Issue 10, 2019

Leda: Literacy Specialist / Art Work by Roy F. Fox
CONTENTS

About the Cover
Leda: Literacy Specialist..............................................i-iii

From the Editor..............................................................iii

1. Favad
   Roy F. Fox, PhD., University of Missouri ....................... p.1-7

2. Eleven Pills a Day: Linguistic Diversity in America’s Schools
   Kathleen Kreamelmeyer, PhD., Ball State University.............p.8-15

3. Culturally Relevant Book Club: Reaching African American Males
   Bethany Scullin, PhD., University of West Georgia ..............p.16-48

4. Private Woman, Public Latina: Overcoming Gender Stereotypes
   Through Stories
   Santiago Piñón, PhD., Texas Christian University...............p.49-64

5. Increasing Graduate Students’ Cultural Competency by Using
   Many Social Media Sites
   Linda A. Landon, PhD.
   Mary W. Stout, EdD., University of Phoenix
   Douglas K. Neely, PhD. ...............................................p.65-84
ABOUT THE COVER

Leda: Literacy Specialist

Roy F. Fox, PhD. University of Missouri-Columbia, MO

This issue’s cover is a colored-pencil drawing that I made when our dog, “Leda,” was a puppy—a rescue dog. (I misspelled her final name on the lower section of the drawing; because we later changed the spelling.) I chose this image because one summer several years ago, Leda played a key role in the teaching and learning of literacy.

I had always wanted to develop a summer course for English teachers (especially for those teaching ELL students). My focus was on how dogs, cats, and other animals can assist in the teaching and learning of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking. Somewhat to my surprise, this three-week course attracted highly motivated K-College teachers, many of whom already used their pets in their classrooms.

Especially for elementary and middle school students whose first language is not English, reading aloud and speaking to a friendly dog can work wonders for the students’ confidence, and hence their reading fluency and motivation to read and write. I wanted these canine-human interactions to be safe, but active, engaging students in doing literacy—not hearing about it, not listening to lectures about it, and not filling out worksheets—but instead, interacting with a special kind of friend. As a colleague, Rebecca Johnson, once told me, “Something happens when any dog enters a room.” Of course, it does, almost regardless of who, where, when, or why.
I wanted to begin this course with what I hoped would be a vivid example of how human-animal interactions could help develop thinking, reading, and writing. So the first day, I brought Leda to class with me. She was full-grown at that time—long, fluffy hair, big paws. The most quiet and gentlest of creatures. Throughout her long life, we never had to teach Leda anything. From Day One, she asked permission to hop up onto the couch, told us when she needed to go outside for the bathroom, and trekked to bed when we told her (and even before if the night was late!).

So, first thing that morning, I introduced Leda as my dog, but did not say her name aloud, because that was my students’ first objective—to work in pairs to try to figure out Leda’s name. Spelling it correctly would earn them a bonus point! I had a pile of objects that each pair could use when they had their turn at interacting with Leda, including a stick, a few balls, a jar of dog treats, a whistle, a length of rope, and a bowl of water. Class members sat in a circle so the first pair working with Leda, had plenty of room in the center. The job of everyone else was to observe each pair of teachers very closely, and write down exactly what each team was doing and how they did it.

After each team finished their five-minute allotment, we engaged in a brief discussion or “critique” of what worked and what did not help them in discovering her name. In this way, succeeding teams might benefit from the accumulation of knowledge (if they listened closely and made notes).

This many years later, I don’t recall exactly what strategies each team used, but it required about four teams before the code was cracked. I remember that one team tried out several typical dog names to experiment with long vowels, such as, Rover, Queeny, Lulu, Casey, and Spike. Sometimes Leda was interested in a ball and sometimes not. In short, she performed perfectly.

Given a room full of dedicated teachers who were also fervent pet-lovers, our class brimmed over with excellent teaching and learning ideas, as well as an abundance of stories chronicling the loss of such dear friends. One student who lived a few hundred miles away was dealing with the loss of their family’s elderly dog while this class was going on. The room was usually chock-full of emotions of all kinds—memories of losses and gains of pets and students—a potent combination to be sure. It was so intense that half-way through, I was asking myself, “This is draining me! Why did I do this?!” But of course, I regretted nothing, not then or ever. I took a sizable risk in even offering such a course and and have never regretted it. A few years ago, Leda
passed away at age fourteen. My wife and son and I were in Ireland at the time, so it fell to my daughter to see Leda through to whatever cushy perch in the clouds awaited for her to lounge upon. As has often been said, “Every dog has its day.” Leda and I certainly had ours, at the same time.

About the author

Roy F. Fox is Emeritus Professor of English and Education at the University of Missouri. His twelfth book, Facing the Sky: Composing through Trauma in Word and Image, was published in 2016. Also in 2016, Fox served as a Fulbright Scholar at University College Cork, Ireland.
Welcome to our 2019 issue of Engaging Cultures and Voices! This is our eighth year of publication. We remain an international, free, peer-reviewed, open-access journal. These days, there are precious few journals like ours!

This issue squarely reflects where America’s students, teachers, and culture reside at this very moment—right in the center of the cyclone, amidst the challenges and successes of teaching English Language Learners (ELL’s). The authors herein, like countless teachers across America, work valiantly with starkly unique individual students: those who lack literacy in English, those who lack literacy in English and in their native language, those who may also struggle with poverty, broken homes, and physical and substance abuse. Simultaneously, these same students must negotiate how—or even if—they fit into their larger communities and nation.

In short, these students often face prejudice and hatred in their daily lives, much of it fueled by the administration of President Trump and the barrage of actions and propaganda that continually cast all immigrants as, in Mr. Trump’s words, “drug addicts,” “criminals,” and “rapists.” The authors in this issue, then, as well as their students, are the real American heroes.

Roy F. Fox
It was going to be a long flight to Paris.

I was already tired, and who can sleep inside of a screaming metal tube hurtling through space in darkness?

Everyone seemed to be aboard this full flight. Stewardesses scurried about, shutting overhead bins, quickly jerking their gaze from side to side, up and down. I’m too tall for any seat on any American airplane. Anytime I saw the price of a First Class fare, I’d tick off all the other more worthy uses of this outlandish cost: How many great dinners? How many hotel rooms? How many tanks of gas?

I feared glancing at the yawning, empty seat next to me, lest someone plop down—maybe a garrulous salesman, like the obese, slobbering drunk on the flight to Orlando, a sad fellow I’d spotted when I walked to my gate: he’d overflowed a small chair in the airport bar, head down, muttering to himself. At that instant, I divined that he’d end up right next to me. He did.

Now, if I looked at this empty seat, I would draw attention to my good fortune. Instead, I coolly buckled my seatbelt, fussed with the magazines in front of me, unloaded my Bose “Noise Reducing” headphones, and triple-checked my pocket for the sleeping pills I’d carefully wrapped in foil.

Then it happened.
That very last passenger was being led down the aisle, a teenaged guy in black pants, black Metallica tee shirt, dark hair and complexion, dark sunglasses. A kid. And “Jesus,” I thought, “He’s carrying a guitar.” A god-dammed guitar. And nothing else. No, wait—a small amplifier, for god’s-sake. Not even a book. And he’s coming straight to me. Shit! My silent sail to France slides down the toilet. La twah-lay. Ker-plash.

Jennifer-the-Stewardess angles the guitar clumsily into the overhead bin and guides him into his seat, avoiding the metal arms. I admire how she “deals with” this late passenger, helping him with respect and not too hurriedly. No less—he’s blind—how much of a hassle will THIS be?

He sits quietly, somehow “centering” himself. I have no idea why he’s still–just intuition. At the same time, I’m surprised he doesn’t launch into staccato chatter. We sit in silence as the plane taxis to the runway. We lift off. I start to muse: “Maybe this won’t be the hellscape I thought it would be—some silence for a while. I relax enough to open my Kindle. I unfurl the coiled cord of my headphones.

His right hand juts toward me and we shake: “Hey man, I’m Favad. You going to Paris?”

“I’m Roy, and yeah, are you stopping there—and what’s your name again?”

“Favad–F-a-v-a-d–pronounced ‘Fa-vahd.’ Yeah, my family lives in Paris, near Sacre Coeur Basilica; I grew up there.”

“So you’re visiting St. Louis?”

“No, man—I go to school there, the Missouri School for the Blind. The MSB’s a really great school, and I want to become an American citizen.”

“I had a student who taught at MSB. How do you like it there?”

“It’s great, man. I love it. I got a great coach, too. He really helps me, and that’s cool.”

Thinking he’s at or near college-age, I ask what areas he’s interested in pursuing.
“I wanna major in business and go into the import-export business like my brother. I can’t wait to see him. My father’s amazing, too. He knows everyone—the Commissioner of Paris, the jazz violinist, Stephan Grappelli—everyone. I want to be like him, man.”

Thinking that Paris has to be more interesting for him than Missouri, I ask him what he likes to do outside of school.

“I go out with girls and go to bars downtown, ya know? I play heavy metal music in one of ’em. It’s not my favorite music, but that’s what they want, so that’s cool…. Sometimes I get in fights in bars, and that’s cool, too.”

A blind man fighting in a St. Louis bar takes me a few minutes to process. I can’t. So I don’t reply and chalk it up to a kid who wants to impress me that he’s “normal,” so I ask if he likes to do anything else.

“I love cars, man. Really love ‘em.”

“Have you ever driven a car?” I did not know the age at which Favad became blind and was not ready to ask him.

“Yeah, once on a friend’s farm in Southeast Missouri. It was cool. I drove out in a field.”

Favad knew every nuance of every car we talked about. Since I know little about cars, I told him some of the ones I’ve owned, including my 1998 Jeep Wrangler.

“Is that the one with the square headlights or the round ones?”

“The round ones.” Had my son not pointed out that the latest model’s lights were round and that the previous year’s model had square lights, this detail would have been lost forever. I had to ask Favad how he learned so much about cars.

“I go to a car dealer or to someone who has the car, and then I rub my hands over every inch of it—the fenders, hood, windshield, bumper, tires, hubcaps, headlight mounts, everything.”
This I can picture sharply, as he ticks off some of the specific cars that he’s felt. What I’d most like to know, though, is what occurs inside of Favad’s head as he caresses these surfaces: what kinds of synapses and clicks and shifts occur? What changes register with subtle peaks and valleys and how quickly? How and when does one shape evolve? How many of them are assembled into a larger whole? What does the emerging miracle look like?

“That’s impressive. I’ve never known anyone who learned about cars like that….”

“I just wanna be normal, ya know, man? I just wanna drive cars, go out with girls, and play music. That’s all. But I’m really lucky. And my Taekwando teacher, who helped me get my black belt, is the best. He tells me that I have to work extra hard because I have more to overcome than most people. That’s okay. That’s cool. I’m luckier than most people, ya know?

While the Internet remained hard for him, he explained how his other senses, especially hearing and smell, were more developed than other people’s, because of his deprivation of sight. He explained that he writes and performs his own music, that he likes to frequent bars where live music is performed. I was curious about how Favad wrote his lyrics and school papers. He drafts and revises with voice-activation software that speaks back to him everything he writes. I wondered aloud whether only hearing his words helped or hindered his revision of what he’d already written. We talked it over, and he was convinced that it did not seem to interfere at all. (I would have to see his writing to believe him, but did not mention this to him.)

Favad never talked my ear off. It was a conversation of equal measures. Too, we engaged in parallel silences. Comfortable gaps that are most common with old friends. After one such space, I finally asked, “How did you lose your sight?”

“When I was nine, I injured one eye in an accident. The doctors touched the wrong eye, the good one—made me go blind in both.”

“Jeez. Did your family sue the doctor?

“Doctors in France can’t be sued, ya know? But that’s okay, man, that’s cool. My doctor in Boston says he can restore my sight when I get old enough and I’m finished growing, maybe this
year, maybe next. I hope so. I just wanna be normal, ya know? It’ll be cool. Meditating helps, too.”

“That’s interesting because I’ve always required my grad students to read a long article that explores writing is connected to what we call ‘inner speech’ and meditation. What exactly do you do when you meditate?”

“First, I clear my mind out of everything that’s in it. Then, I think of everything that I’ll be doing that day, and of all the things that could go wrong with each one. So, I tell myself that if they do happen, it’s okay; it’ll be cool. Like, if I’m playing in the band that night, I tell myself that if I get into a fight, it’ll be okay.

“Or like this morning, I was supposed to meet an airlines person at eleven o’clock, who would help me get onto my flight. But nobody ever came, so I just waited there. When they did finally show up for this flight, I said, “No problem. That’s okay. Don’t worry about it. That’s cool.”

“Uh huh,” I muttered, as I calculated that Favad had waited over seven hours in the airport by himself.

“It’s all cool, ya know? It’s okay. It’s like with girls at school. They ask me out and they drive. It’s cool. We go to bars and all kinds of places and have a great time.” And then, in a softer, off-handed way, as he twisted his head toward the aisle: “I’m not always sure why they do that, but that’s okay, ya know? That’s cool….”

I had to pause here. I wasn’t sure what he was saying. Then I realized that he was asking me if I thought that he was an attractive guy, and if the girls who asked him out did so because they felt sorry for him (though he never used the words, “sorry” or “sympathy” throughout the whole flight).

