent is a norm from which other kinds of people diverge" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 128). Including multiple cultural backgrounds of characters in children's literature allowed a student insight into experiences he or she may never get due to not knowing someone from the culture represented within the book. Gopalakrishnan wrote, "It [multicultural children's literature] gives equal representation and validation to countless voices that had either been silenced or did not have an opportunity to see themselves aptly represented in literature" (2011, p. 24). "The characters are a crucial part of any children's novel, because they serve as a link between the reader and the story" (Horning, 1997, p. 160) and each had varying levels of importance within a story. Horning (1997) added, sometimes authors depicted 'secondary characters' in a stereotypical fashion highlighting the laziness or biasness of the author – "the black kid who's good in basketball or the Asian-American kid who's good in math" (p. 161) both speak to familiar stereotypes countlessly found in literature and movies for decades. Minority students were not the only ones who benefited from seeing minority characters in stories and books. "Vicarious experiences – and ensuring emotional involvement with minority characters in well-written books – have the potential to correct misconceptions about people who are

different than the reader. This may help children avoid developing prejudiced attitudes" (Anderson, 2013, p. 173).

"An author uses three sources to develop characters: the narrator's description, other story characters – how they are treated or mentioned and the character in question – their thoughts, sayings, and actions" (Anderson, 2013, p. 32). Famous African American author, Jeannette Franklin Caines told Day (1999) the things in Day's books came from past personal experiences and explained how students viewed and related to people in the books. "[T]he literature produced by men and women of different ethnic and racial groups tell us something about what it means to be poor, or to live in the barrio or ghetto, or to work in the factory or the home" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 222). Day (1999) wrote, "Virginia [Hamilton] succeeds in creating for her readers original and startling images of themselves; these characters provide unique and positive role models who celebrate being African American" (p. 102). When teaching, teachers must choose works and resources from a plethora of groups to teach children that other authors and styles exist outside of the privileged European male norms (Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Fairytales were a specific genre under the children's fiction genre. "In the clear-cut world of fairy tales, it's easy to figure out whom we should admire and whom we should hate. The distinctions between those who are admirable and those who are hateful are clear from the beginning" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 256). "The characters in a picture book often form what directors call 'stage pictures': They are 'blocked' – that is, given positions in relation to each other that imply their social or emotional relationships" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 235).

In 2013, Anderson wrote, “One way to assess the literary merit of fiction books is to analyze and evaluate the literary elements or various parts of a fiction story: characters, point of view, setting, plot, theme, style, and tone.” (p. 31) “Main characters, especially the central character or protagonist, must be fully developed; that is, readers should learn of the characters’ many traits – their strengths as well as their weaknesses” (Anderson, 2013, p. 32). Children typically identified with the characters within the books read. Anderson (2013) added, “It is essential that readers relate to them (main characters)” (p. 32). Being able to relate to the main characters in a story allowed children an increased opportunity to connect with the story; and thus, heightens a student’s motivation, engagement, and interactions with the books read.

Common Core State Standards

“Standards, high-stakes testing, and disaggregated data have dropped the challenge to close the achievement gap at our school door. Successes and failures have given way to the need for consistency in standards” (Davis, 2012, p. 95), thus birthing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Teachers and administrators alike had reservations due to “the Common Core State Standards are clear that the responsibility for interpreting and implementing these expectations rests on the shoulders of teachers and principals (as well as those of state leaders)” (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 1). “Teachers, more and more, are working within contexts in which they are accountable for students’ performance on assessments” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 154). “The standards are already affecting what is published, mandated, and tested in schools – and also what is marginalized and neglected” (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 1). With that being said, more districts adapted, exchanged, and reworked curriculum because “curriculum serves as a

gatekeeper regulating who gets access to which opportunities in and beyond high school" (Sleeter, 2005, p. 12) and in such an academic emergency, schools utilized the standards to prepare college and career ready high school graduates. "In today's policy context, curriculum is increasingly aligned with content standards and assessments" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 154). "The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a big deal. Adopted by forty-five states so far, the standards represent the most sweeping reform of the K-12 curriculum that has ever occurred in this country" (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 1).

> Probably everyone has experienced curriculum that marches students through textbook pages, workbook activities, and lists of decontextualized skills and bits of knowledge, punctuated periodically by tests. . . . Now teachers are expected to plan curriculum based on state content standards. (Sleeter, 2005, p. 44)

Chaucer (2012) wrote, "The common core is nothing more than sensible standards that guide us on our journey as teachers and learners" (2012, p. x). Sleeter (2005) stated, "content standards are generally promulgated as consensus documents that represent agreement over what is most worth teaching and knowing within a discipline" (p. 54). The CCSS served as a planning agent used to assist educators in teaching relevant lessons and assessments no matter the student or community demographic. If the CCSS were "designed to prepare students for both higher education and the workplace," (Chaucer, 2012, p. 13) the CCSS must include adequate representation of the people and cultures present in higher education and the workplace as well.

"Schools are required to produce evidence that all students –regardless of their background, race, language, or culture –are learning" (Noguera, 2008, p. xi). The CCSS were created with the intent of removing bias relative to the location or region in which

students were educated. Governor James B. Hunt stated, Common Core "ensures that a child's education is not largely determined by where he or she lives, rather than his or her abilities" (as cited in Rothman, 2011, p. x). In the researcher's experience, policies and practices in education changed drastically over the decade previous to this writing; specifically, due to advances in technology. The advancement, observed by the researcher, resulted in an awakened ability for teachers and students to accomplish more than ever before.

In *Something in Common: The Common Core Standards and the Next Chapter in American Education*, Hunt (2011) added, "students are competing with their peers across oceans and continents, and in an increasingly transient society, it is critical that what they learn is consistent and relevant from state to state" (as cited in Rothman, 2011, p. x). According to Tucker and Codding (1998), "The only job security in contemporary America is the job security of being highly skilled in an area of high demand and being able to learn complex new things quickly" (p. 35). Unfortunately, companies discovered new hires straight out of high school often came to the agency with several academic voids. CCSS were a response to the frequent issue of high school graduates who lacked the academic and social requirements necessary in the workforce (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Tucker and Codding (1998) vouched for the implementation of the CCSS and stated the secret to correcting the woes of the declining performance of public schools was to "abandon immediately the idea that we are doing our job by sorting youngsters into winners and losers and instead dedicate ourselves to the idea that all students can and must achieve at internationally benchmarked levels" (p. 23). The idea that the CCSS altered classroom instruction and resulted in substantial gains in student performance

appeared obtainable since textbook manufacturers also incorporated a national set of standards, instead of a piecemealed compilation from various states and regions, as done in the past (Rothman, 2011).

Summary

At the time of this writing, there was much conversation about the disparity between the number of Caucasian male teachers and African American male teachers. Previous research suggested that the ability to separate a person's background from the curriculum was next to impossible. Lack of minority educators made cultural representation in the classroom even more of a challenge. Factors that affected whether African American students learned at the same rate of their Caucasian counterparts included poverty in record numbers, assessments written that excluded African American experiences, deficiencies in teacher cultural competency, and lack of minority representation in instructional materials. In Chapter Three, the researcher outlines the data collection and analysis procedures used to measure the cultural sensitivity of the common core exemplar fictional texts.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Introduction

As noted in previous chapters, the researcher conducted extensive research and found few references inside the suggested five- year time frame. Lukens (2003) believed children oftentimes read books for pleasure without adequate understanding, due to informational voids or a lack of experience necessary to reference abstract ideas incorporated in the book. Irvine (1990) stated, "Many believe that black students' school failure and economic deprivation are related to their inferior intelligence, attributable to blacks' history of slavery, segregation, and limited opportunities" (p. 3). However, school failure could be attributed to the absence of cultural sensitivity in the assessments and the purchased curriculum teachers utilized. Davis (2012) defined culture as “the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, activities, and knowledge of a group or individuals who share historical, geographical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social traditions, and who transmit, reinforce, and modify those traditions” (p. 7).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the cultural sensitivity within the CCSS K-5 exemplar fiction recommended texts. “Students need to interact with other students who look like them and face similar challenges” (Davis, 2012, p. 241) in textbooks, outside of the traditional European American escapades. The researcher found many texts inclusive of minority characters; but, the authors intentionally or subconsciously portrayed the characters in an unrealistic manner related to native cultures and backgrounds. Novels with Caucasian authors who wrote books with African American characters depicted African Americans either unbelievably lively and intriguing or ridiculously bland and easily forgettable (Nodelman, 1996, p. 131). Previous

research stated the CCSS "serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality and range" (n.d., p. 2) for kindergarten through fifth grade, for the state of Missouri. Based on the prior work of Day (1999), deceased at the time of this writing, 'Evaluating Children's Books for Bias', an adaptation of The Council on Interracial Books for Children, "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks," and the work of McCaffrey (2014) in the dissertation, *Common Core English and Language Arts K-1 Exemplar Text Set: A Critical Content Analysis of Cultural Representations*, the researcher developed the Literature Analysis Framework (see Appendices A & B).