Favad was a good-looking kid. I turned toward him and replied with assurance, “No. I don’t think they’re acting out of sympathy for you.”

After we landed, he invited me to his family’s restaurant. Our parting was abrupt and awkward. Neither of us was quite ready. A stewardess met him at his seat, to get him to his next ride. I
didn’t want our talk to end. As compatriots, we forgot about our cramped seats and the endless move through darkness. It was good to be in the City of Light.

Post-Script, 2018

This event occurred about twenty years ago. After my return to the U.S., on that trip, I made notes about this young man, purely because I found him remarkable. He had asked me to visit his family’s restaurant, but with limited time while I was in the Sacre Coeur neighborhood of Paris, I was unsuccessful. I have no idea where Favad is today, but hope that he is happy and thriving and well. I only know that he was articulate, had tremendous will power, energy, and a sturdy sense of optimism. He had already overcome more obstacles than many people face in a lifetime. Even back then, he was a student who could well have been considered “different,” “handicapped,” “minority,” and maybe even “Muslim,” and therefore “suspect” or “dangerous.”

Of course, Favad was (and is, I hope) far more than any of these petty labels. The sad truth is that today, we live in even more mean-spirited times. The circumstances that Favad conquered have increased exponentially. On top of this, young people today face new challenges than they did 20 years ago—a greater variety of problems and most of them more intense than back then. On the other hand, our best chance of reversing today’s socio-political climate resides in Favad and people like him.
About the author

Roy F. Fox is Emeritus Professor of English and Education at the University of Missouri. His twelfth book, *Facing the Sky: Composing through Trauma in Word and Image*, was published in 2016. Also in 2016, Fox served as a Fulbright Scholar at University College Cork, Ireland.
ELEVEN PILLS A DAY: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN AMERICA’S SCHOOLS

Kathleen Kreamelmeyer, PhD, Assistant Professor of Elementary Education, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.

Abstract

Diversity in this country touches many aspects of life other than the color of one’s skin. We are rich and poor. We are old and young. We are gifted and we are physically, emotionally and mentally challenged. Men and women still have conflicts. Gays and lesbians continue to be harassed and even physically harmed. We attend many different religious institutions and worship in a variety of ways and…we speak different languages. This paper will concentrate on the area of linguistic diversity. The Hispanic population in this nation has increased from 6% to 16% in the last 30 years. As a result, our schools must address many new challenges related to this phenomenon.

Keywords: diversity, language, multicultural education, culture, English learner

Not that long ago, immigration to the United States had a very different look to it. Most of the people coming to this country were white, they were Christian and they spoke English (Migration, 2014). This is just not the case any longer. Linguistic diversity is a huge challenge in our schools and society, even in the middle of America.

Times have changed so much to say the least. One of my colleagues told me about her husband's
mother. In the 1950s, she came to the United States from Germany. She was thirteen years old at the time and did not speak a word of English. The school in which she enrolled did not know what to do with her, so they stuck her in a first grade class! This may seem like a dramatic example, but it provides an indicator of the challenges schools have faced with linguistic diversity and the resulting “solutions.” The significance of this becomes more evident when considering the following information. According to Freeman & Freeman (2007), “The U.S. Census Bureau reports that about one in five students in public schools lives in a home where English is not the primary language” (p. 5). One of the most rapidly increasing populations in the United States are school-age children who speak a language other than English at home, with their numbers doubling between 1980 to 2009 (Armario, 2013).

Spanish of course is the predominant foreign language in the United States, with the number of Spanish speakers in the United States increasing 210 percent since 1980 (Accredited, 2014). It is a language that certainly has its fair share of misunderstandings and controversy. One of the biggest reasons for this is probably that many people associate the language with illegal immigration. More than 30 percent of non-Hispanics believe over half of Hispanics in the United States are undocumented, according to a National Hispanic Media Coalition and Latino Decisions 2012 poll (Lilley, 2012). This is the source of anger for many individuals in places like Texas, Arizona, and California. There is also another "unspoken" stereotype that is related to Spanish speakers. Let us use a comparison scenario. Many believe Asians are able to pick up English at a much more rapid pace than native Spanish speakers. For example, if one visits a Chinese restaurant and a Mexican restaurant, some would say the difference between the Asian and Latino employees and their ability to speak English is rather striking. This stereotype is all about work ethic, including “working hard” to learn a new language.

Not speaking English in America will be inconvenient to put it mildly. Sometimes it can even be dangerous. For example, let us say someone is a Spanish speaker and takes an important medication. The pill bottle reads "once" a day, but in Spanish, "once" means eleven. Most times, taking eleven times the recommended dosage is not a good idea! Often such a thing could be lethal.

In the United States, there are some very challenging situations with schools that have a large number of non-native English speaking students and a large number of English-only teachers. Some of these difficulties lie in the lack of uniformity in the programs used to instruct these children who are learning English, while another issue is locating enough qualified teachers to educate them (Armario, 2013). Less than 3 percent of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers had degrees in English language education or bilingual education, according to a 1997
Eleven Pills a Day: Linguistic Diversity in America’s Schools

study (Armario, 2013).

There are plenty of locations in the United States where parent-teacher conferences can cause misunderstandings if the teacher is not able to speak the language of the parents, most probably Spanish. The school will possibly provide a translator for the conference. If the teachers are English-only speakers, they may have a very unrealistic idea of what the Spanish-speaking parent may or may not know. They hear the parent speaking Spanish and recognize that it is Spanish. It sounds good. The parent is speaking rapidly and often the assumption is made that the speaker is fluent in the language, probably even that everything is being said grammatically correct and so forth. In truth, the language of the parent may be very impoverished. It could well be that it is only slightly better than their English. The reasons vary, but very possibly the parent came to the United States as a young child. Their Spanish was not well developed and it certainly has not improved without any additional instruction. It is not at all uncommon for someone to be bilingual in Spanish and English, but the skills in both are actually quite weak.

So, what can be done to meet the needs of English language learners in America’s schools? To assist teachers, I will explain several techniques to aid in the transition for students who are learning English as a New Language (ENL). Not surprisingly, these tips and strategies are not restricted to only students learning English. On a daily basis, successful teachers everywhere incorporate these ideas into their teaching, using them with ALL their students because they work. These simple ideas illustrate that working with an English Language Learner (ELL) does not need to be perceived as a daunting undertaking. It does not need to be met by educators with a feeling of overwhelming pressure, dread, and uncertainty. ENL children are more like than unlike their native English speaking classmates and all benefit from excellent teaching.

From the first Education course in college, pre-service teachers are encouraged to do modeling. It is part of the lesson plan and many college students have spent time on a dorm room floor cutting out and creating the perfect example to model with the children. Modeling what students are expected to do is a potent tip to use with English learners. Unfortunately, as experience in the classroom increases and the daily pressures of preparing for standardized tests, communicating with parents, re-teaching skills and unexpected classroom interruptions, the time previously devoted to modeling, is commonly over taken by the daily rigors of a classroom. Modeling is a lesson component that is simple to omit and that is all too often what happens. This element is especially needed for ELLs who will be able to see what they are expected to do even if they are not fully able to understand the verbal explanation of the task.

Kindergarten to grade 12 educators recognize the value of increasing “wait time” when asking students to respond to questions, contemplate ideas and synthesize class content. This is
especially true for students who need to listen and comprehend in a non-native language, translate that information to their native language, develop a response, translate it back and ultimately respond in the non-native language. When it finally happens, a “normal” activity for most students becomes life changing for the non-native speaker. If a teacher limits wait time, then only the quick response. The teacher calls on those students raising their hands and then the process continues with another question to answer. As this pattern repeats, those students who rely on substantial wait time to respond, begin to realize they do not even need to think about formulating a possible answer because they will not raise their hand in time to be called upon. What is the point of even trying? Increasing wait time has an obvious benefit because there is additional time to formulate a developed response to a question. However, there are other advantages. Increased wait time allows students to expand their knowledge base by listening to those who tend to talk less frequently if wait time is kept to a minimum, like an English language learner.

Using concrete items instead of abstract ones is another path to take with English learners that will serve them and their fellow English speaking classmates. As infants and toddlers learn a language, their caregivers frequently hold up a concrete example and repeat the term – cat, cat, cat. If a food is too heated, an adult will lift up a full spoon, blow on it and repeat – hot, hot, hot. How do the children learn these words? Concrete examples help those learning a language, whether as a toddler or a student. The object helps the learner make a connection between the term and the item, instead of repeating new words that yet have no understandable meaning. This same approach works for native English speakers when new concepts are introduced. For example, a teacher can describe an owl pellet, but it is not until a sample is brought in for the students to investigate, that a more comprehensive understanding takes place.

If concrete objects are not a feasible option, then the next best route is illustrating ideas with drawings or photographs. This method is a continuation of the path created by concrete objects, but it is a less complicated alternative made that much easier with technology. Photos available online can be collected by the ELLs or retrieved beforehand by the instructor.

Specific teaching strategies assist children in learning English and those include graphic organizers which is a branch of a previously mentioned idea of illustrating ideas with drawings. A graphic organizer guides the learner's thinking as they fill in and build upon a visual map or diagram. The concept of creating a paragraph is more clearly understood when there is a simple visual representation of those components such as a hamburger graphic organizer. In this scenario, the top and bottom buns signify the introductory and closings sentences. The meat of the hamburger would represent the most important part of the paragraph, just as it would represent the most important part of a hamburger. The additional components of the sandwich...
such as condiments, lettuce, onion and cheese represent the supporting details of the beef patty paragraph. To an English language learner, the idea of developing a paragraph is even more daunting than it would be to a native English speaker. However, with a graphic organizer, the English learner has a sharper visual understanding of the process, even if a verbal explanation may not be as clear.

The processes of paraphrasing and think-aloud focus on reinforcing an audio explanation that offers a variety of terms to help introduce, describe and clarify a topic. If an ELL is challenged to understand the array of terms used by a teacher, paraphrasing allows the educator to incorporate varying phrases to restate the same information. With an assortment of expressions used through paraphrasing, English learners will more likely grasp and comprehend what the teacher is explaining. The same result is probable through a think-aloud. This term refers to explaining what someone is thinking about while it is being thought. A think-aloud for an addition problem would sound something like this. “If I add the two numbers in the ones column, it will be larger than 10, so I’ll need to ‘carry’ the one and place it above the numbers in the tens column, put the 8 in the ones column and then add all the numbers in the tens column.” This strategy of verbalizing the thinking process allows the English language learner to increase vocabulary while hearing terms in the appropriate context. The verbal repetition of key terms in the context of a specific content area helps to engrain specific words within specific school subjects.

Fostering English language learners to work with a buddy or even additional students in a group setting, sets the tone for peer-to-peer teaching to occur. Children are typically more comfortable interacting with a classmate rather than working one-on-one with a teacher, so a buddy system provides support and encouragement from someone their own age. Casual conversation between friends can result in the most potent potential for learning a new language. The stress of working with a teacher is removed and the comfort level of collaborating with a partner is more relaxed. Adding additional students to the mix creates a group environment and also allows the English learner to interact with and learn from classmates in a less taxing environment.

Valuing an English language learner’s native culture is imperative and can be demonstrated in a multitude of ways. Labeling the classroom with the English language learners’ first language in addition to English, allows the English learners to have a visual reference when learning new vocabulary. Additionally, it encourages native English speakers to learn the ELL’s language as well. Labeling a classroom clock in the English learner’s native language and in English provides a concrete example of the item to be learned.

To celebrate the culture of an English learner, the student could teach their classmates greetings in their native language and for the remainder of the year, the class would continue to use those
greetings. This indicates to the English learner and the remaining classmates that the native language is valued and respected in the classroom. It will not be considered a second-class language.

A teacher can also demonstrate support to English learners by being attentive to the students’ emotions and listening when they compare American culture to their own. This simple act of listening displays caring and support, but unfortunately this type of compassion is not consistently demonstrated throughout America or its schools. Using activities from the English learner’s culture provides learning opportunities for the whole class. It also indicates to the entire class, a curiosity and eagerness to learn about the student, especially if it is the English learner who is teaching the classmates this activity. Finally, one last suggestion for celebrating the culture of a student is for the teacher to put effort into learning the language of the student. Any energy put forth by the teacher will be prized by the student. Barriers break down when both student and teacher laugh at the determined teacher’s mispronunciation of a word in the child’s native language. The child is the expert and is able to teach the educator. This demonstrates that each individual, when valued, respected and expected to, will provide positive contributions to the classroom and beyond.

Perhaps the biggest component of meeting the needs of an English language learner ultimately lies with the teacher. If the teacher is eager to engage with the student, chances are the remaining students will be as well. The educator should strive to model how students should welcome and embrace this unique student into the classroom. According to Sorace, “Perhaps the most significant aspect of teaching English language learners is a teacher’s attitude and behavior toward a child’s oral language.” (p. 75). That student’s transition to a new language depends on a teacher who is open-minded, encouraging and accepting. Be that teacher.

Being bilingual or even multilingual is, in fact, very positive and worth celebrating. Renowned Dartmouth professor John Rassias describes the notion of speaking just one language to be rather like being a painter with only one color to work with (Rassias & Yoken, 2007). If all the artist has is orange paint, the artist’s paintings may still be quite nice. But imagine how much they improve when he is able to add blue to his pallet. With each new language added, the world becomes so much richer.
References


http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/largest-immigrant-groups-over-time


About the author

Dr. Kathleen Kreamelmeyer is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Kreamelmeyer primarily teaches the cultural diversity class and was recently awarded the Outstanding Teaching Award in the Elementary Education Department. She has been an educator for over twenty-five years, including time teaching in London, England.
CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOK CLUB: REACHING YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Bethany Scullin, PhD, Assistant Professor
University of West Georgia

Abstract

This article explores how eight African-American eighth-grade male students, enrolled in urban public middle school, participate in a culturally relevant literacy-based reading curriculum in the context of a book club. Using the constant comparative method for data analysis, two overarching themes emerged: the role of books and the role of space and discourse. Based on the results of the study and considering the voice of the participants, a proposed culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model is highlighted and explained.

Keywords: African American males, reading, culturally relevant curriculum, holistic case study, culturally relevant literature

There is little to debate regarding the reading achievement gap (NCES, 2015) of African American eighth grade male students and their White counterparts as the most recent nationwide testing results demonstrate:
• 11% of Black males scored at or above Proficient versus 38% of White males;
• 52% of Black males scored at or above Basic compared to 81% of White males;
• and 48% of Black males scored below Basic opposed to 19% of White males.

The results for 2013 reading gap revealed a similar pattern as did the results for 2012 (no data is available for years prior to 2012). The reading achievement gap is not narrowing between these two subgroups, nor is there any indicator showing that there will be significant improvement in the upcoming school years as nationwide curricular practices remain stagnant towards African American male students.
Rightfully so, there has been national concern regarding the African American male reading achievement gap and the limited improvements in solving this critical and unsurmountable issue. Since 1978, The National Council of Teachers of English has advocated for the inclusion of a curriculum that accurately and authentically represents memories, including African Americans. In more recent years, one of the responses to this dilemma has been the implementation of culturally relevant instruction (CRI), also referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally relevant teaching, within urban school classrooms. While the research and implementation of CRI has drawn much-needed attention to this neglected group of students, many African American scholars have called for culturally relevant curricular interventions as a path toward increasing achievement and school connectedness for African American children (Asante, 1992; Banks, 2001; Giddings, 2001; Hale, 2001; & Ladson-Billings, 1995) in place of the current traditional curriculum that historically does not acknowledge people of color.

**Background of the Problem**

**Cultural Mismatch Between African Americans and Schools**

Unfortunately, a cultural mismatch often occurs when African American students do not see themselves in the curriculum provided by schools and have frequent experiences in which their cultural behavior is not accepted (Irvine-Jordan, 1991). Several studies have indicated that school achievement and motivation improve significantly when protocols and procedures of teaching are synchronized with the cognitive abilities, physical and verbal style, ethnic frames of reference, and African-centered principles of African American children (Albury, 1992; Boykin, 1978, 1982, 1994; Gay, 2000/2010; Howard, 1998; Krater, Zeni & Cason, 1994; Tatum, 2000; Tuck & Boykin, 1989).

Research suggests that African American children often have a distinctive manner of learning and engaging that is characterized by physical and verbal expressive learning styles, and highly physical interactions with their environment (Gay, 2000/2010; Hale-Benson, 1982; Neal, 2001; Thompson, 2007). This is not often recognized by many educators teaching African American students and usually ignored within the implemented curriculum. African American students often bring unique learning patterns to the classroom which includes cultural traditions, language, behaviors, style, dress, mannerisms, learning styles, movement, and African-centered perspectives (Irvine-Jordan, 1991; Irvine-Jordan, Armento, Causey, Jones, Frasher, & Weinburgh, 2000).

Because of the differences in cultural behavior, African American children frequently experience "cultural discontinuity in schools; particularly schools in which the majority, or Eurocentric persons, control, administer, and teach" (Irvine-Jordan, 1991, p. 15). Cultural discontinuity can produce a lack of interest in schooling along with educational disengagement and discontent (Irvine-Jordan, et al., 2000). This discontinuity has been evidenced by a well-documented
academic achievement gap which has repeatedly shown that African American children are lagging behind in all academic areas (D'Amico, 2001; Haycock, 2001), especially African American males who continue to perform lower than their peers throughout the country on almost every academic indicator (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). The need for experiences and curriculum that mirror their home life, community, and African-centered principles are often neglected in educational settings where the majority of African American students are taught by White females.

**Historical Disconnect Between Teacher and Student**
Research has begun revealing the harmful cultural differences between the teacher and the Black student (Graybill, 1997; Siegal, 1999). Because many teachers often fail to acknowledge the validity of any culture other than the dominant culture (Sleeter, 2004; White, 1973), there continues to be a negative impact on African American students because of their cultural differences. The language used by teachers often denotes a negative conception of the students. These children were labeled "underprivileged, culturally deprived, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally handicapped" (White, 1973, p. 309). The message became: those who were different than the dominant cultural norm were inferior.

**Lack of Student Voice Within the Curriculum**
Student voice has long been forgotten in curriculum-making practices. Traditionally, curriculum comes from textbooks, scope and sequence charts, teacher guides, and other sources of predetermined curriculum developed outside the classroom. Nieto (1994) makes the recommendation for more students’ perspectives in their classrooms by claiming that “student voices sometimes reveal the great challenges and even the deep pain young people feel when schools are unresponsive, cold places” (p. 420). Furthermore, she states that “those who spend the most time in schools and classrooms are often given the least opportunity to talk . . . students have important lessons to teach educators and we need to begin to listen to them more carefully” (p. 420).
Burke and Short (1991) claim that students should become curricular informants and be involved in the curriculum making process as a shared responsibility between the students and teacher. The creation of curriculum by both the teacher and the students has often been referred to as “negotiating the curriculum” (Boomer, 1982). A negotiated curriculum does not mean educators abandon the responsibility of curriculum, nor does it mean giving students “free range” to make decisions. Rather, “curriculum negotiation involves giving students a voice in the choice and development of learning opportunities: both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of curriculum” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 171).
Culturally Relevant Curriculum and the Need for Research

Many African American students, especially males, do not connect with the traditional curriculum used in the majority of classrooms today. Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994, 1995) and Geneva Gay (2000/2010) proposed a curriculum based on culturally relevant teaching. Although there is no universally accepted definition of culturally relevant curriculum (CRC), for the purpose of the study a CRC is “based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2002). Culturally relevant curriculum creates a bridge between home and school cultures that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

There appears to be a large gap in the literature given the absence of qualitative or quantitative research studies that examine what happens when African American students, especially male, participate in a culturally relevant curriculum. While there are many studies examining a CRC with Hawaiian, Native American, and Latino students, only three studies were found specifically implementing a culturally relevant curriculum with African American K-12 students. The first study documented African American students’ responses and how students participated when immersed in a CRC (Gibson, 2006). In this dissertation study, the researcher initiated a culturally relevant physical education curriculum to understand African American student responses and connection to a relevant physical education curriculum which resulted in increased student motivation to participate and made way for leaders to emerge within the class (Gibson, 2006). The second study, conducted by Januszka (2008), sought to examine the effects of employing a culturally relevant curriculum with second grade African American students to facilitate reading fluency. The results showed that the students who partook in the culturally relevant curriculum did better than the control group. Januszka attributed this to the CRC that was implemented as the texts used were more culturally familiar to the students and hence did better on fluency measures than when using a traditional text with no cultural component. Lastly, Sampson & Garrison-Wade (2011) explored the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant American history curriculum. The results revealed students had a statistically significant preference for the culturally relevant curriculum. All authors who conducted the previously mentioned studies confirmed the importance of implementing a culturally relevant curriculum and stated the need for more research in an attempt to meet the curricular needs of our nation’s African American student population.
Theoretical Framework

This study is based on sociocultural theory which is founded on the notion that knowledge is constructed in social settings, wherein groups construct knowledge for one another, creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory explains the relationship between learning and development through social sources of individual development, including language and social interactions, as well as familial values and practices. According to Vygotsky (1978), students view themselves and their surroundings through the sociocultural perspectives of their own experiences. This approach to sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of cultural forces in shaping one’s development.

Sociocultural theory also emphasizes the advantages of discussion, which is highly valued in many African American communities. Group discussion affords students the chance to exercise self-regulation, self-determination, and a desire to persevere with assignments or activities (Matsumara, Slater, & Crosson, 2008) while building on African American learning patterns of a social/oral emphasis (Willis, 1989). In addition, dialogue increases student enthusiasm, collaborative skills, and the ability to problem solve (Dyson, 2004; Matsumara, et al., 2008). Increasing students’ opportunity to talk provides a space where students’ voices are heard and increases their ability to sustain their thinking, expand their reasoning skills, and to dispute their opinions persuasively and respectfully (Reznitskaya, et al., 2007).

In addition, a book club setting which serves as the context for the study where students openly discuss a common reading acknowledges the value of open discourse in group discussion. The advantages of group talk are built into the culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum (CRLBRC) designed for this study as it uses a small group book club setting to provide a space where student voices can be heard and also respects the cultural forces that shape each student’s development. This research study recognizes a gap in the literature by investigating what happens when a group of adolescent African American male students participate in a curriculum that concedes oppression and is built with their cultural experiences in mind.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

2005; Webster, 2002). It appears that there is a great deal of information about the foundations of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to implement culturally relevant teaching, but as previously mentioned, there is limited peer-reviewed research on the how students experience a culturally relevant curriculum.

This study, then, is based on the notion that the traditional reading curriculum taught in schools is historically oppressive, as this type of curriculum is viewed as “normal” and tends to ignore the experiences and skills that diverse students bring to the classroom. A culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum attempts to disrupt this common curricular practice as it embraces student differences and acknowledges race and personal experiences. This article focuses exclusively on the research question: What happens when eight African American male students participate in a culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum? Based on these results, a proposed culturally relevant literature-based reading curriculum model is presented to supply educators who teach African American adolescent male students with a foundation built on student voices and experiences.

**Methodology**

**Holistic Case Study Design**
The purpose of case study research is “to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The case study approach is defined by Schram (2006) as “an analytic focus on an individual event, activity, episode, or other specific phenomenon…” (p. 106) and by Stake (1995) as a “specific, a complex, functioning thing” (p. 2). This study fits inside both definitions well as a book club is a “bounded system” and individual activity (Smith, 1978, as cited in Stake, 1995, p. 2). The book club, the holistic case, featuring culturally relevant texts was the phenomenon under examination which has specified boundaries. This holistic bounded system is a single entity identified by the following qualities: in terms of time (book club meets two to three times per week for 60 to 70 minutes), in terms of space (an empty classroom), and in terms of components (eight participants).

**Site and Participants**
Educational case study researchers are interested in how actors in education experience their surroundings. The site was chosen by analyzing what research questions were being asked (based on the larger study) and where these questions could possibly be answered. Also, a holistic case study design is dependent on its context (Stake, 1995) and therefore was purposefully chosen. The site, an urban middle school in Pennsylvania, is part of a larger city school district with 12,100 students and 1,100 teachers. The school reports enrolling 540 students in grades six through eight with 55 teachers on staff with a 99% free and reduced lunch rate (ProPublicica, 2013).
After IRB approval and conducting general observations of the designated eighth-grade language arts classroom for two weeks, all students who identified as African American and male were asked to participate in the study. These nine students met in the teacher’s lounge as the researcher explained all that would be required of them as research participants. Eight students (all pseudonyms), Isaac, Donald, Deshawn, Devante, Kareem, Edwin, Jamar, and Garrett returned their consent forms within a week as one student mentioned that they “really want to get out of class.” All but one student received some type of special education service in reading/language arts. Seven of the eight students stated that they did not read for pleasure and only read when they “have to” in class. All eight students revealed that they rather not be in school nor did they look forward to attending school every day.

Data Collection and Analysis
Considering Creswell’s (2007) statement explaining that a case study is one in which “the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73), data were collected over a period of 17 weeks. Typically, the group left their language arts class early to meet in an empty classroom for an hour and ten minutes, two to three times each week. Data were collected through teacher interview; observations; audio recordings from initial, ongoing, and final semi-structured interviews; student reflection journals; and audio recordings from each book club meeting. A record was also kept of participant attendance and how much each student read from the assigned reading to prepare for the book club session. In addition, the researcher took field notes and kept a research journal to serve as a place to write “researcher identity memos” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 27) that assisted in examining the experiences, goals, biases, feelings, and assumptions experienced before, during, and after the study.

The coding from all data were manually compared (without using HyperRESEARCH) in order to determine the major themes, categories, and subcategories. A constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was utilized to continuously go back-and-fourth through all the collected data to compare the initial codes and begin identifying major themes, categories, and subcategories by analyzing emerging patterns and relationships. Coded data were assembled and reassembled to develop preliminary themes and categories to compare the data within and amongst categories (Maxwell, 1996).