Research Questions

The researcher investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: How culturally sensitive are the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts with regards to characteristics measured by the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ2: How are the cultures and characteristics of minority characters in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts represented according to the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ3: How frequently are minority themes, characters, and cultures represented in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts?

The researcher believed there would be a significant difference in the number of cultural sensitivity characteristics in the text sets for grades four and five, than for grades two and three, and K and one.

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference between the total number of cultural sensitivity characteristics within the sample of exemplar texts divided by the total number of reading content pages between the sample grades K-1, 2-3, and 3-5.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The study involved three steps. The first step included the researcher conducting a random sample (n = 50), from the total population of 90 K-5 Common Core exemplar texts, with the analysis for each text specifically focused on title of the text, copyright date, race of author, race of illustrator, the presence of minority characters, total number of minority characters, and the total number of Caucasian characters.

The researcher accessed the list of exemplar fiction and nonfiction texts from the researched state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) website. The researcher printed the list of books classified as nonfiction exemplar texts and typed a complete list of the 90 CCSS K-5 exemplar fictional texts into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researcher then classified each of the texts, based on the intended use – poetry, stories, read aloud poetry, and read aloud stories. The researcher developed a spreadsheet inclusive of the text types and the grade-level groupings provided by the CCSS.

Using Stat Trek's online random number generator, the researcher reviewed a rectangle box of numbers in random order ranging from two through 92. Moving across the random list of numbers from left to right, the researcher selected the first 50 numbers from the list. The researcher selected the titles from Microsoft Excel aligned with the 50 numbers provided in the box by the random number generator and ordered the books from the public library system in groups of ten at a time. The researcher read each of the

50 texts once for familiarity and read the books a second time from an analytical lens, pulling out information about the characters' backgrounds, ethnic origins, and cultural experiences to complete the first literature analysis framework (see Appendix A).

The second component of the study included the use of a separate literature analysis framework (see Appendix B) to investigate the texts for the presence of minority characters, particularly for the coding categories of illustrations, relationships and heroes, language, and story line. The researcher read the books with featured minority characters a third time and completed the literature analysis framework as the researcher read each book.

The third step included conducting a stratified random sample of the texts among each grade-level grouping (n = 25) for grade-level groupings K-1, and 2-3, and (n =19) for the 4-5 grouping, to seek a possible difference between the mean cultural sensitivity and grade level. The fourth to fifth grade-level grouping only had a total number of 19 books listed, which reduced the possible number of books available in the stratified random sample. The researcher then typed a new Microsoft Excel document of fiction titles grouped together by grade levels by kindergarten and first grade, and second grade and third grade; and the third group consisted of fourth and fifth grade. The researcher placed each grade-level grouping on a separate spreadsheet within the same Microsoft Excel document. The Kindergarten to first and the second to third groups consisted of 36 books. However, the fourth to fifth grade-level grouping only consisted of 19 possible books. To develop the stratified random sample, the researcher generated 19 numbers for fourth and fifth grade using Stat Trek's random number generator. Using the random numbers, the researcher selected the books from the second Microsoft Excel spreadsheet

aligned with the numbers from the generator. Grade-level groups K-1 and 2-3 each had 36 possible books; the researcher selected two separate lists of 25 numbers from Stat Trek's random number generator tool. The first set of 25 numbers helped the researcher select the books from the K-1 group list in Microsoft Excel aligned with the generated numbers. The second set of 25 numbers determined the books from the second to third grade-level group listed in Microsoft Excel.

The researcher asked the three research questions and the one null hypothesis, which helped answer the cultural sensitivity of the Common Core exemplar fictional texts.

Summary

The researcher performed a three-step research methodology. Each step of the data collection entailed further review of the outcomes from the previous step. Each step increased in complexity as the second step required the researcher to read the texts with minority characters and references a second time. Over 70 texts were read, which totaled approximately 4,000 pages.

After consultation with the committee chair and supervisor of graduate research, the researcher shifted the research design. The null hypothesis was originally slated for inclusion within the research study, yet after a full review of resources and previous work, the researcher believed the null hypothesis compromised the integrity and authenticity of the research. This study was important because data showed minorities the most 'at-risk' academically. Through this qualitative work, the readers experienced the texts and the patterns of systemic racism hidden within familiar texts.

Chapter Four: Analysis

Cultural sensitivity became a controversial dissertation topic due to societal unrest and race relations in the researcher's neighboring community during the time of this study. Many White and Black individuals pondered why little to no literature existed to meet the individualized needs of African American students, who historically exhibited low performance across all content areas (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Nodelman (1996), a professor and leader in children's literature, described the depiction of African American characters as less interesting or unbelievably embellished when created by Caucasian authors and illustrators (1996). Texts included minority characters, but depicted those minority characters in a jovial, immature, or inferior manner. The researcher first read each of the randomly selected texts for the presence of minority characters; then reread the randomly selected texts for understanding and highlighted the cultural innuendos within the text, using Day's (1999) book, *Evaluating Children's Books for Bias*, which was an adaptation of the book, *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*. The researcher developed a Literature Analysis Framework from Day's (1999) work along with McCaffrey's (2014) dissertation, *Common Core English and Language Arts K-1 Exemplar Text Set: A Critical Content Analysis of Cultural Representations*. In 2010, Derman-Sparks and Olsen-Edwards noted both teachers and students learned biases about cultures in which both belonged and made judgments based on what was or was not witnessed at the time. Children read books and discovered things about the world and how the world related to other children from similar cultures and backgrounds (McCaffrey, 2014). "Reading about children like themselves has the power to motivate them [students] to participate more in the curriculum" (Gopalakrishnan,

2011, p. 10). The researcher described the study as critical to education because research showed bias existed in many ways. The purpose of this study was to investigate cultural sensitivity within the mandated English Language Arts Common Core exemplar fictional texts, which "serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality and range" (CCSS, n.d., p. 2) for kindergarten through fifth grade, for the state of Missouri.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study the researcher analyzed each of the following research questions:

RQ1: How culturally sensitive are the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts with regards to characteristics measured by the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ2: How are the cultures and characteristics of minority characters in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts represented according to the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ3: How frequently are minority themes, characters, and cultures represented in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts?

RQ1: How culturally sensitive are the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts with regards to characteristics measured by the Literature Analysis Framework? Children determined whom or what was important by the people or things included in the games children played, the toys children played with, and the stories children read (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010). McCaffrey (2014) wrote, "Literature informed the way in which young readers came to view the world, as well as

how they viewed themselves as individuals within the world" (p. 19). The Literature Analysis Framework consisted of two separate phases. The researcher determined whether minority characters existed and noted the title of the text, copyright date, race of author, and race of the illustrator. In the second phase, the researcher reread the books with minority characters and checked for suggestive illustrations, relationships, language, and cultural relevance and significance in the story line. The researcher read a random sample of 50 texts from the total population of 90 K-5 Common Core exemplar texts; 37 texts written by Caucasian authors (74%), 10 texts written by minority authors (20%), and two texts by unidentified authors (4%). The two poems, "As I was Going to St. Ives" and "The Fox's Foray," were written anonymously. Classified as a second to third grade read aloud and a fourth to fifth grade story, *Bud Not Buddy*, resulted in the total percentages to equal 98% instead of 100%.