Trustworthiness
Establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study is essential in ensuring thorough and rigorous analysis. The researcher has an ethical obligation to minimize misunderstandings (Stake, 1995).
Being that the researcher is a White woman from a middle class and racially homogeneous background, there was concern over the disconnect that would most likely occur with the interpretations of the collected data regarding adolescent African American males participating in a CRLBRC. Therefore, a member check was conducted after all data was analyzed. In preparation for the member check, all final themes, categories, and subcategories were changed into statements for participants to consider and determine whether they either agree or disagree with each. During the member check, a highlighter and a copy of the statements were provided to each participant. As the researcher read each statement aloud to the group, participants either highlighted the statement if they agreed, or left it alone if they disagreed. The students asked questions as needed to clarify any confusion they had over the statements. If two or more participants disagreed with a statement, it was deleted from the findings in order to preserve their voice in the data analysis and reporting process.

While this article does not delve into the breadth and depth of each stage of the curricular process as detailed in the original study (Author, 2014), two components, the book club setting and the books, are highlighted to further explain the design of the CRLBRC.

**Book Clubs**

A major component of the curricular design was the book club context. Books clubs, also referred to as literature circles, or inquiry circles (Harvey & Daniel, 2009) consist of a small group of students gathering together on a regular basis to discuss a piece of literature in depth. Usually, students’ discussions are guided by what they have read prior to participating in the book club using their questions, thoughts, comments, connections, and predictions that arise as they read the book.

The book club adhered to several key guidelines suggested by Daniels (2002) that also adhere to the components of the CRLBRC: (a) students choose their own reading materials; (b) met on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading; (c) discussed topics originated by the students; (d) students used written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion; and (e) group meetings aimed to be open, natural conversations about books and therefore personal connections and open-ended questions were encouraged. Each book club session followed a similar schedule of beginning with 10 to 15 minutes of group talk where the researcher took the time to begin developing a rapport with the participants. Then 30 to 40 minutes were dedicated to open discussion of the assigned reading. During the last 10 to 15 minutes of the session, students wrote in their reflection journals and either shared their written reflection or discussed concerns that needed to be addressed to improve the book club.

The group negotiated with each other and researcher to determine the required number of pages to be read for the following session. Each student was responsible for reading the specific
Culturally Relevant Book Club: Reaching Young African American Males

number of pages determined by the participants as a group but no consequence was given if the reading was not completed. The researcher also completed the same reading tasks as the students in order to understand the students’ book discussions as well as to demonstrate investment and engagement in the book club.

Culturally Relevant Text Selection
Based on Vygotsky’s notions of sociocultural theory, readers interpret texts while continuously using their social and cultural contexts. This idea comes into play when choosing texts for African American males in a CRLBRC. Because the researcher is a White female and cannot justify collecting a sample of culturally relevant books for African American middle school males alone, a selection of texts was created with the help of two fellow African American male doctoral students who were public school teachers. Both emailed suggestions of book titles and additional websites detailing quality African American texts with a wide array of genres and readability levels. They based their choices on what they had personally read and what their children and students have read and were currently reading. Using the resources provided by these two helpful individuals, a proposed book list was developed that included 21 texts.

After reducing the text selection into two groups: nine picture books and 12 novels; the researcher conducted a brief “book talk” (Kittle, p. 59, 2013) on each book to highlight the characters, plot, and any interesting features. The students then had the opportunity to peruse through both sets of books to choose their first four choices in each group as they recorded their selections on two ballots, one for the picture books and one for the novels. The votes were tallied and the picture books with the most votes were: 12 Rounds of Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali (Smith, 2007) and Testing the Ice (Robinson, 2009). The novels selected were: Yummy (Geri, 2010), Bang!, (Flake, 2005), Shooter (Myers, 2004), and You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems about Boys (Flake, 2010).

Findings

Two major themes emerged through the data analysis process: Role of Books and Role of Space and Discourse. As the findings are explained, segments of dialogue that occurred during the book club meetings are frequently presented. Rather than summarizing their discussions, the goal was to present clear evidence to support the findings, and also present the students’ authentic conversations in an attempt to authentically represent their voice.

Role of Books
The role that the culturally relevant texts selected by the participants played within the CRLBRC
was an important driving force within the study. During one of the last book club sessions, the students were asked to tell the researcher what they enjoyed about the book club meetings. One response was:

Isaac: The books.
Donald: Yeah, the books.
Devante: Our readings.
Researcher: So hold on. Books, so the books you chose?
Deshawn: Yeah, they were good ones.

Engaged within the text
The literacy behavior “engaged within the text” is operationally defined as being directly involved with the book. More specifically, the students used the text in a purposeful way, silently or verbally, to make meaning before, during, or after reading.

Underlining. At the beginning of the study, students indicated that they read their assigned reading but did not know what to talk about during the book club sessions. Therefore, the researcher modeled the strategy of underlining a piece of the text when reading independently to indicate a possible discussion point for the book club. While several other strategies were modeled that many of the students continued to use, students began consistently underlining when they read in order to become involved in the group’s conversation. During our discussions, students often specifically stated what they underlined. Although this literacy behavior was not authentically generated by the students but introduced and modeled by the researcher, they incorporated the modeled strategy in order to actively participate in and support the conversation.

Engaged beyond the text. Students were also engaged beyond the text, meaning participants pushed their thinking past the passive role of reading into a new level of understanding.

Empathy through connections. Throughout the book club discussions, the students would often empathize with what the character was experiencing. Students demonstrated an understanding and awareness of the character’s feelings and thoughts by connecting with the character and often posing possible alternatives to the character’s actions during our discussions. Students used their background knowledge to empathize with what the character experienced and presented possible alternative choices the character could have made. One example of this is when Donald mentions, “If he [Yummy] would of just went with his grandma and not them [gang members] cause at the end he [Yummy] was crying and all scared.” Donald offered the option of Yummy going with his grandmother instead of waiting for his gang members, who eventually kill Yummy, to pick him up. Later in the conversation, Donald added, “Cause grandmas love you no matter what” demonstrating that he possibly has or had a grandmother.

Engaging Cultures and Voices
Issue 10 2019
who demonstrated these qualities and would have provided Yummy with a feasible alternative. Here, Donald’s engagement was initiated and sustained by his personal connections to the text.

**Asking questions.** During our discussions, the students often posed questions to the other book club members which furthered discussion and encouraged students to stay engaged in the conversation. Students valued asking and answering questions as explained by Donald, “Answering questions and like when people are asking questions, it got us talking.” While some of the questions were higher level and thought-provoking, the majority of the questions posed by students were low-level as many were simple recall-related questions and often stemmed from their confusion about what they read. However, the lower level questions that the students presented frequently promoted higher level thinking, which led to a rich discussion or “talking out the text.” During these engagements, students would often collaboratively discuss the complexities of an issue presented in the book which led to an enhanced understanding through discussion. They listened to each other and shared various opinions of the characters and/or events for others to consider.

**Students were intrinsically motivated to read.** Although the concept of reading motivation is somewhat vague, complex, and difficult to measure (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007), intrinsic motivation is characterized as reading for enjoyment and reading as a pleasurable activity (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007). While students can be motivated in multiple ways and the level of motivation can vary (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002), participants in this study were intrinsically motivated to read by reading their reading assignments, reading more than they did before, and demonstrating an interest in reading additional culturally relevant books.

**Students read.** Students were reading for the sake of reading possibly because they were able to choose what they wanted to read or possibly because they were able to identify with the selected books. Students read more than the required amount of reading 31.94% of the time, students read the required reading 29.96% of the time, students read less than what was required 34.15% of the time, and did not read at all 3.96% of the time. While the previous percentages indicate that students read at least some of their required reading 96.05% of the time, students indicated they increased their overall amount of reading throughout the study when compared to their previous self-identified reading habits. During a final interview, Isaac explains why he chose to read:

Researcher: I was looking through my notes and noticed that you usually read what you were supposed to read. Why did you read even though it wasn’t for a grade or –?
Isaac: That’s just respectful. We got about three days to read to the pages, but if when we come here we like we didn’t even read the pages. It would be different; we couldn’t talk about it none.

Having the opportunity to talk about the text at our club meetings had a noteworthy impact on
Isaac to keep reading and to continue participating in the group.

*Students read more than they did before.* The students expressed this change over the course of the study as Isaac noted in his reflection journal: “I read more. I make sure I read all of it. I see more of the story. I don’t want to stop.” Kareem also wrote on two separate reflections, “I’m reading these books and I didn’t read before” and “I’m starting to read a lot more books.” Devante also discussed his increase in reading:

Researchers: Did you find yourself doing anything differently when you read these books?
Devante: Actually, I read more.
Researchers: Why do you think that?
Devante: Because first I thought the book wasn’t going to be interesting, so I was in like Yummy and Bang. I read the first couple pages and so I thought it could be a good book. So, I would just start reading the rest of it. So, I want them all.
Researchers: As it got better, you wanted to read it more?
Devante: Mm-hmm. (affirmative)
Researchers: Has this changed how much you read on your own now?
Devante: Yes.
Researchers: Why do you think that?
Devante: Because the books that we read, a lot of us in there [the books], it was about people, their life, how their life is and how it went on and what their parents did and did not do.

**Role of Space and Discourse**

**Gradually building a community of trust and respect.** Cultivating a community where the group members trusted each other and the researcher took time. Initially, the students were hesitant to share personal information as the researcher might “get them in trouble.” During an ongoing interview, Isaac was asked why he started talking more during the book discussions. He responded:

Isaac: I just got used to you.
Researchers: So what do you mean by that?
Isaac: I was shy at first. I didn’t know if you would snitch on us.
Researchers: And you didn't think you could say some things?
Isaac: Yeah.
Researchers: Why?
Isaac: Cause that’s what teachers do.

The conversation with Isaac demonstrates the importance of gradually building trust in order to create a space where students felt they could openly talk about their opinions. Other students confirmed Isaac’s opinion of building trust in the group. However, it is important to note that the
researcher did report the content of two book club discussions to the school’s guidance counselor because of student safety concerns. Even though the group members knew the two discussions were reported to the appropriate school personnel, they still considered the researcher trustworthy.

Students also valued the respect demonstrated by other participants and the researcher. The students voiced their opinion in regards to respecting each other through getting along and listening to each other. Garret wrote in his reflection journal, “We are getting along with each other. I was happy that we didn’t argue” and Deshawn wrote, “They was listening to what I was saying and we was telling how we was really feeling and telling people how to solve their problems.” Devante noted in his journal, “I liked it because we bonded and told each other’s stories” which also reveals the importance of respectful behaviors exhibited by members of the book club.

The students also valued the respect the researcher demonstrated towards them. For example, during one book club meeting, students were expressing their frustration about teachers demanding respect without demonstrating respect to students in return. The researcher posed a question asking if they felt respected during the book club discussions.

- Donald: Yes. You respect us.
- Donald: You talk – you talk nicely.
- Researcher: But, I am a teacher.
- Devante: Yeah, but you talk nicely to us like Donald said.

Students expressed that they welcomed the respectful behavior of “talking nicely.” In addition, respect was also valued between group members. At the end of one of book club sessions, students were asked what was needed to be improved upon for the next meeting. Devante was the first to respond:

- Devante: Respect.
- Researcher: Why? What do you mean?
- Devante: We showed respect. We have respect…but we need to show more, too.
- Researcher: To each other or to me?
- Devante: No, to each other. If one person’s talking, then another person starts talking. Then we all start talking.
- Researcher: Do you think we should do something about this during our next meeting?
- Group: Yeah, yes.
- Researcher: Well, like what? What should we do to show more respect?
- Deshawn: Don’t interrupt.
- Researcher: How should we do that?
Deshawn: I don’t know.

This notion was also voiced by additional members of the group as they made comments in their reflection journals as Kareem stated, “Stop interruptions and respect more” and Jamar stated during a book club session, “We need to be more respectful to others and the person who is talking.” While addressing interruptions was one of the curricular decisions made by the group is explained later in this section, the students wanted a space where their voice was respected and heard by all group members.

**Space for individual and group student voice.** Providing a space that encouraged open discussion for students was perceived by students as an opportunity for “being true.”

*“Being true”*. The students referred to the term “being true” multiple times throughout the book club discussions. One instance occurred when students were asked to reflect in their journals on what surprised them about the book club meetings. The following discussion highlights where “being true” was first mentioned by Isaac as he was asked to explain the phrase.

Isaac: I’m gonna write… I’ll write being true.

Researcher: What?

Isaac: Being true.

Researcher: I don’t know what that is…

Isaac: I’ll say it’s like – it’s like I being real but…

Deshawn: I don’t know how to explain…

Donald: I got it on my shirt too.

Researcher: Yeah, but can you help me? I don’t know what that means.

Isaac: Sometimes…It’s like a baseball bat or a basketball and it’s a soccer ball or game or you got somethin’ awesome and there is somethin’ nice, but then it’s really just a basketball.

Researcher: So, it’s like you think you have something great, but it’s really not that great?

Isaac: Yeah, but it’s who you are too.

Based on this conversation, “being true” means being able to act in a natural, unforced manner. Students did not have to invest their energy in defending who they are or trying to act in a contrived way but rather used their life experiences to build on conversation in an organic manner.

**Students as knowledge creators within the enacted curriculum.** Students served as creators of knowledge within the space of the book club sessions. While students are traditionally passive receivers of curriculum, the group members actively made many curricular decisions, as well as managerial decisions, usually in a purposeful manner.