Copyright

From the 50 texts, authors wrote 11 texts before school segregation ended in 1954 (see Table 2). The copyright year was an important component to the researcher, because, not only did cultural bias exist through unintentional bias, but intentional bias also existed due to the authors' intended audiences.

Table 2

Titles Written before School Segregation Ended (1954)

Title	Copyright	Genre	Author	Illustrator	Minority Characters
Alice in Wonderland	1865	Story	Lewis Carroll		No
The New Colossus	1883	Poetry	Emma Lazarus		n/a
Who Has Seen The Wind?	1893	Poetry	Christina Rossetti		n/a
A Bird Came Down The Walk	1893	Poetry	Emily Dickinson		n/a
Fog	1916	Poetry	Carl Sandburg		n/a
Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening	1923	Poetry	Robert Frost	Susan Jeffers	n/a
Dust of Snow	1923	Poetry	Robert Frost		n/a
Halfway Down	1924	Poetry	A.A. Milne		n/a
Little House in the Big Woods	1932	Read-Aloud Story	Laura Ingalls Wilder	Garth Williams	(1) Cat
My Father's Dragon	1948	Story	Ruth Stiles Gannett	Ruth Stiles Gannett	No
Charlotte's Web	1952	Read-Aloud Story	E.B. White	Garth Williams	No

Note. Texts were classified as (n/a) if race of characters were not specified. The titles without an illustrator listed were not picture books.

Author/Illustrator

The researched believed that the race of the author and illustrator played an intricate role in whether the texts were culturally sensitive. Furthermore, the researcher believed culture was deeply woven into a person's being, so much so that separating a product from the embedded culture of the creator was impossible. In 1999, Day described a conversation with African American author, Mildred Pitts-Walter, who stated,

> Teachers must not be afraid to look at different cultural patterns within our nation. They have to search beyond what is obvious. They need to delve into writings by Asians, African Americans, Africans, etc. to know many points of view. (as cited by Day, 1999, p. 214)

"In doing so, we will replace a deficit perspective with an asset based perspective when viewing and working with our students and families from low income and impoverished communities" (Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010, p. 5).

Characters

In 2010, Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards noted, "Ongoing learning about yourself, as well as about the children and families you serve, makes it possible to effectively decide what to say, what to do, when to wait, and when to act in many different kinds of settings" (p. 21). Anderson (2013) noted, "Children need to see themselves reflected in stories with positive role models; this tends to increase their self-esteem and pride in their heritage" (p. 173). Additionally, "Students need to interact with other students who look like them and face similar challenges" (Davis, 2012, p. 241) in textbooks, outside of the traditional European American escapades. One of the 11 texts written before 1954 included a minority character. In the book, *Little House in the Big*

Woods, the one minority character mentioned was the family pet, Black Susan, who came and went as she pleased.

The poetry listed in the descriptions for Table 2 did not include race or specific characters. The poetry in Table 2 all consisted of new experiences and descriptive words with detailed scenery. The three stories included 47 possible characters, with only one character identified as a minority, a cat. The cat in *Little House in the Big Woods*, Black Susan, was not portrayed as a typical family pet. The author included multiple occasions in which the family never engaged Black Susan. Wilder (1932) wrote, “Black Susan, the cat, came and went as she pleased, day and night, through the swinging door of the cat-hole in the bottom of the front door” (p. 21).

From the 50 randomly selected texts (see Appendix C), 12 (24%) included minority characters. The 12 texts with minority characters had a grade-level breakdown of five K-1 grade-level texts (41.6%), four 2-3 grade-level texts (33.3%) and four 4-5 grade-level texts (33.3%) The CCSS classified the book, *Bud Not Buddy,* into two separate grade-level brackets (see Table 3).

Twelve texts included minority characters and three comprised of a minority author (25%). Within the 12 minority inclusive texts, the ratio between minority characters (MC) and Caucasian characters (CC) measured 35 MC (42.68%) to 47 CC (57.31%). Of the 35 minority characters, 19 (54.28%) were African American, 10 (28.571%) were Asian, and six (17.142%) were Native American. From the 35 minority characters’ present in the previously mentioned 12 texts, 26 included human beings and 10 included animals and creatures drawn as black or brown.

Table 3

Titles and Grade Level of Common Core Texts with Minority Characters or Minority Authors

Title	Grade	Minority	
		Characters	Author
Are You My Mother?	K-1	Yes	No
Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China	K-1	Yes	Yes
Hi! Fly Guy	K-1	Yes	No
Owl at Home	K-1	Yes	No
Little House in the Big Woods	K-1	Yes	No
Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa	2-3	Yes	No
Amos and Boris	2-3	Yes	No
My Father's Dragon	2-3	Yes	No
Bud Not Buddy	2-3 or 4-5	Yes	Yes
The Birchbark House	4-5	Yes	No
Where The Mountain Meets the Moon	4-5	Yes	Yes
Tuck Everlasting	4-5	Yes	No

Note. The bolded title, *Bud Not Buddy* was classified by the CCSS as a Read-Aloud Story for grades 2-3 and a grades 4-5 story.

The researcher included animals drawn black or brown only in the instances when the animals were not traditionally a different color. In the books, *Owl at Home*, *Are You my Mother?,* and *The Owl and the Pussycat*, the majority of the characters were animals. The researcher counted the characters as a minority since all were drawn brown. *The Owl and the Pussycat* and *Owl at Home* featured brown owls, noting white owls existed in the

world. The illustrator of the book, *Are You my Mother?*, depicted a brown bird, hen, kitten, cow, and a dog. Each of the five aforementioned animals, found traditionally, included a variety of colors other than brown.

Davis (2012) noted the elimination of a large degree of bias from materials, but bias often laid dormant and later erupted due to the environments and cultures where individuals lived. Davis (2012) further added the playing field between the Caucasian majority and minorities were far from leveled. When personal cultural accounts of minority readers and students were not included in lessons and books, the result was an academic and social decline (Burke et al., 2008). The literature included authentic examples and components of the culture and community in which the school resided, with engaged students (McCaffrey, 2014). Lynch (2011) highlighted the social and behavioral norms within the Caucasian culture as the historically dominate group, which were so ingrained members from the culture, they were unfamiliar with any of the norms within different cultural groups. Hughes-Hassell & Rawson (2011) wrote, “There is no single cause or origin for the current crisis in literacy education for African American males, although there are contributing factors, like poverty and lack of access to culturally relevant books” (p. 17); while Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) declared the absence of culturally inclusive material was the driving force behind the disproportioned academic performance of African American and Caucasian students. In 2013, Anderson wrote, “One way to assess the literary merit of fiction books is to analyze and evaluate the literary elements or various parts of a fiction story: characters, point of view, setting, plot, theme, style, and tone” (p. 31).

RQ2: How are the cultures and characteristics of minority characters in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts represented according to the Literature Analysis Framework? Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote "Culturally relevant teaching helps them [students] to be where they need to be to participate fully and meaningfully in the construction of knowledge" (p. 104). Cultural differences must be identified and included in daily instruction because "cultural competence involves developing an awareness of the ways in which cultures differ and realizing that these differences may affect the learning process" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 15). "The language they [minority students] bring with them serves as a tool that helps them with additional language learning, just as speakers of Standard English use English to help them acquire new languages" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 93).

Illustrations

Illustrators created children's picture books with the ability to tell a complete story with little to no words (Anderson, 2013). Nodelman (1996) wrote, "A picture is a classic example of a sign. Any given picture not only represents something, but communicates further information about the thing it depicts by the ways in which it depicts it" (p. 185). In the book, *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China* (1989), the illustrator used dark pictures to depict the grim and detestable wolf. The author wrote, "The bad, sneaky, and untrustworthy black wolf" (Young, 1989). Drawn brown in the book, *Are you my mother?* (1960), were all the animals; however, the color of each animal varied historically. "As with the overall effects of predominating colors, the colors of specific objects provide information about those objects. The mere fact that the objects are in colors that stand out gives them weight" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 233).