*Dealing with interruptions.* As mentioned previously, the students valued respect
between book club members and interpreted interruptions as a lack of respect. Even though students recognized interruptions as something that needed to be “fixed,” they struggled to know what actions to take to make this a reality within the context of the book club. The researcher posed a strategy relating to tally marks (not detailed in this article) to help with interruptions and the group consented. Based on the group’s realization of their frustration with interruptions, the expectation regarding discourse was modified. Students now expected everyone to listen to each other and avoid interjections in order for every group member to be heard. Independently and as a group, they acknowledge the value of being able to listen to others and to talk without interruptions and therefore thought a change needed to be made. While some interruptions continued to occur, students began to regulate the tally marks on their own. For example, if one student interrupted another, the first student would simply say “tally” and a tally would be marked on the board without stopping the flow of the discussion. The word, tally, became a type of unobtrusive signifier to the person interrupting to stop while keeping the momentum of the conversation going.

_Students as facilitators._ The CRLBRC was originally designed with students taking turns facilitating the book club sessions but students were uncomfortable with this arrangement and voiced their feelings during the third book club meeting. Devante asked, “Why can’t we all just do it at the same time?” Garrett also stated his concern, “Yeah, I don’t like how one person’s got to do it.” To rectify this curricular decision made by the researcher, the students suggested that everyone facilitates every time a book club is held. The group decided that each member would come to every meeting with something they wanted to talk about related to the assigned reading. This process seemed “unnatural” at first as students would say “your turn” after they were finished. However, they gradually developed a more organic rhythm with every group member chiming in with their questions or comments without hesitation.

_Reading out loud._ Another suggestion made by students was to read out loud during our meetings. Garrett and Donald initiated this decision by writing in their reflection journals that, “We should read out loud more” and “We should read out loud or in a circle in our group.” Based on their feedback, the option was posed to students and they responded positively. When a student referred to a specific part of the book during the group conversations, they had the option to read it aloud or ask the researcher to read for them. Initially, students hesitated to read out loud but gradually became more comfortable with the process. Donald mentioned that now he was, “Not afraid to read aloud because I was before.” In addition, students revealed that reading out loud in our group became a more comfortable act. Deshawn explained, “It didn’t matter if I messed up [reading out loud] cause no one made fun of me,” while Isaac added, “I actually liked it [reading out loud]. I didn’t even want to do it at first, but I got better.”

_Teaching the researcher about African American male culture._ Throughout the book club sessions, the students explained many aspects of African American male culture and experience to the researcher. The researcher often asked students to explain something
unfamiliar during their book conversations. Initially, the students were annoyed with the researcher’s questioning as Deshawn asked, “Why do you ask us so many questions about us?” The researcher responded with, “Sometimes I have no idea what you’re talking about and I get confused, so I want you to explain it to me so I can understand.” Continuing with, “Remember, I told you that I’m a White girl who grew up around cows…I have no idea what you’re talking about sometimes, but I want to know.” This response satisfied their curiosity and encouraged them to often ask “Do you know what that means?” if they thought the researcher might be confused about a statement someone made.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Role of Books**

**Reading engagement.** An engaged reader is one who is intrinsically motivated to read, reads frequently, and often talks with others about what they are reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). From this viewpoint, reading engagement can be thought of in terms of how often African American males read and what level of involvement they put forth while reading. The findings of this study suggest that the eight African American male participants were engaged in the reading process by underlining specific sentences and phrases during their personal reading time in order to promote discussion as well as making connections and asking questions during our book club meetings to facilitate sustained group discussion. The participants also showed a level of intrinsic motivation by reading their assigned pages, reading more than they did before, and displaying an interest in wanting to read more culturally relevant literature. While no professional literature was found confirming this finding with an African American adolescent male population, this notion was posited by Tatum (2006) explaining that African American male students are likely to be more engaged with texts when the texts are culturally relevant, that is, they reflect their lived experiences and realities.

When the participants were provided with the opportunity to read these pieces of culturally relevant texts, they were intrinsically motivated to read, read more than before, and showed interest in wanting to read additional CRL. It is conceivable, that if instead, the students were provided with culturally neutral texts; they would not have had the same types of reading experiences or displayed the same types of reading behaviors, such as sharing personal stories and opinions or engaging in sustained conversation about the books.

These findings indicate that the types of books the participants read, culturally relevant texts, were important in engaging students in the personal reading process and should be considered an integral part of a reading curriculum. The participants were able to identify with the characters and the characters’ experiences in order to become engaged in their personal reading and group
discussions. While current research indicates that students are more likely to engage in texts that reflect their social and cultural experiences than texts that do not (Protacio, 2012), in many classrooms, African American males are not given opportunities to read books that reflect their culture and lived experiences, such as the participants in this study. Since there is a connection between reading engagement and reading achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009), the lack of access to culturally relevant literature might be a contributing factor to the overall lack of reading success for African American male students.

**Role of Space and Discourse**

Space and discourse were also critical components of the CRLBRC. The participants appreciated the small group context built on trust and respect as one participant, Edwin, mentioned that our group was “Comfortable, yeah, comfortable” and Donald stated “We can say anything. Nothing is right or wrong.” In this context, the participants had the opportunity to “be true” in their conversations and provide invaluable insight into the curriculum through voicing their opinion.

Gradually building a community of trust and respect. Respect and trust were established as essential by the participants in order to have an open book club discussion where the participants felt they were “being true.” The participants wanted a teacher who they could trust not to “snitch” on them. While many teachers may report or talk about events or occurrences that their students discuss, as they may be considered taboo, the researcher only reported incidents that might be harmful to themselves or others, keeping their personal stories and conversations private if it did not pose a threat. Through this, the participants began to consider the researcher trustworthy. Deshawn stated the researcher was “like a teacher sized friend that who we can talk to and you’ll listen and understand us.” As they were first annoyed with the many questions asked by the researcher, the participants later seemed to appreciate the researcher’s attempt to listen and understand who they are and their experiences. Making an effort to establish a relationship was noticed and eventually welcomed by the participants.

Many scholars have argued the importance of positive teacher-student relationships (Frymier & Houser, 2000; West, 1994). The finding of building a community of trust and respect is an important contribution to a large body of professional research (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Cambourne, 2000; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Forsyth, 2008; Holdaway, 1979; Routman, 2005; Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). For example, trust between teacher and student was a significant positive predictor of the differences in student achievement (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Ladson-Billings (2000) also found that trust between teachers and students was one of the most important components of schools that successfully taught African American students. Howard (2006) explains,
We must know our students well, both for the purpose of building relationships that work, and also for the purpose of designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are responsive to, and honoring of, our students’ actual lived experiences. There is no work more complete, and there is no work more important, than this. (p. 132)

In addition, Howard’s (2001) work suggests that students of the underrepresented population are more likely to perform better when they believe that teachers and administrators are aware of their needs and are involved in building a relationship with them that acknowledges their personal and cultural experiences. Therefore, in order to create a curriculum that fits the needs of African American male students, educators need to focus on developing relationships built on trust and respect.

**Space for individual and group student voice.** The participants utilized our book clubs as a space for “being true” by sharing personal opinions and experiences that sometimes centered around topics that might be considered taboo by some educators. Because African American male students are frequently taught by middle-class White females, taboo topics are often seen as inappropriate for classroom discussion and therefore regularly neglecting what is truly happening in students’ daily lives. Unsurprisingly, nontraditional topics of discussion can be awkward and feel uncomfortable for many educators. However Kefele (2009) suggests,

> Because many African American male students identify with violent and illegal behavior, teachers need to be acutely familiar with the frequency and context of these events in the community. By developing a broader sense or awareness of the events to be able to address and/or counteract these harmful aspects. But they cannot be ignored or considered taboo—this is their life and teachers must take that into consideration when developing a curriculum for this population. (p. 18)

In addition, Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) state “Minority perspectives in the form of narratives, testimonies, or storytelling challenge the dominant group’s accepted truths” (p. 5) as this type of talk might be uncomfortable for educators to consider as the stories might contradict their current perceived beliefs as “history is always told from the perspective of the dominant group” (p. 5). What might be perceived as taboo by the teacher is perceived as normal by this student population which further silences their lived experiences. For instance, the participants engaged in a conversation based on the book, Bang!, where the main character, Mann, was stopped by law enforcement. The participants continued by discussing their personal discriminatory encounters with the local police force. Many educators might have found this topic unsuitable for classroom discussion; however, the participants were simply connecting their lived experiences with Mann’s. These events were important to the participants and silencing their voice would have been disrespectful as their stories would have been perceived as
insignificant.

African American male students need a space within the curriculum where their potentially taboo stories and experiences are embraced and built upon in an attempt to genuinely understand their experiences. If teachers continue to ignore this “forbidden” discourse, a continued alienation will exist further driving a wedge between teacher and student connectedness. The current power structure within our educational system in the United States is reflective of the power structure of American society which leaves little room to value other cultures that are not conceptually White. Because of this, teachers must recognize this inequality while providing a space for African American male students to express their thinking about what they are reading in order to feasibly expect the same type of reading success as their White counterparts. If educators continue to silence the connected experiences of African American male students, little change will come to a population that continues to struggle with reading performance in a historically oppressive system.

Talking out the text” with peers in a small group context. During our book club sessions, students would often collaboratively discuss complicated issues presented in the book which led to a heightened understanding of the text through group discussion. Constructing meaning through engagement with a text and by collaborating with others to justify points of view and elaborate on meaning has also been confirmed (Hickman, 1981; Short, 1986). However, this finding might shed more light on the power of African American male students

In this study, eight African American males engaged with texts in a socially constructed environment to share their learning and build on one another’s knowledge. As all of the participants stated in their initial interviews that they did not have experience talking about the books they had read, they still took part in the book club discussions. The longevity and purposefulness of the discussions might have occurred because of the small group format. The participants talked out the text, asked questions, and shared personal stories, experiences, and opinions during the meetings not only because they enjoyed the books, but they also appreciated the small group format. For example, at the end of one of our book club sessions, I asked the students if they had any suggestions to improve the book club.

Donald: I like our group just the way it is.
Researcher: Why?
Donald: Well, I know everyone and we can really talk about anything in here knowing nobody going to tell them.
Researcher: Do you think our group should be bigger?
Group: No!
Researcher: Oh! Okay. Why?
Isaac: Then we won’t talk as much with more people.
Researcher: Why do you think that?
Isaac: Everybody else be talkin.

This conversation shows the value students placed on discussing books in the context of a small group of their peers rather than a large group, whole class discussion which is often the traditional approach in middle school classrooms.

**Students as knowledge creators within the enacted curriculum.** Results from this study indicate that the participants served as creators of knowledge within the space of our book club sessions. While students usually play a passive role within the curriculum and the classroom, the participants negotiated purposeful curricular and managerial choices within the enacted curriculum, such as dealing with interruptions, reading out loud during our sessions, facilitating our meetings, negotiating the readings, and teaching the researcher about their culture.

During the initial weeks of the study, the participants seemed uncomfortable with providing input regarding curricular decisions and were resistant at first, possibly because they did not know how to answer the questions or they did not understand what was being asked. For that reason, the participants were possibly victims of differend, which is a conflict between two or more parties that occurs when a concept, such as curriculum, has conflicting meanings for two groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as often the oppressed group does not have the language to express what poses a conflict to the dominant group (Duncan, 2006). This is what happened here as the participants did not have the language conducive to explain their opinion of what they prefer or did not prefer in the curriculum. To combat this problem, Delpit (1995) suggests that educators need to teach students the “codes” (p. 45) needed to participate fully in mainstream America, which includes our school system. Delpit explains that teachers “need to help students establish their own voices, and to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society” (p. 46). Because of this, we need to create innovative ways to help students express themselves to be part of the decision-making process so they are able to actively provide input to help their teachers conceptualize a culturally relevant curriculum.

The notion that students enjoy having a voice in their curriculum is well supported in educational research. These findings concur with research that found increasing student voice led to improved student learning, especially when their voice was linked to changing curriculum and instruction (Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Hollins and Spence (1990) found that students put forth additional effort and performed better for those educators who gave them the opportunity to voice their own feelings and ideas when completing academic activities in the classroom.
Implications and Suggestions

Proposed Culturally Relevant Literature-Based Reading Curriculum Model

The proposed CRLBRC model was constructed based on the findings from this study. Curriculum models help educators to transparently map out the use of specific teaching and learning approaches. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) suggest that although curriculum models are valuable, they often neglect the human aspect such as the individual attitudes and values involved in curriculum making. Curriculum models should provide a perspective and not a prescribed recipe. Therefore the proposed CRLBRC model displayed and explained below should be used by educators as a support and guide to make thoughtful decisions about how to develop a paper curriculum based on the culture and lived experiences of their African American male students. Educators should embrace this process as an opportunity to continuously update their understanding of their curriculum with their current students as well as prepare for their future African American male learners. Figure 5 represents a proposed culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model grounded in the findings from this study.

![Figure 1. Visual Representation of Proposed Culturally Relevant Literature-Based Reading Curriculum Model. The proposed curriculum model is represented as a planetary gear train because all of the gears need to be present and secure for the gear train to perform correctly. The same is true for the proposed culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model as all of the components are interrelated and should be present for the curriculum to work.](image-url)
Foundation. The foundation of the curricular model presented above is built on the students’ culture and lived experiences. In order to do this, an educator must take the time and effort to develop a rapport with each individual student. Effective teachers of African American male students must go beyond reading instruction and learn who they and their students really are. Educators should take advantage of this rapport to not only modify and build on their current curriculum but to also aid in their attempt to provide students with culturally relevant literature. If teachers know their students, the greater the likelihood they will select or suggest books that are relevant and meaningful.

Teacher and students. The teacher and students need to be engaged in continuous reflection and negotiation as the curriculum is enacted. As curriculum is often developed by experts outside the classroom to “cover” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 4) specific topics, students are not considered and often feel disconnected from classroom curricula. While programmed curriculum is helpful and should serve as a source for consideration and reflection, curriculum development should be a shared process of teachers and students working together inside the classroom.

The teacher and students are featured at the center of the proposed curricular model to represent that both, working together, are the driving force of the curriculum and propels it forward or backward through reflection and negotiation as indicated by the double arrows. Dewey (1998) surmises that “Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (p. 38). Based on how the teacher and students collaboratively negotiate the curriculum determines whether a curricular component needs to be revisited and revised, or whether to move ahead with the current results.

At the start of the study, participants were uncomfortable and did not “know how” to provide curricular input when asked. In order to have a shared voice in the curriculum, students must know how to communicate their thinking so that the teacher and other students understand their intended meaning. Educators need to modify or create new strategies to help students express themselves to be part of the decision making process. As Delpit (1995) suggests, this is providing students with “additional codes of power” (p. 40). For example, the initial question of: “How can we improve our book club?” was modified into more manageable and relatable questions: “What didn’t go well today?”; “What were you frustrated with?” and “Do you think we can fix it? How?” As time progressed, the participants began considering these questions and making statements in their reflection journals while also verbally voicing their opinion on what needed to be modified. While students were unfamiliar with voicing their curricular opinions, the researcher persevered in attempting to gain their input as Tatum (2006) confirms that being successful teachers of African American male students begins by inviting their voices.
into the process. If the decision was made to stop asking for their point-of-view, their voice would have been lost. The curriculum would have been enacted based solely on the researcher’s understandings, when in actuality; they were the ones experiencing these curricular decisions. If we teach students what a curriculum is, how it works, and the essential vocabulary of the process, we are providing students with the tools to purposefully change and engage in their classroom experiences.

**Dynamic in nature.** Curriculum should be continuously evolving through modification and revision as it is dynamic in nature. The word dynamic is characterized by continuous change as every school, every class, and every student is different. The strengths, experiences, and perspectives that students bring to school are ever changing and so should be the curriculum. Based on the information gathered and reflected upon by the students and the researcher during the study, a proposed curriculum model was developed. However, this is not the culmination of the process. An educator should use this model as a basis for developing their own curriculum when teaching African American male students. As the curriculum is enacted, the teacher uses their personal and student reflections to evaluate experienced tensions to make informed collaborative decisions about how to progress or revisit a specific component. Working through this process will facilitate the development of their own envisioned curriculum that may inform the next unit of study or as the underpinnings for the next school year. This approach embraces continuous improvement and allows for reflection to enable a clear understanding of the past and present, to plan for a better future. With every experience and mistake we make, we become more informed creators of curriculum (Burke & Short, 1991).

**Culturally relevant literature.** When referring to the CRLBRC model, it is important to note the three outside gears: culturally relevant literacy, space, and discourse. All three of these components are essential to a CRLBRC as all three are interconnected as the model cannot exist if one component is removed. Many curricular reading models do not include the role of texts in literacy curriculum development as specific texts and text characteristics should inform this process. Since students should be reading in a reading curriculum, books need to be carefully considered. However, many teachers stop there and lose many potential opportunities to engage their African American male students in the reading process.

Often the leading obstacle to selecting and purchasing books aimed at strengthening the reading engagement of African American adolescent males is the resistance by school boards, administration, teachers, and parents who do not understand why particular books have to be specifically selected for this population. As Tatum (2009) explains, “The literacy development of the collective cannot be addressed without addressing the literacy development of the individual” (p. 61), we cannot ignore the importance of providing relevant books for African American male students. As such, teachers should not fear or circumvent these types of texts, but rather welcome the possible benefits of engagement with culturally relevant literature. Thus,
not only literacy educators, but school administrators as well, need to advocate for the purchase of texts that respond to the needs of many African American males.

**Space and discourse.** The space where the curriculum is enacted and the discourse that occurs in this space should be embraced and often is not within our nation’s schools. The classroom is where curriculum development should take place, rather than at the district, state, or national level. The teacher and the students are the ultimate enactors and receivers of the curriculum, so why should this be a sacred process be determined by a person or group of people who possibly have never stepped foot inside the teacher and students’ classroom? A culturally relevant curriculum does not have the ability to exist if we do not begin to rethink where the curriculum development process takes place. We should grant this power to the teacher and students as they are the only curriculum actors who can fully realize cultural relevance within their curriculum.

The proposed CRLBRC model includes the component of a small group context where the participants felt they were able to talk openly and appreciated being heard as Garret stated, “I could talk about anything in there” and Edwin added, “I was with my friends and it was easier to say what you wanted to say instead of a big class.” However, many classrooms, especially in urban settings, have large class sizes upwards of thirty or more students. While this study was conducted in an isolated context that was separate from the rest of the language arts class, the curricular suggestion of utilizing small groups with this population of students may still be applied in larger, diverse group settings.

**Limitations and Conclusion**

It is important to note that not every African American adolescent male student is identical in their culture, academic strengths or needs, or is underachieving in reading. However, due to the overwhelming increasing reading achievement gap between African American male students and students from non-minority groups, and the need for culturally relevant-based reading curriculum, the results of this study have the potential to play an important role in understanding what happens when African American adolescent male students engage in a reading curriculum centered on their ways of knowing as it may have the potential to increase school motivation and school connectedness as they are interesting, familiar, and validating.

The researcher acknowledges the limited scope of this study as there were only eight participants from one middle school located in an urban setting and thus meaningful comparisons for all African American adolescent male students in this particular setting cannot be made. However, this research hopefully serves as a starting point for difficult conversations and reassessments of curriculum that are currently employed in schools for African American male student populations.
Another limitation includes the duration of the study as it limits the understanding of the longevity of the participants’ intrinsic motivation to read. In addition to the duration of our book club, it is also important to acknowledge that the time during which the book club sessions took place as the participants missed their regular scheduled language arts class. While every participant indicated during the initial interviews that they wanted to join the study because they could miss class, every participant stated during their ending interviews that they would still participate in the book club if it was held during an alternative time that did not conflict with their class schedule, such as during lunch and before or after school.

Astonishingly enough, John Dewey (2009) made the following remark in 1916:

> Since the curriculum is always getting loaded down with purely inherited traditional matter and with subjects which represent mainly the energy of some influential person or group of persons in behalf of something dear to them, it requires constant inspection, criticism, and revision to make sure it is accomplishing its purpose. Then there is always the probability that it represents the values of adults rather than those of children and youth, or those of pupils a generation ago rather than those of present day (p.250).

Still, a little over 100 years later, incorporating student voice to inform the curriculum and teachers engaging in continuous reflection and curriculum revision are foreign concepts in many of our nation’s schools. Educators must embrace their students’ silenced voices to propel their curriculum forward in a collaborative effort to combat the disconnect that African American male students experience daily in their current curriculum. The proposed culturally relevant literature-based curriculum model developed from the findings of this study will hopefully provide educators of African American males with a vehicle to forge ahead into these unchartered territories with their students as collaborative navigators.

**References**


Giddings, G. (2001). Infusion of Afrocentric content into the school curriculum toward an

distribution and effects of teacher trust in students and parents in urban elementary schools.
The Elementary School Journal, 102(1), 3-17.

Graybill, S. W. (1997). Questions of race and culture: How they relate to the classroom for

instruction to knowledge about interventions for motivations in reading. Educational Psychologist, 42(4), 237-250.


Haycock, K. (2001). Closing the achievement gap. Educational Leadership,


Howard, G. R. (2006). We can’t teach what we don’t know: White teachers, multiracial schools.
New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. The Urban Review, 33(2), 131-149.


Routledge.


Webster, J. (2002). Teaching through culture. Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press.


Literature Cited


About the author

Dr. Bethany L. Scullin is an assistant professor of literacy at the University of West Georgia. She is currently the co-director of the Cherokee Rose Writing Project and serves as a committee member of the National Council of Social Studies Notable Trade Book Awards.
PRIVATE WOMAN, PUBLIC LATINA: OVERCOMING GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH STORIES

Dr. Santiago Piñón, PhD.
Texas Christian University

Abstract

This article demonstrates how personal stories may be used to overcome the gender oppression and sexism that women often experience. The article highlights stereotypes that make gender oppression possible in order to overcome the oppression by bringing to the foreground a new way being. This new way of being is the public Latina who participates in the polis as a free and acting agent, which is reflective of personal stories that women tell. The interviewees represent women who have broken free from the oppressive stereotypes that control many women, and lend themselves to assisting others to gain a new sense of dignity and freedom.

INTRODUCTION

The necessity to address gender oppression and sexism in the 21st century is alarming. Women have greater access to education, more business opportunities, and greater venues for equality in places such as the home. Either by choice or by necessity, women with BA/BS degrees and get married will stay at home to care for their children. Others will experience sexual harassment in the work place. Domestic violence will affect one in three women from all cultures and all economic levels. Latinas are especially vulnerable to gender oppression and sexism.
In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education, Fulfilling America’s Future: Latinas in the U.S., 2015, reported an increased enrollment of Latinas in undergraduate programs, but was offset by a 19% completion. Latinas are also vulnerable in the workplace as gender, ethnicity, and the hyper sexuality stereotype meet. The oversexed Latina in popular media influences how employers sexually objectify Latina employees. Like their ethnic counterparts, one of three Latinas will experience domestic violence. Different for some Latinas is their reluctance to report the abuse for fear of deportation, which forces Latinas to remain with abusive partners. By confronting gender oppression and sexism that Latinas, and other women, face, one can uphold women’s dignity. I argue that gender stereotypes can be overcome through stories that women tell. My goal is to highlight a few Latinas who have broken free from binding gender stereotypes. In this article, I will provide a theoretical framework demonstrating how women break stereotypes followed by their reflection how this was accomplished.

There is explicit and implicit intentionality in gender oppression and sexism, especially when Latinas are portrayed as primarily sexual beings. Arnoldo de Leon has documented how the over sexualized Latina existed even in the early nineteenth century (De Leon 1983, 43-45). Anglos often perceived Mexican women as temptresses who seduced the anglo male through her sexuality. Explicit comments about Latina sexuality is limited after 1890. Yet, the topic of Mexican morality can rise unproblematically as Latina sexuality is stereotyped, especially as it becomes a precognitive.

To understand the full impact of the stereotypical Latina one must consider the public context that influences the stereotype. I am setting public in contrast to the private sphere, which is the supposed place where the woman is to work and live. The public space, or what others would call the polis, remains off limits to the woman. If she does enter the polis, then she becomes the outsider who is out of place and out of bounds. It is both in the polis and the household that one can see the social imaginaries of women taking shape.

Latinas are often identified in reference to public and private spheres. Many maintain that Latinas, like most women, ought to remain within the private sphere of human existence. They should concern themselves with household duties because this is what they are to do. Household duties are not limited to the home. Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of The Managed Heart, took note that women had the majority of jobs in service. In the case of Latinas, working as a service worker is simply an extension of their household duties. Even professional Latinas are sometimes subjected to menial positions and duties that are reflective of the stereotypical home
duties that women are to fulfill. To be a “public Latina” entails that she has moved into the sphere of the “public man.” As a “public man,” the male is productive by making goods available. A “public woman,” becomes a “bad” woman as she steps out of the private into the public sphere. As such, she becomes the prostitute who has lost all virtue and goodness (Pineda-Madrid 2011, 116).

The weakness of the public/private dichotomy is that it “results in group exclusion from the public” (Young 2011, 168), which can be overcome by appealing to both Hannah Arendt and Iris Marion Young.

DISMANTLING THE STRUCTURES OF OPPRESSION

Hannah Arendt, a leading political thinker of the twentieth century, would argue that the political incorporates both “action” and “being (Arendt 1998, 23).” Within the polis, individuals adopt discourse as the means of presenting their position with the hope of changing the opinion of others. The adoption of discourse is in direct opposition to violence, which would accomplish nothing. “To be political, to live in a polis,” writes Arendt, “meant that everything was decided through the words and persuasion and not through force and violence (Arendt, 26).” Violent acts only mute the opposition, rather than proving one’s perspective as the best possible option.

As a sphere of action, the polis becomes the place of freedom. To be in the polis “meant neither to rule or to be ruled” (Arendt, 32), instead, one can exercise agency to act in freedom. For Arendt, the polis is in contrast to the household where the head makes all decisions (Arendt), thereby abolishing freedom. By exercising agency through power, the head renders all others within the household inactive. The polis, however, is a place of freedom “meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (Arendt, 33). All have agency and speak because everyone is equal. One should note that Arendt envisions an equality that must be developed by human agency rather than the whim of some natural force.

In addition to freedom, the polis allows the distinctiveness of individuals as they relate to others. To exercise freedom, one must always act and speak in the presence of others. For Arendt, action without speech “would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words”
(Arendt, 178-179). Speaking and acting go hand in hand because it informs others of one’s identity. “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world” (Arendt, 179). Identity is always in relation to others. Moreover, this relation is one among equals who speak and act.