Are You my Mother? included a bird, a hen, a kitten, a cow, and a dog. In review, the researcher found the animals were the same color and none of the brown animals provided a visual of inequity. Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt (2010) wrote, “We recognize that to hold the *culture of poverty* as mythical will be disturbing to many people because it is so much easier to assume poor students who fail in our school do so because of their socioeconomic conditions” (p. 6). “There was never any intention to create equitable institutions of education, and thus, schools attended by children of color and indigenous children predominately were so chronically underfunded and inadequately supported that they could never rise above mediocrity” (Singleton, 2015, p. 173). Historically, African Americans and Caucasian children received inequitable educations, which led to a culture of adults and children alike with academic or intellectual deficits. According to the *Education Digest*, “By nearly every measure, students of color attend schools that are substantially deficient compared with the schools their white, higher-income peers attend” (Henderson, 2016, p. 4). Individuals in schools reflected upon the way students conveyed personal values and actions; “to accomplish personal change in how we work with students and families from low-income and impoverished communities” (Lindsey et al., 2010, p. 6). The wicked witch of the West was an evil slave owner who, in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* stated, “None of them [Dorothy and friends] is fit to work, so you may tear them into small pieces” (Baum, 2011, p. 110). “Dorothy, who was truly frightened to see the Witch actually melting away like brown sugar before her very eyes” (Baum, 2011, p. 120). Brown sugar was the title of a popular song released in the 1970s by the Rolling Stones, which described encounters of slavery, rape of female slaves, and a desire to pursue interracial relationships, despite an uncommon acceptance. The Rolling

Stones sang, “Gold Coast slave ship bound for cotton fields, sold in the market down in New Orleans, scarred old slaver knows he's doin' all right, hear him whip the women just around midnight” (The Rolling Stones, 1971). In 1971, rock and roll legends, The Rolling Stones, sang, “Brown sugar, how come you taste so good” (The Rolling Stones, 1971), and in 1995, rhythm and blues singer, Dangelo sang, “Brown Sugar babe, I gets high off your love and don’t know how to behave” (D’Angelo, 1995). In the researcher’s experience, through inclusion and immersion in African American culture, brown sugar was a reference used to describe the intimacy and sexual attraction of an African American man or woman.

Relationships

In the book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (2011) the only black character was the dog, Toto. “Toto was not gray; he was a little black dog with long silky hair and small black eyes that twinkled merrily on either side of his funny, wee nose” (Baum, (2011, p. 12). Several references existed within the text of the color black, which the researcher perceived as unnecessary. Baum (2011) wrote, “Forthwith there was heard a great buzzing in the air, and a swarm of black bees came flying toward her” (p. 112). The author used the word black to describe the bees to depict just how terrifying the bees actually were. In the researcher’s experience, readers understood bees were yellow and black, which made the fact the author called the bees ‘black’ redundant. In the same book, the color white suggested power or influence; stated by, “Besides, you have white in your frock, and only witches and sorceresses wear white” (Baum, 2011, p. 112). Powerful beings were the only ones allowed to wear the color white. “Dorothy still wore the pretty silk dress she had put on in the Palace, but now, to her surprise, she found it

was no longer green, but pure white" (Baum, 2011, p. 107). The wicked witch sent flying monkeys out to destroy Dorothy and her friends.

Chavous, Leath, & Richardson wrote, "Black youth in the United States often face structural and social risks as a function of their racial group, including racial barriers, discrimination, and negative stereotype-based treatment; and these risk factors have been linked to negative educational outcomes" (2015, p. 1). Furthermore, "The risks, barriers, and constraints extant in Black youths' lives as members of their racial groups can influence their academic attitudes and behaviors as well as psychological and behavioral outcomes related to achievement" (Chavous, Leath, & Richardson, 2015, p. 9). "Although a general association between a group and 'animals' is one form of dehumanization, there are reasons to believe that some animals are more strongly associated with some groups than others" (Goff, Jackson, Lewis-Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014, p. 528). Deirdre L. Webster-Cobb, Esquire, an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Officer in New Jersey wrote, "It is important to note the historical derogatory comparisons between Blacks/African Americans, apes, and monkeys. Research revealed a hateful association between Blacks and monkeys or apes was one way the antebellum South justified slavery" (State of New Jersey, 2015, para. 3). Webster-Cobb, Esquire (2015) added, "Studies show that only about 8% of White Americans claim to be aware of the history of the association between Blacks and apes . . . disturbing research released in 2009 clearly shows a high level of subconscious engagement with this association" (p. 8). Baum (2011) added, "When they returned to the castle the wicked witch beat them [slaves] well with a strap, and sent them back to their work" (p. 112). The author talked about the witch's ability to enslave other characters due

to ignorance and an inability to use the strength the individual possessed. “I can still make her my slave, for she does not know how to use her power” (Baum, 2011, p. 117).

In the book, *Color, Class, Identity: The New Politics of Race*, Steele (1996) wrote, “The most obvious and unarguable source of black innocence is the victimization that blacks endured for centuries at the hands of a race that insisted on black inferiority as a means to its own innocence and power” (p. 28). Baum (2011) wrote, “It [the Wicked Witch’s castle] was constantly guarded by the yellow Winkies, who were the slaves of the Wicked Witch and too afraid of her not to do as she told them” (p. 118). Slavery in American history shaped many of the undisputed tensions between Caucasians and African Americans that exist at the time of this writing. In an apology to African Americans for enslavement and segregation, the House of Representatives (2008) stated, “Africans forced into slavery were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and subjected to the indignity of being stripped of their names and heritage . . . slavery in America resembled no other form of involuntary servitude known in history” (para. 18).

Parents within impoverished families focused entirely on the compliance of children and did not feel the need to explain why the negative behaviors of children were not accepted socially. “In educated households, adults spend a great deal of time coaching the child on appropriate behavior. In poverty, the focus is on stopping the behavior but not necessarily on change” (Payne, 2013, p. 26). Babbitt (1975) portrayed in the book, *Tuck Everlasting* the existence of a different set of social and cultural norms between Caucasian and African Americans, as well as differences between privileged and impoverished families. The author wrote,

> She [Winnie] watched them carefully at first, to see what rules there might be that she did not know about. But there seemed to be no rules. There were no napkins. It was all right, then, to lick . . . from your fingers (Babbit, 1975, p. 56).

"In this world of increasing global interdependence, understanding cultural differences is critical for people in all walks of life," because they allowed us to learn from one another (Gelfand, 2012, para.1). Payne (2013) wrote, "Hidden rules exist in poverty, in middle class, and in wealth, as well as in ethnic groups and other units of people" (p. 10). Winnie had grown up with order and was unprepared for "the homely little house beside the pond, unprepared for the gentle eddies of dust, the silver cobwebs" (Babbitt, 1975, p. 50). Winnie grew up in a clean and wealthy household and did not relate to the culture and practices of an impoverished, African American family. Payne (2013) described three hidden rules in impoverished families: 1) noisy households where effective communication norms were not encouraged, 2) communication occurred most often using silent gestures, and 3) a person's level of significance was measured by his or her own ability to captivate an audience.

Erdrich (1999) mentioned on many occasions in the Native American culture, certain things or objects specific to the dominant race existed. "She tucked her braids up underneath a man's hat, a white man's hat with a heavy brim" (p. 22). The book used the term 'Chimookoman,' "used to describe the non-Indian, or white people" (p. 76) and additional things Native Americans believed belonged to Caucasians, "his cabin for instance, and his ability to plan and win the white man's game of chess" (p. 79). The book, *The Birchbark House,* created the perception Caucasians and Native Americans could not get along. "LaPointe was becoming more Chimookoman every day, and there

was talk of sending the Anishinabeg to the west" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 77). Erdrich (1999) showed the cultural pride many Native Americans kept, despite having close blood relatives who were Cauasians. The author wrote, "Although his grandfather had been French, he was raised and considered himself Ojibwa and kept the rules of his mother's dodem or clan, the catfish clan. The Asausesee" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 79).

Self-Image/Tokenism

"Finding ways for students to make connections to their own lives and to other texts can build motivation in the most stubborn of readers" (Davis, 2012, p. 156), which essentially kept students focused and engaged. A balance needed to exist within the curriculum inclusive of all cultures and backgrounds; a representation of the entire student population since "inequitable opportunities, privileges, and life experiences based on economic class deeply affect young children's lives" (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010, p. 101). "Policies and practices that are likely to narrow gaps in achievement need to be broad and comprehensive if they are to check inequality at the outset of a child's academic career" (Lindsey et al., 2010, p. 7) for every student to flourish.

Positive perceptions and cultural understandings within minorities were important in textbooks, through the author's use of characters, since minority students did not always experience individuals who looked like themselves in the school system. "From our experience, students living in poverty see things differently and experience the world in terms that have limits that too often lead educators to view students from a deficit perspective" (Lindsey et al., 2010, p. 17). "The vast majority of public school teachers are White and from backgrounds that differ from their students of color" (Chavous et al.,

2015, p. 6). Sleeter and Grant (1994) wrote, “Children develop their self-concepts through interactions with other people in various contexts. The home and neighborhood provide contexts, as does the school” (p. 99).

Few African Americans entered the educational workforce and became teachers. The researcher believed the content with African American people or characters should be positive, because students did not see many African Americans present in the school setting. Toldson (2013) wrote, “Today, of the more than 6 million teachers in the United States, nearly 80 percent are white, 9.3 percent are black, 7.4 percent are Hispanic, 2.3 percent Asian, and 1.2 percent is another race” (p.16). The researcher found stories with characters or animals of a different race or species than the majority that received special attention within the story. In *My Father’s Dragon* (1948), Gannett (1948) called the animal with the black coat ‘enormous’ and ‘fierce,’ and while the author never referred to the other animals in the story as being dangerous, the temperament of the other animals was only implied. Gannett (1948) described the gorilla further using the gorilla’s violent speech; “I’ll twist your arms the way I twist the dragon’s wings” (p. 68). Gorillas were known historically to be aggressive.

According to a news story from the Associated Press in March 2004, a 3-year-old child and the mother were attacked by a gorilla in Dallas after the animal scaled a 16-foot wall. The mother, Keisha Heard, reported, “He has my son in his mouth, he’s attacking him . . . there wasn’t really anything that I could do . . . He slings me back across the concrete area where we are . . . it was really scary” (Associated Press.). Additionally, dragons in literature were drawn and described as fire-breathing and ferocious. “Dragons were almost exclusively adult and male, they lacked speech or intelligence, lacked

magical abilities, and they ravaged the countryside dining on livestock and/or humans . . . They often breathed fire, spat venom or had poisonous breath" (Cheetham, 2013, p. 19). However, in the fictitious story, *My Father's Dragon* (1948), the dragon was weak and in need of being saved by the Caucasian boy, Elmer. Cheetham (2013) added, "In the traditional stories, especially of St. George, the dragon was commonly seen as a personification of the devil" (p. 19).

Stiles (1948) gave the impression a well-known and powerful figment in Chinese culture was feeble. Wilder (1932) wrote, "It was a huge, black panther, leaping through the air . . . it could kill him [grandpa] with its enormous, slashing claws and its long sharp teeth" (p. 42). Gannett (1948) described the gorilla as 'big, black, and hairy.' In the book, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), the daughter, Laura, had a cat the family named 'Black Susan.' "Laura had only a corncob wrapped in a handkerchief, but it was a good doll. It was named Susan" (p. 20). The researcher concluded, during analysis, the cat was not appreciated enough to get a separate name that did not specify a color. Due to the fact the cat happened to be a member of the family and had dark fur, the cat was identified as 'Black Susan.' Further analysis revealed the family owned a bulldog named Jack and remained with the rest of the characters. The author never specified the color of Jack's fur. With Black Susan getting her name because her fur was black, Jack's fur was more than likely lighter in color and did not require the color descriptor. Farley (1941) wrote in *The Black Stallion*, "Alec saw a dark-skinned man, wearing European dress and a high, white turban, giving directions" (p. 9). The author introduced the character initially as the dark-skinned man, which suggested to the reader the actual name of this character was unimportant. The author continued, "The dark-skinned man became more mysterious

than ever – always alone, and never talking to anyone but the Captain" (Farley, 1941, p. 12). "The dark-skinned man appeared and rushed up to the captain, waving his arms and babbling hysterically" (Farley, 1941, p. 18). Farley (1941) continued to refer to the character as 'the dark-skinned man" several more times, despite the significance of the character's role to the rising action in the novel.

Language

The grandfather in the book, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), was a musician who played the fiddle. The family came together and sang songs, shared old stories, and ate dinner. The grandfather had a song which included the line, "There was an old darkey and his name was Uncle Ned," (p. 99). From the researcher's experience with race relations, the term darkey was a racial slur used to describe an African American person with a darker skin complexion. Additional statements in the book about the cat, Black Susan, were not stated by the author about the dog Jack, and implied Black Susan was not appreciated or welcomed. "They [the family] liked to be there, before the warm fire, with Black Susan purring on the hearth and good dog Jack stretched beside her" (Wilder, 1932, p. 44). Jack was called a good dog in the same sentence and suggested, to the researcher when reading, that Black Susan was a bad cat, although the writer never mentioned Black Susan's temperament or behavior as being bad. To the researcher, Black Susan appeared to be a stray cat who marched to the beat of a different drum, since the cat roamed often. "Black Susan, the cat, came and went as she pleased, day and night through the swinging door of the cat-hole in the bottom of the front door" (Wilder, 1932 p. 21). Chavous et al., (2015) wrote, "The Black-identity-as-risk view has become the dominant story, or 'master narrative,' in discussions of Black culture, which shed light on the belief that individuals around the world depict African Americans by

nature as problematic" (p. 6). Delpit (2006) reported African American young men had been setup and seen as scary and dangerous for quite some time. Farley's (1941) decision not to have the main character address the black stallion by a name other than 'The Black' inadvertently embedded racist and historically loaded accounts of slavery into the reader's minds when taken out of context. The author wrote, "Suddenly he walked to the rear of the horse and let the hard whip fall on the Black's hind quarters" (Farley, 1941, p. 9).

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon (Lin, 2011) used black with a negative connotation. "Every time she unwrapped the blanket, she grimaced – the ugly wounds had turned black, and evil-looking liquid started to seep" (p. 164). The author wrote, "Just follow the black stones,' the boy said, pointing at the road paved with polished bricks" (Lin, 2011, p. 98). The black stones happened to be the only way to get to the palace. The path in the story subconsciously suggested to get to the top where the palace existed, the characters had to walk over what was black. In *Zlateh the Goat*, Singer (1984) described the goat's beard as small and white, and the cloud with the bluish center the author described as large. In the book, *Charlotte's Web* (1952) White wrote, "He [Wilbur] was a pure white, pink around the ears and snout, and smooth as silk" (p. 122) The author described Wilbur in a manner which suggested the color white was supreme, since previously in the book the author characterized Wilbur as dirty and Wilbur's coat was not mentioned. In *Tuck Everlasting*, the author used the southern dialect intentionally in sentences. "It don't take 'em more'n a minute to pile into that pond" (Babbit, 1975, p. 48). Babbitt (1975) added in a different chapter, "But I been laying in there thinking I ought to be setting out here with you till you went to sleep" (p. 70). Babbitt (1975) did

not have the character say, sitting, instead, the author used the word setting, just as an actual person with the character's limited amount of education might. However, with such a small proportion of African American characters in the book, the researcher experienced a skewed sample of African Americans from the South.