Equally important is Arendt’s insistence that the polis must be a place of “factual truth” (Arendt 1968, 239). Speaking and acting are factual communication with others who are equals. For Arendt, this “factual truth” involves not only information about various activities. Instead, it is the “brutally elementary data” surrounding vicious, atrocious, and evil acts. To ignore, forget, and remove these “facts” is an exercise in “power interests” which removes freedom, including speech and act. Truth based on facts “is always related to other people, it concerns events by witnesses and depend upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about, even if it occurs in the domain of privacy (Arendt 1968, 238).” Of course, Arendt had in mind the atrocities of war; however, it is beneficial to glean from her notions of “factual truth.”

LATINAS SPEAK

By foregrounding the stories of various Latinas, it is important to keep in mind that many of these stories contain “factual truths” that are often silenced. The silencing of voices and perspectives of particular Latinas amounts to silencing and controlling the discourse, which is nothing short than removing freedom. While it is possible to focus on supportive roles of Latinas, this would amount to exercising power similar to that of the head of the household. Refusing Latinas the place and opportunity to speak the “factual truths” of sexism, sexual violence, domestic abuse, etc., is to place them in the household rather than allow them to interact in the polis.

Allowing Latinas to speak and act entails recognizing of their identity, which is never homogenous. Identity entails difference, especially as Latinas articulate who they are. While I focus on Latinas in general, I emphasize the difference in their identities. As Iris Marion Young argues, “Woman is a serial collective defined neither by any common identity nor by a common set of attributes that all the individuals in the series have, but rather names a set of structural constraints and relations to practical inert objects that condition action and its meaning” (Young 1997, 36). Inclusion in the group of women does not entail having attributes similar to all other women in the group. Instead, identity as a woman is based on choice. Young states, “No
individual woman’s identity, then, will escape the markings of gender, but how gender marks her life as her own” (Young 1997, 33). In terms of identification, every woman exercises agency by determining her own identity.

The following stories are part of Mujeres Poderosas: The Legacy of Strong Latinas in Fort Worth, Texas that I spearheaded in 2015, and was supported by the City of Fort Worth, TX Human Relations Commission. I initially assigned my Introduction to Latina/o Religion to work on a three-minute video addressing violence against women. After 100 videos, and becoming disheartened for the future of my children, I changed the video emphasis highlight Latina leaders in Fort Worth. All of the women volunteered for the interviews. Some are members of the Hispanic Women’s Network of North Texas, others responded to my request for an interview. I received IRB approval for the project from Texas Christian University, and have release of information from all the participants. These and other interviews are archived in the Religion Department of Texas Christian University.

Methodologically, these women reflect back on obstacles they faced and overcome. All are leaders in the Fort Worth community, and are mentors to younger women and men. These women demonstrated a level of sophistication and profundity in thought when it came to considering the various roles available to Latinas. The categories that will be explored are the roles that Latinas adopt, Latinas and the family structure, Latinas and Latinos, Latinas and religious institutions, and Latinas and the Divine.

LATINAS AND SELF IDENTITY

A most interesting characteristic exemplified by most, if not all, Latinas is their generous spirit in allowing other Latinas to choose the roles in life they will fulfill. One should recall Iris Marion Young, who stated, “No individual woman’s identity, then, will escape the markings of gender, but how gender marks her life is her own” (Young 1997, 33). To be a woman in the polis includes a variety of roles that she can adopt. She could be a stay-at-home mother, a homemaker, or be a professional pursuing her own career goals. These roles, however, do not have the same value for some individuals. For example, Rosa M. Gil and Carmen Inoa Vazquez question the traditional roles of women by arguing that marianismo places women in patriarchal positions by holding the Virgin Mary as the example of submission par excellence. They write, “Marianismo is about sacred duty, self-sacrifice, and chastity” (Gill and Vazquez 1996, 7). This
role forces women into submission and fall “under the shadows” of men. Regardless of this critique, some Latinas recognize that women choose to be stay at home mothers and fulfill a very meaningful and dignified role.

Latinas and the Household

Dr. Maria Muñoz, associate professor and coordinator at the Harris College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth (herein referred to as TCU), recognizes that the Latino community usually adheres to a traditional family structure, but also recognizes that this role is not for all Latinas. For her, it is a “woman’s right to choose how to live” (Muñoz). Dr. Muñoz insists that this choice is a counter-cultural response in that it resists the roles that society has identified for women to adopt. The notion that a Latina chooses her role is reflective of Young’s reference that a woman chooses to be a woman. Here, a Latina has the ability to adhere to a traditional family role or break from this role.

Ms. Jennifer Treviño, vice president of administration and chief of staff, Office of the President of the University of North Texas Health Science Center and Chair of the Hispanic Women Network of Texas, Fort Worth Chapter, recognizes the pressure of living up to expectations of having a traditional Latino family (Treviño). As the sole income provider in her family and making the conscious decision to have no children, Ms. Treviño faces the challenge of being viewed as a non-traditional Latina. Yet, she is aware that her decision has opened various opportunities to serve as a mentor to younger Latinas. These opportunities are especially true in her work with the Hispanic Women Network of Texas, Fort Worth Chapter where she seeks to build relationships and shape leaders among Latinas. By resisting pre-determined roles that she must fit in, Ms. Treviño exercises her freedom of choice and free will by choosing her identity.

The most interesting articulation of the role of Latinas comes from Ms. Beatriz Gutierrez, a TCU Alum who works in the TCU Office of Admissions as an Admissions Counselor. When asked to describe the role of Latinas, Ms. Gutierrez responded by emphasizing the Latino ideal that informs women they “need to learn to cook, clean, do housekeeping,” and clearly have the intent of getting married (Gutierrez). While Ms. Gutierrez grew up in a traditional family, her parent’s divorce became especially influential. Divorce forced Ms. Gutierrez’s mother to find the means to provide for herself by returning to school and getting a beautician’s license. More influential for Gutierrez was her time in a sorority on the TCU campus, where she learned that “Women do
not need anyone else” (Gutierrez). In the freedom to choose one’s path, Ms. Gutierrez recognizes that women are empowered. Included in this choice, for Ms. Gutierrez, is the decision her mother made to be a stay at home parent/house maker.

This level of complexity exemplifies Iris Marion Young’s agenda in arguing for the agency of women in choosing the roles they will adopt. That they are women, and in this case, Latinas, is one issue, but it is entirely different when these Latinas decide their identity. The empowerment of self-identification serves as a model for other Latinas/os, women, and men.

Ms. Victoria Herrera, who works for the Admissions Office of TCU and manages its Community Scholars Program, which makes available more than $3 million in scholarships to local urban high schools, has an equally complex notion of women’s roles in public. Her view takes into account the reality that women, like her mother, stayed home because they lacked many skills. This, however, is in contrast to the options available to Latinas in contemporary times. A Latina, argues Ms. Herrera, “can be a mother and have a job” (V. Herrera). Ms. Herrera seems to cling to the traditional Latino domestic notion. Yet, she also moves beyond the accepted roles by stating that a Latina can be a good role model by going to school, having a college career, and working. This opportunity allows Latinas to be single parents and the main decisions makers in the family, rather than being dependent on a man. That Latinas can be single parents is contrasted to the Latino domestic stereotype, and is representative of obstacles that Latinas have overcome.

Latinas and Los Hombres

Eva Bonilla helped to create the Hispanic Women’s Network of Texas’ Latinas in Progress, a program that prepares Latinas to enter Ivy League colleges and local Fort Worth universities, and has taken part in various volunteer services, political groups, and caring “for her widowed father and disabled adult daughter” (Bonilla). An obstacles Latinas face is machismo-male chauvinism. Being a machista implies that men are in the public eye, while “women do all the work” (Bonilla). This is clearly reflective of the public / private spheres that were mentioned above. The private role of women is especially ironic in Ms. Bonilla’s case since she has been in many political organizations. Moreover, she recognizes that her husband’s employment gives her the opportunity to not work outside the home. Interestingly enough is the way that Ms.
Bonilla navigates between speaking out against machismo and her love for her father and husband, which is reflective of how many Latinas relate with the men in their lives.

One can see a Latina’s complex relationship with men in Ms. Christina Palacios, who is a Financial Aid Specialist at Tarrant County Colleges. Ms. Palacios was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and grew up in what she calls the barrios – a lower income area similar to a ghetto (Palacios). Ms. Palacios learned from childhood that a woman is to respect her husband by “doing everything for a man.” As a result, education was never encouraged. Her grandfather, the patriarch of the family, insisted that education beyond a diploma was unnecessary.

Ms. Palacios also witnessed how males sexually abused her mother, which contributed to her negative views of men. Along with the negative males in her family, Ms. Palacios was affected by an absentee father. The negative experiences continued when she became pregnant and got married after graduation. In her marriage, Ms. Palacios experienced domestic violence including verbal, and physical abuse. She remained in the relationship because the violence was infrequent, but eventually got divorced. A Christian counselor taught her that a woman ought to experience respect and dignity. Arendt’s notion of factual truth is reflected in Ms. Palacios’s willingness to speak of the violence in her life. Naming the violence allows her to avoid future domestic violence.

Latinas often find themselves in ambiguous relationships with men who are not related. On the one hand, they find themselves surprised or annoyed at how men treat them. On the other hand they exercise great patience realizing that these particular men wield power and influence over them as women.

Latinas and Gender Roles

Dr. Ariane Balizet, associate professor of British Literature at TCU, recognizes that society holds men and women to two different standards. Both she and her husband work in the same department at TCU, but acknowledges that men can easily advance their careers. By dominating department leadership roles, men make it difficult for women to become leaders (Balizet). There is a tension between Dr. Balizet’s desire to have a leadership position and its time commitments and her desire to fulfill familial responsibilities of raising a son. While Dr. Balizet states that she
feels no intimidation from her male colleagues at TCU, she wonders to what extent the “boy’s club” influences her desire to be in a leadership role.

That men often exercise power over women is a given. Less clear is the extent of power that men wield over women. An interesting case is Ms. Sharon Herrera, a Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) specialist in student engagement and school completion. She is also the president of the FWISD Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE). As practicing lesbian, Ms. Herrera continues to experience male domination within the LGBTQ community. Gay males often take over various meetings and events, and push aside gay women. The issues that heterosexual Latinas face in their relationships with men are similar, if not the same, as the relationships that Latina lesbians face when dealing with gay men. Incessant is how men exercise power along gender lines, which is evident, for Ms. Herrera, in religious institutions.

As a Latina raised by her grandmother and uncles, Ms. Herrera recognizes that women in religious institutions are relegated to “second-class citizenship” due to a “privileging” of men (S. Herrera). This privilege extends even to mundane tasks as ushering in a church setting. Recognizing the discrepancy in women serving in public roles, Dr. Muñoz inquired of an evangelical pastor, “Why women cannot be ushers” (Muñoz). The pastor stated that a female usher would make church people uncomfortable. The pastor’s argument is reflective of social stereotypes that enter the religious institution.

Dr. Muñoz argues that specific biblical texts emphasizing women’s subservience to men is the source of society’s male domination. In contrast, the church needs to be counter-cultural and break free from the hierarchical and power relationships that are commonplace in society. The norms of male domination in society have influenced how women are treated in church, thus making it necessary for the church to be counter-cultural. Women’s freedom is negated when men prevent them from serving in role in the church.

Latinas and Religion

Ms. Gutierrez understands that a woman’s freedom is specifically demonstrated in religious institutions. She emphasizes that having women who are pastors in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) allows other women to see the potential and possibilities that are available
to women. That these women are in public roles is a direct contrast to what she learned as a child that women ought to private lives by learning to cook and house keeping with the intent of getting married (Gutierrez). While some other churches allow women to have public roles, many others do not. What is more, a woman ought to be able to distinguish the expectations and possibilities available.

Ms. Victoria Herrera demonstrates a keen insight and graciousness in terms of the roles that women have in religious institutions. Of utmost importance to Ms. Herrera is that women have the freedom to choose. She states, “Women choose how they want to be involved” (Herrera). This choice includes the wisdom to know what is available to women and what is an obstacle that requires time and energy to overcome. That women have different available roles is evident to Ms. Herrera. Many know that the head of the house is a man who has the right and responsibility to make all decisions affecting the household. With more women being single parents, they have the responsibility of being the primary “decision maker.” In their decisions Latinas exercise their freedom and become empowered. Often, this sense of self-worth originates in their notion of the divine.

When asked how they perceived the Divine – God – these Latinas gave a variety of surprising answers.

When one considers the interviews with Ms. Eva Bonilla, one can see a sharp contrast between the details. In the CRBB, Ms. Bonilla speaks of the many activities that she took part in as a social activist (Bonilla, CRBB). The Strong Latinas interview has similar details but with a very important distinction. The latter provides insight as to the reasons that Ms. Bonilla involves herself in political activism and how she finds the strength to continue in her activism (Bonilla, Strong).