The author of *Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China* (Young, 1989) wrote three Asian sisters outsmarted the big bad wolf by killing him. The author wrote, "Not only did the wolf bump his head, but he broke his heart to pieces" (Young, 1989, p. 21) after the three sisters dropped him from a basket in a tree. The author added, "The children climbed to the branches just above the wolf and saw that he was truly dead" (Young, 1989, p. 24) and then climbed from the tree and walked back into the house. The researcher perceived the author insinuated through the text Asians were not afraid of killing.

Erdrich (1999), author of *The Birchbark House*, a novel about an Indian little girl named Minli and her family, described the English language as the 'White man's language'. "I went to the priest's school. To learn to read the chimookoman's tracks. That way they can't cheat us with the treaties" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 112). In the book, Erdrich (1999) added, the alphabet was 'White man tracks'. "She [Angeline] was learning to write her name in Zhaganashimowin, the white man's language" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 190) The Ojibwa talked of Caucasians who forced the members of the tribe from the settlements and planned to push them further west. "They [Caucasians] are like greedy children. Nothing will ever please them for long" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 79). While the author included a statement of how some Native Americans may have felt in the text, Erdrich (1999) captured actual accounts of historical Native American practices, such as making

shoes. Erdrich (1999) wrote, "Mama tanned the moose hide with the very brains of the moose and Omokayas hated . . . the boring, endless scraping and rubbing that went into making a hide soft enough for makazins" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 14).

"Children learn who is important enough to be visible and valued from sources such as children's books, videos and toys, and even their early childhood curriculum" (Derman-Sparks & Olsen-Edwards, 2010, p. 103). "The continuing presence of educational gaps is a challenge to those of us at all levels in the education community to examine why education and academic achievement gaps continue to persist among demographic groups of our students" (Lindsey et al., 2010, p. 57). Lynch (2011) stated the social and behavioral norms within the Caucasian culture as the historically dominate group were so ingrained, members from the culture were unfamiliar with any of the cultural norms of groups different from their own.

RQ3: How frequently are minority themes, characters, and cultures represented in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts? In 1999, Day described a conversation with African American author, Mildred Pitts-Walter, who stated,

> Teachers must not be afraid to look at different cultural patterns within our nation. They have to search beyond what is obvious. They need to delve into writings by Asians, African Americans, Africans, etc. to know many points of view. (as cited by Day, 1999, p. 214)

A student's cultural attributes should be nurtured to encourage student achievement and a sense of belonging, not only inside the classroom, but within the entire world (Lynch, 2011). Out of the 50 fictional Common Core texts, 12 books (24%) contained minority characters. Of the 12 books, 35 total characters were minority, and 47 total characters

were Caucasian. Twenty-one texts did not speak specifically to the race of a character or person (42%). These 21 texts were all poems. A character's race was included in 17 out of the 29 texts (58%).

Table 4

Common Core Texts That Specified Character Race

	Title	Level	Minority Characters		
			African American	Asian	Native American
1	Where The Mountain Meets the Moon	4-5		X	
2	The Birchbark House	4-5			X
3	My Father's Dragon	4-5		X	
4	Tuck Everlasting	4-5	X		
5	Bud, Not Buddy	4-5, 2-3	X		
6	The Wonderful Wizard of Oz	K-1			
7	Little House in the Big Woods	K-1			

Note. There were 12 books with minority characters. The 7 listed in the chart above deliberately mentioned the race of the characters. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *Little House in the Big Woods*, implied the race of the minority characters present.

The researcher found 85 characters within all books read. Figure 1 reflects the percentage each race was represented by total characters within the Common Core exemplar texts. Twenty-one texts from Common Core fiction exemplar texts did not specify the race of the characters. All 21 texts were poems with characters not mentioned. Much of the poem content pertained to scenery and holidays, not characters and race. Many books included blatant racists remarks including, a comment made about a 'darkey' named Ned (Wilder, 1932) and many implied racist comments, which suggested the color White was superior or to be desired.

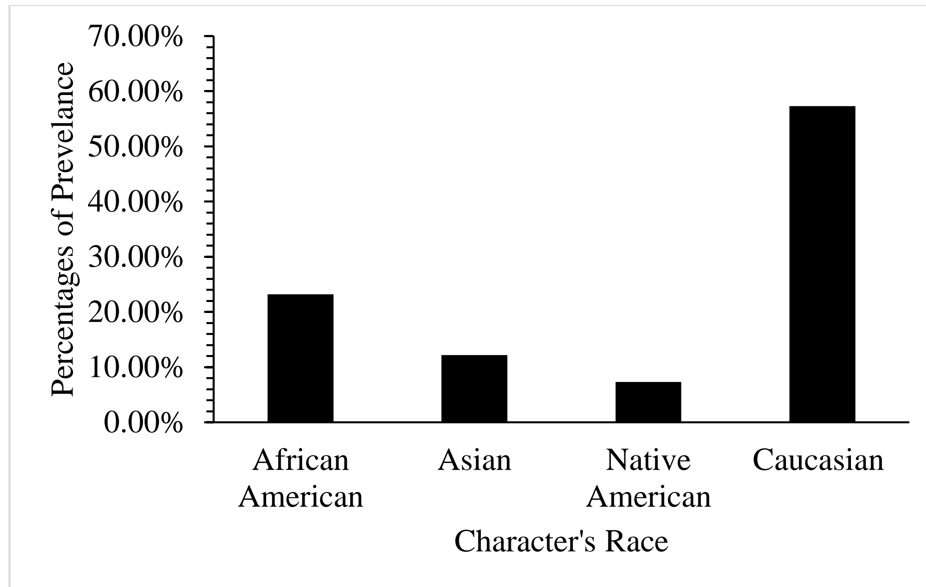

Figure 1. Percentages of race representation.

Within *Charlotte's Web* (1952) White wrote, "He [Wilbur] was a pure white, pink around the ears and snout, and smooth as silk" (p.122). Baum (2011) wrote, "Besides, you have white in your frock, and only witches and sorceresses wear white" (p. 107). Powerful beings were the only ones allowed to wear the color white. "Dorothy still wore the pretty silk dress she had put on in the Palace, but now, to her surprise, she found it was no longer green, but pure white" (Baum, 2011, p. 107).

Summary

Many of the books reviewed in this research contained predominately Caucasian characters with little to no minority characters. The minority characters presented in the literature included animals or humans, not heroes or individuals of influence. The results left the researcher questioning the process for selecting books as exemplar Common Core fictional texts. In Chapter Five the researcher, with over seven years of experience in urban education, includes a compilation of then-current texts

believed to be better suited as exemplars. The researcher also mentions the potential errors considered and discusses further research as a result of the study.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Based on the researcher's findings, according to the literature analysis framework, developed through Day's (1999) book, *Evaluating Children's Books for Bias*, an adaptation of the book, *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*, in the fictional texts deemed as exemplar by the CCSS the researcher found specific books culturally insensitive.

Previous research showed inequality in the instruction and overall academic experiences of affluent, predominately Caucasian districts, and underserviced, urban, predominately African American districts. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) documented, "Across the board, students from African American, Latino, and Native American backgrounds average significantly lower scores on a range of standardized achievement tests than do their counterparts from the White majority" (p. 192). In addition to biased assessments and materials widening the achievement gap, the researcher believed the problem originated with selected texts and the part played in the performance of minority students. Based on the researcher's work as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, and building principal, the reading materials required further investigation. Despite the initial assumptions, the researcher discovered the prevalence of negative words and subliminal messages throughout many of the exemplar Common Core suggested texts.

As an African American male who experienced minority in many academic settings earlier in the researcher's academic career, as an elementary student, numerous experiences lacked the background knowledge necessary to engage with a story or text. As a sixth-grade student, to have to read books about traveling the country seemed foreign since the researcher had never left the city. Several students appeared unable to

push past the frustrations of a concept so common to the rest of Caucasian counterparts. The researcher's family's trip each year to Six Flags paled in comparison to family vacations to Switzerland or even beaches in Florida. In addition to physical experiences, such as family vacations, dining experiences widened the achievement gap of minority students. As an impoverished African American male, the food selections growing up were commensurate to what was affordable to a single parent. Canned vegetables were served daily and the researcher had no account of fresh vegetables; specifically lacking the understanding of zucchini as a vegetable and not a pasta until much later into adulthood. The researcher had heard of fettucine and assumed something so similar had to be in the same pasta family. Oftentimes, minority students were left to make educated guesses using context clues and prior knowledge.

At the time of this study racial protests and community unrest existed. The researcher's background and experiences as an impoverished youth shaped a worldview and conceptualized the relationship between law enforcement and civilians, which many Caucasians viewed as a partnership or support system. As a young male, family was slow to involve the police for conflict resolution or assistance out of fear the circumstances would be turned against the person who actually made the request for dispatch. "Individuals in poverty are seldom going to call the police, for two reasons: First, the police may be looking for them; second, the police will probably be slow to respond" (Payne, 2013, p. 27). Historically, based on the researcher's experience living in predominately African American neighborhoods, the emergency responders lagged behind the responders within more affluent communities.

African American students internalized society's characterization of African Americans, which resulted in the fruition of African American subservience to Caucasian counterparts (Singleton, 2015). Race relations coupled with an absence of representation in what African American boys and girls read and studied, forced students to view themselves as less than. "As long as police officers shoot and kill young, unarmed males of color for merely being present, or disproportionately deploy Brown males to fight wars in countries of color abroad" there will continue to be a divide in how African American individuals viewed individual significance in the fabric of society today (Singleton, 2015, p. 200). While cultural sensitivity relative to academic instruction within the school system mattered, the researcher believed cultural sensitivity that existed within the media and across all social settings needed to increase. Cultural sensitivity in textbooks alone would not close the achievement gap; increased partnerships to combat poverty in minority communities and provide the cultural experiences often only awarded to affluent Caucasian students and families were needed.

Research Questions

The researcher investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: How culturally sensitive are the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts with regards to characteristics measured by the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ2: How are the cultures and characteristics of minority characters in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts represented according to the Literature Analysis Framework?

RQ3: How frequently are minority themes, characters, and cultures represented in the Common Core State Standards exemplar fictional texts?

Recommendations to the Program

The researcher challenged the quality and caliber of books selected as exemplar according to the CCSS. Questions the researcher was unable to answer during the study was: How were the books selected deemed exemplar? How did the individuals or committee determine whether the texts were appropriate for each suggested grade level? Did the selection committee in fact, read the texts prior to recommending the texts as exemplar? Did the committee's familiarity with the storyline or title influence the selection of the text as exemplar?

The researcher created a selection of books deemed exemplar due to the powerful message and popularity among elementary aged students (see Table 5). From the list of exemplar texts created, the majority of the titles all featured a female lead. Young males were oftentimes left out of stories as the male lead. Generally, young males were the aggressors or the antagonists and were left to play the bad characters. Rarely were females portrayed as the bully when there was a male lead.

Presence of Death

The researcher found several books including the concept of death in a cavalier manner. "He seized his axe, which he had made very sharp, and as the leader of the wolves came on the Tin Woodman swung his arm and chopped the wolf's head from its body, so that it immediately died" (p. 110) "The King Crow flew at the Scarecrow, who caught it by the head and twisted its neck until it died" (p. 111).

Table 5

Researcher Created Exemplar Fictional Text List

Year	Title	Author	Summary
1998	Bad Case of the Stripes	Shannon, David	A young and impressionable Caucasian girl suddenly takes ill after taking on the multiple opinions and ideas of peers, instead of her own.
1991	Amazing Grace	Hoffman, Mary	An African American young girl decides to be the lead in the school play, despite what classmates might think or say about her race.
2008	Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters	Steptoe, John	An urban spin on the classic fairytail, Cinderella full of minority characters.
1998	Chicken Sunday	Polacco, Patricia	An interracial group of siblings decide to purchase a hat for their grandma.
2002	Please, Baby, Please	Lee, Spike & Tonya	The escapades of an African American toddler are highlighted through the use of rhyme and humor.
2008	Alvin Ho: Allergic to Girls, School, and Other Scary Things	Look, Lenore	An Asian 2nd grade boy hides his brave and creative true self from the public, who sees him as shy and dreadfully afraid of everything.

Continued

Table 5 Continued.

2010	My Brother Charlie	Peete, Holly & Ryan	An African American young girl tells readers about her relationship and interaction with her autistic younger brother.
2008	One	Otoshi, Kathryn	After all the colors were threatened by the color red, "One" stands up and shows the other colors just how much they counted.
1996	Shortcut	Crews, Donald	Seven African American children decide to take a shortcut on the train tracks despite Big Mama's warning.
2015	Mixed Me	Diggs, Taye	A young biracial girl decides to share that while others may think that her parents don't match, she is a perfect blend of them both.

The author, L. Frank Baum (2011) added to the morbid description by stating, "There were forty crows, and forty times the Scarecrow twisted a neck, until at last all were lying dead beside him" (p. 111). "She turned away as Angeline caught each struggling, flapping bird and broke its neck with one quick, strong twist" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 58). The writer added, "Omakayas looked around for a heavy stick to club it, to put it out of its pain" (Erdrich, 1999, p. 59).

Many impoverished African American children witnessed death on a regular basis. In the article, "Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools," McInerney and McKlindon (2014) wrote, "It is well documented that a child's reaction to trauma can 'commonly' interfere with brain development, learning, and behavior - all of which have a potential impact on a child's academic success as well as the overall school environment" (p. 1).

Recommendations for Future Research

If the researcher were to restart the research process, the researcher would count the total number of times a reference was made to the color of a character's skin or any time a character's ethnic origin was mentioned. The researcher would calculate the total number of times for each book to better quantify the cultural sensitivity of a specific set of texts. Gopalakrishnan (2011) said, "Reading about children like themselves has the power to motivate them [students] to participate more in the curriculum" (p. 10). Many curriculum series existed with standard texts designed for use through balanced literacy. One component of balanced literacy was guided reading which involved the classroom teacher working with a small group of students at or near the same reading level. The researcher suggested a future study would include books from one of the reading

curriculum series utilizing a quantitative study to determine the possible relationship between the race of the students in the guided reading group, the presence of minority characters and cultures, and the rate of improvement or academic gains each student made in English Language Arts. The researcher believed the students who did not have characters that looked like each of them would perform lower than students who read stories about characters of the same race or background.

Conclusion

As the researcher, it was disheartening to see much of the same issues which existed in the previous literary findings still plagued education and were never completely addressed by districts. The sources listed in the research study were in fact fundamental works many educators were unaware of, due to the fact that typically, foundational work in education was rooted in how to make the academic experience better pedagogically. The foundational works included within the research talked of how to improve education through the eradication of social and cultural deficits that existed systemically.

The Caucasian authors wrote 37 texts (74%), 10 texts written by minority authors (20%), and two texts by unidentified authors (4%). From the 50 texts, authors published 11 texts before school segregation ended in 1954. From the 50 randomly selected texts (see Appendix C), 12 (24%) included minority characters. The 12 texts with minority characters had a grade-level breakdown of five K-1 texts (41.6%), four 2-3 texts (33.3%) and four 4-5 texts (33.3%) The CCSS classified the book, *Bud Not Buddy*, into two separate grade-level brackets (see Table 3).

From the 12 texts with minority characters, three were written by a minority author (25%). Within the twelve minority inclusive texts the ratio between minority characters (MC) and Caucasian characters (CC) resulted in 35 MC (42.68%) to 47 CC (57.31%). Of the 35 minority characters 19 (54.28%) were African American, 10 (28.571%) were Asian, and six (17.142%) were Native American. From the 35 minority characters present in the previously mentioned 12 texts, 26 included human beings and 10 included animals and creatures drawn as black or brown.

The researcher read over 70 books and pulled an extensive amount of data from each book. The books and passages total over 4,000 pages read. The texts were read to capture context, in order to carefully highlight the subliminal messages or cultural misconceptions hidden in the text the first or second time. The researcher found that several books, 38 from the randomly selected 50, were culturally insensitive.

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Appendix A

Literature Analysis Framework-First Round

Title of the text	Copyright Date	Race of Author	Race of Illustrator	Are there any minority characters present?	# of minority characters/# of Caucasian characters

* This framework was developed in part by the now deceased Frances Ann Day's children's literature evaluation framework 'Evaluating Children's Books for Bias', an adaptation of The Council on Interracial Books for Children's, "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks" in conjunction with research conducted by Megan Rose McCaffrey (2014) in her dissertation, Common Core English and Language Arts K-1 Exemplar Text Set: A Critical Content Analysis of Cultural Representation.

Appendix B

Literature Analysis Framework-Second Round

Titles with Minority Characters	Illustrations	Relationships/Heroes	Language	Story Line
	Stereotypes? Tokenism? Self-image considerations?	Who makes decisions, saves the day, and leads the group?	Suggestive comments? Symbolism? Connotation?	Standard of success? Resolution of problems? Authenticity?

* This framework was developed in part by the now deceased Frances Ann Day's children's literature evaluation framework 'Evaluating Children's Books for Bias', an adaptation of The Council on Interracial Books for Children's, "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks" in conjunction with research conducted by Megan Rose McCaffrey (2014) in her dissertation, Common Core English and Language Arts K-1 Exemplar Text Set: A Critical Content Analysis of Cultural Representation.

Appendix C

Complete Common Core State Standards Fictional Exemplar Texts List

K–1 Text Exemplars

Stories

Minarik, Else Holmelund. *Little Bear*
Eastman, P. D. *Are You My Mother?*
Seuss, Dr. *Green Eggs and Ham*
Lopshire, Robert. *Put Me in the Zoo*
Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad Together*
Lobel, Arnold. *Owl at Home*
DePaola, Tomie. *Pancakes for Breakfast*
Arnold, Tedd. *Hi! Fly Guy*

Poetry

Anonymous. "As I Was Going to St. Ives"
Rossetti, Christina. "Mix a Pancake"
Fyleman, Rose. "Singing-Time."
Milne, A. A. "Halfway Down."
Chute, Marchette. "Drinking Fountain."
Hughes, Langston. "Poem."
Ciardi, John. "Wouldn't You?"
Wright, Richard. "Laughing Boy."
Greenfield, Eloise. "By Myself."
Giovanni, Nikki. "Covers."

Merriam, Eve. "It Fell in the City."
Lopez, Alonzo. "Celebration."
Agee, Jon. "Two Tree Toads."

Read-Aloud Stories

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Big Woods*
Atwater, Richard and Florence. *Mr. Popper's Penguins*
Jansson, Tove. *Finn Family Moomintroll*
Haley, Gail E. *A Story, A Story*
Bang, Molly. *The Paper Crane*
Young, Ed. *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China*
Garza, Carmen Lomas. *Family Pictures*
Mora, Pat. *Tomás and the Library Lady*
Henkes, Kevin. *Kitten's First Full Moon*

Continued

Read-Aloud Poetry
Anonymous. "The Fox's Foray."
Langstaff, John. Over in the Meadow
Lear, Edward. "The Owl and the Pussycat."
Hughes, Langston. "April Rain Song."
Moss, Lloyd. *Zin! Zin! Zin! a Violin*

Grades 2–3 Text Exemplars
Stories
Gannett, Ruth Stiles. *My Father's Dragon*
Averill, Esther. *The Fire Cat*
Steig, William. *Amos & Boris*
Shulevitz, Uri. *The Treasure*
Cameron, Ann. *The Stories Julian Tells*
MacLachlan, Patricia. *Sarah, Plain and Tall*
Rylant, Cynthia. *Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures*
Stevens, Janet. *Tops and Bottoms*
LaMarche, Jim. *The Raft*
Rylant, Cynthia. *Poppleton in Winter*
Rylant, Cynthia. *The Lighthouse Family: The Storm*
Osborne, Mary Pope. *The One-Eyed Giant*
(Book One of Tales from the Odyssey)
Silverman, Erica. *Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa*
Poetry
Dickinson, Emily. "Autumn."
Rossetti, Christina. "Who Has Seen the Wind?"
Millay, Edna St. Vincent. "Afternoon on a Hill."

Frost, Robert. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."
Field, Rachel. "Something Told the Wild Geese."
Hughes, Langston. "Grandpa's Stories."
Jarrell, Randall. "A Bat Is Born."
Giovanni, Nikki. "Knoxville, Tennessee."
Merriam, Eve. "Weather."
Soto, Gary. "Eating While Reading."

Continued

Read-Aloud Stories

Kipling, Rudyard. “How the Camel Got His Hump.”
Thurber, James. *The Thirteen Clocks*
White, E. B. *Charlotte’s Web*
Selden, George. *The Cricket in Times Square*
Babbitt, Natalie. *The Search for Delicious*
Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*
Say, Allen. *The Sign Painter*

Read-Aloud Poetry

Lear, Edward. “The Jumblies.”
Browning, Robert. *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*
Johnson, Georgia Douglas. “Your World.”
Eliot, T. S. “The Song of the Jellicles.”
Fleischman, Paul. “Fireflies.”

Grades 4–5 Text Exemplars

Stories

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*
Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *The Secret Garden*
Farley, Walter. *The Black Stallion*
Saint-Exupery, Antoine de. *The Little Prince*
Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*
Singer, Isaac Bashevis. “Zlateh the Goat.”
Hamilton, Virginia. M. C. *Higgins, the Great*
Erdrich, Louise. *The Birchbark House*
Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*
Lin, Grace. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Poetry

Blake, William. “The Echoing Green.”
Lazarus, Emma. “The New Colossus.”
Thayer, Ernest Lawrence. “Casey at the Bat.”
Dickinson, Emily. “A Bird Came Down the Walk.”
Sandburg, Carl. “Fog.”
Frost, Robert. “Dust of Snow.”
Dahl, Roald. “Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf.”
Nichols, Grace. “They Were My People.”

Mora, Pat. “Words Free As Confetti.

Vitae

Kevin D. Starks
Building Principal

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Education and Degrees

B.A. 2010 Elementary Education, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

M.S. 2013 Educational Administration, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Ed.D. 2018 Educational Administration, Lindenwood University-St. Charles

Appointments

2006-2007 Ambassador for the SIUE Academic Success Center Funding Initiative

2008-2009 Internal Affairs Committee Chairman, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

2009-2010 Student Body Vice President, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

2010-2012 Lead Teacher, 7th grade team

2012-2014 Teacher-in-charge, Danforth Elementary Academy

2014-2015 Administrative Intern-Riverview Gardens School District

Teaching Experience

2006-2007 EnTeam Facilitator, partnership with SIU Edwardsville East St. Louis Charter School

2007-2008 Math & Reading Tutor, Family Resource Center (1st-5th)

2009-2010 Maryville Elementary, 3rd Grade General Education

2010-2012 Lift for Life Academy, 7th grade Communication Arts

2013-2015 Danforth Elementary Academy, 2nd grade Full-Inclusion

Su' 2014 Studio Schools Administrator, LeMasters Elementary , 1st-5th grade

Su'2015 Studio Schools Administrator, Moline Elementary, K-5th grade

2015-2016 Elementary Assistant Principal (Gibson Elementary & Moline Elementary)

Awards & Recognition

2006-2010 Johnetta Haley Award Recipient

2009 Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Award Runner-up

2013 Teacher on Fire, Outstanding Teacher Recognition Recipient

2015 Danforth, Teacher of The Year

2017 Rookie of the year; Building Principal Superlative

Professional Affiliations

2007-2012 Founding member of Promoting, Recruiting, Increasing Minority Educators (PRIME)

2010-2012 Founder of Driven & Productive (DAP) Mentoring & Service Organization

2014-Present Missouri Leadership for Excellence, Achievement, & Development (MoLEAD) Cadre III

2016-Present Member of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals (MAESP)