When specifically asked about her view of God, Ms. Bonilla’s responses were unsurprisingly traditional. She referred to God as the being who gives and allows life to continue. God is also the one who hears and answers prayers. These, and other similar responses are reflective of the views that many pious individuals believe. From a certain perspective, these responses lack the theological insight that a professional theologian could provide, but, then again, Ms. Bonilla is not a theologian.
What is amazing is Ms. Bonilla’s reference to God, “He is the Supreme Being” (Bonilla, Strong). Her use of the masculine pronoun is surprising especially when she insists that men have often been male chauvinists who exercised power over women. Even Latina feminist theologians would insist that references to God must make use of feminine qualities to overcome male domination. Maria Pilar Aquino, a noted Latina feminist theologian, writes, “God must not be identified with male power, but must be able to integrate women in a way that neither suppresses their difference from men nor endorses their inequality” (Aquino 1993, 134). There is, then, a connection between how one speaks about God and one’s experience of gender. Yet, many of the Latinas who participated in this project were easily able to refer to God using male attributes. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily exclude feminine qualities. Again, this is reflective of their use of freedom as they choose to refer to the Divine in ways that are comfortable.

With her usual keen insight, Dr. Munoz states, “God is a father image just as much as a mother” (Muñoz). Dr. Muñoz understands God to be loving in both maternal and paternal ways. The reason that one can understand God in these manners is that God manifests the God self in a variety of manners. Dr. Munoz exercises a very profound theological perception that professional theologians sometimes overlook.

A most interesting view of the divine is when Ms. Palacios states, “God has been father, protector, supporter, and the one who provides deep values.” She specifically views God as father because her own experience lacked a father figure in her childhood. Rather than looking to other males to fill the void of not having a father, she turns to God who becomes the present father who replaces her absent father. Ms. Palacios sees no connection between the men who sexually abused her or the husband who created an atmosphere of violence in her own family, and the God whom she refers to as “Father.” This attribute, along with all others used by Latinas, is the result of their exercise of freedom.

Listening to women entails the possibility that they will freely say and act differently from our expectations. As such, these Latinas have a special appreciation and admiration for religion when it is distinguished from the bureaucratic and hierarchical male-dominated institution.
From a woman who knows of her mother’s sexual abuse as a child, and her own domestic violence when she was married, Ms. Palacios acknowledges that she has overcome various obstacles because God has given her strength to persevere. She also credits God with the assistance she had received to pay various household bills and for the current position she holds at Tarrant County College. She states, “God has always been in control. I just needed to trust God” (Palacios). For Ms. Palacios, God is the source and motivation for maintaining hope especially during times when all seems lost.

Similar to Ms. Palacios, Ms. Gutierrez maintains that God is the “reason to overcome various things” (Gutierrez). The major obstacles for her were the expectations of doing nothing more than being a wife, mother, and homemaker. Again, these are worthwhile roles that give dignity to a woman, but only if she enters by choice. For Ms. Gutierrez, God is a being with whom she is able to have an intimate relationship expressed through prayer, and, gives her the strength to stand against adversity and popular expectations. This relationship provides more than a simple moral compass as it provides worth and empowerment in sexual relations. Self worth is more than “physical appearance” for sexual gratification of others. Worth and dignity allows women to exercise celibacy because her worth is “not only in her body.” Celibacy is more than a moral choice. It is a decision to overcome the sexualization and objectification of Latinas. This resistance to sexualization is similar to Dr. Balizet’s insistence that she is, “not just a rear end” (Balizet). The profundity of this insight becomes relevant when one considers that she gained this insight during the 1990’s, which was the height of the sexualization of Puerto Ricans through the person of Jennifer Lopez.

While God is a source of self-worth, dignity, and respect, God also affects one’s relationship with others. For Ms. Sharon Herrera, service to others means developing a mission to help people who are gay. Ms. Herrera recounts the story when she found herself with a Bible in one hand and a bottle of Drano in the other hand. She was ready to end her life because of her sexual orientation, and now is an advocate in helping to humanize individuals in the LGBTQ community.

Serving others is the result of how one learns at a young age. In the case of Ms. Herrera, her grandmother taught her to believe in God. This belief is more than an intellectual acquiescence to particular view. Instead, it is manifested in the ways that one helps others. Religion allows one
to “treat others with respect.” Belief in God leads to kindness. Helping others becomes a measure of success. As Ms. Bonilla stated near the end of her interview, “Success is not monetary. Success is having friends, love, family, and mentoring others” (Bonilla, Strong).

The above Latinas are examples of strong women who have overcome a variety of obstacles ranging from chauvinism to violence of various kinds. That they have become successful reflects a resiliency that serves as a model for others including men. These women have become leaders within the Latino community. While some are better known than others is beside the point. What is important that they have exercised freedom in their choice.

By asking the religious question Latinas have demonstrated a complex understanding of God who becomes the source for perseverance and determination in overcoming the obstacles they face. The ideas of the divine serve as counter-cultural perspectives that help Latinas to overcome the social imaginaries that seek to restrict and contain them into perceived roles that would push them into the private arenas of the household and into the shadows of men who seek to exercise power and domination.

Not only do these Latinas become role models and leaders for other young Latinas, but they also incorporate a spirit of adversity and diligence that men can follow. Countering the sexualization prominent in media, Latinas recognize themselves to be more than the means to men’s sexual gratification. They overcome the stereotypes by envisioning new roles they can adopt. They become agents of change not only for themselves, but also for future generations of Latina.

References


Flores, Diana (N/A). Interview by Jose Angel Gutierrez. Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project.


Gutierrez, Beatriz (June 29, 2015). Interview by Thanh Pham. Strong Latinas of North Texas.

Herrera, Sharon (July 8, 2015). Interview by Joselin Barajas. Strong Latinas of North Texas.
Herrera, Vitoria (June 16, 2015). Interview by Thanh Pham. Strong Latinas of North Texas.


Munoz, Maria (June 22, 2015). Interview by Marcela Sisley-Varela. Strong Latinas of North Texas.

Palacios, Christina (June 19, 2015). Interview by Thanh Pham. Strong Latinas of North Texas.


About the author

Dr. Santiago Piñón, Jr. is a theologian and ethicist (Ph.D. 2012, University of Chicago, M.Div. 2001 University of Chicago; M.A. Abilene Christian University 1999) on the faculty of Texas Christian University since 2011. His field of expertise is the intersection of Religion and Law, with a focus on the legal construction of the person, and is interested in addressing social issues from a religious perspective, such as immigration, death and grief, and marriage. He teaches courses on Latino/a Religion and Religion and Law in the Religion Department at TCU. Dr. Piñón is affiliated with the Women’s and Gender Studies and Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies and is the Director of the Latino/a Studies Program at TCU.
INCREMENTING GRADUATE STUDENTS’ CULTURAL COMPETENCY BY USING MANY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Linda A. Landon, PhD.

Mary W. Stout, EdD, Associate Professor, School of Advanced Studies, University of Phoenix.

Douglas K. Neely, PhD.

Abstract

Higher education to varying degrees uses social media for instruction, making social media effects on cultural competency an important educational issue. The underlying problem of this study is that the relationships between graduate students’ areas of academic study, their geographical region of origin, their use of social media sites, and their cultural sensitivity skills, are unclear. This problem is important because the literature reflects inconsistent findings about the relationship between graduate students’ characteristics and their types of cultural sensitivity. The purpose of the current study is to identify whether differences in graduate students’ disciplines of study, geographical regions of origin, number of social media sites used, and frequency of social media site use resulted in strengthened cultural competency. Theoretically, the study is founded in Hofstede’s definition of cultural competency and applies Chen and Starosta’s Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to define types of cultural competency. The overall research question is: What relationship exists between graduate students’ areas of academic study, geographical region of origin, frequency and number of social media sites used, and their cultural sensitivity aspects. The quantitative design used parametric correlation and nonparametric ANOVA analyses. The number of social media sites used was positively correlated with increased interaction confidence and interaction effectiveness forms of cultural competency. Participants who used Facebook, Pinterest, and blogging, demonstrated statistically significantly increased cultural competency on the interaction engagement, interaction confidence, and interaction effectiveness subscales of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. These
results suggest that education interventions that encourage the use of multiple social media sites during learning will increase graduate students’ cultural competency.

Key Words: Facebook; Culture; Cultural Competency; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Media.

Introduction

Culture and Cultural Competency
Culture is part of everything we do. Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). Alternatively, cultural competence is defined as the ability to work with people from another culture (Moule, 2012). Creating cultural competency and trust helps diverse people to support shared purpose and outcomes, and keep morality in the world (Pagel, 2012). Removing cultural barriers increases harmony among people of differing cultures (Baugher, 2012). A key way in which culture is shared and users’ cultural competency is enhanced is through the use of social media.

Use of Multiple Social Media Sites
Social media has grown globally, crossing cultures and national boundaries (Baugher, 2012). The term social media is defined broadly as technology systems used for community and collaboration (Joosten, 2015), such as accessing world news and contributing to social media network forums or blogs (Baugher, 2012). Social media are defined more specifically as “internet communications where more than one user can publish or post within a community of users” (Luchman, Bergstrom, & Krulikowski, 2014).

Among social media sites, Facebook is the most used among adults (Karpinski, Kirschner, Ozer, Mellott, & Ochwo, 2013; Ma & Chan, 2014). In 2016, 79% of online adults used Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2016). Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest use are rising (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). A substantial portion of social media users use more than one site (Duggan et al., 2015). In 2014, 16% of social media users reported using three social media sites at the same time (Duggan et al., 2015). Cultural opinions converge more quickly among people who use multiple social media sites (Nunes, Antunes, & Amblard, 2013), and disclosure of private information increases over time as users became more and more interconnected by using multiple social networks (Stutzman, Gross, & Acquisti, 2015; Li, 2015). A common set of tools, such as computers or phones, are required to access multiple social
media sites. Librarians use a common set of skills in a flexible manner to access appropriate content on multiple social media networks (Murphy & Moulaison, 2009). Using multiple social media platforms increases users’ ability to disseminate and encounter the same information on multiple social media platforms, which reinforces the message conveyed by the content (Doyle, 2010). Presumably encountering the same culturally-competent messages on different platforms reinforces cultural competency for users as well (Pierce, 2015). Although standardization helps, people from different cultures perceive the same message differently, which poses a cultural competence problem for multinational corporations (Pierce, 2015). In education, using multiple social media sites as a foreign language teaching tool has worked in various European countries (McDermott, 2013). Students who used blogs and Facebook while learning a foreign language increased their engagement with the language by communicating with native speakers (McDermott, 2013).

Education, Social Media, and Cultural Competency

According to Joosten (2015), only a small portion of social media is used for education because of the altruistic nature of sharing media for communication, community, and sense of belonging (Ma & Chan, 2014). Nearly two-thirds of faculty use social media for a class and 30% use social media content for student reviews (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011).

Social media effects on education are varied as shown by studies. Social media allows students and faculty to communicate remotely (Joosten, 2015). Using social media reduces GPA in U.S. students compared to GPA in European students (Karpinski, et al., 2013). Social media positively affects faculty teaching, student satisfaction, and learning outcomes depending on compatibility of technology and perceived risk (Cao, Ajjan, &d Hong, 2013). Using social media positively affects learning results because students are familiar with social media (Tess, 2013). In teaching foreign language and culture, using social media replaces TV shows to assist college students to learn (Vickers, Field, & Melakoski, 2015). Faculty think social media with video, Wikis, and podcasts, provide value to teaching and to collaborative learning (Moran et al., 2011). Because of the ease of creating a variety of social media sites for college instruction, a need exists to document how post-secondary faculty use social media successfully (Howard, 2013). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, ethnic and racial minorities are over half of the U.S. born children (Baugher, 2012). Because social media affects cultural competency, understanding how to use social media in educational settings has become essential to improve cultural competency for the future of effective education. Cross cultural appreciation should be included in educational instruction because cultural competence is “…the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own” (Moule, 2012, p. 5). Cultural competency in education has instructional and leadership aspects for faculty members or administrators. Cultural competency in education is based on core values that include policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors that allow educators to teach and work effectively with students of
various cultures (Elam, Robinson, & McCloud, 2007). Social media used conversationally by faculty or administrators to remove cultural barriers increases harmony and improves atmosphere for knowledge among multicultural groups of people (Baugher, 2012).

Different authors tried to determine the impact of social media in education on cultural competency. For students from these six cultures (Latino/a, Asian Pacific, European, African-American, Arab and Muslim, and American Indian/Alaska Native), Moule (2012) analyzed cultural and racial bias due to teacher attitudes and expectations. Including awareness of others and self, identification of dynamics of differences, knowledge of specific cultures of students, and definitions of cultural standards in curricula were needed (Moule, 2012). Viewing and discussing cross-cultural movies impact intercultural sensitivity (Jain, 2013). In different postsecondary majors, analyses of academic cultures were done in majors including pharmacy (Okoro, Odeina, & Smith, 2015), agriculture (Irani, Wilson, Slough, & Rieger, 2014), engineering (Cech, 2013), and consumer sciences (Baugher, 2012), to name a few.

No research is found on ways that social media can be used to improve learning to enhance cultural competency in higher education. In graduate education, additional research is needed to define whether educational design, personal influence, and communication content can enhance intercultural sensitivity for diverse graduate students. The literature review indicates that more studies are necessary to identify how graduate students’ areas of academic study, geographical region of origin, and use of social media sites affect their cultural sensitivity aspects.

Theoretical Framework

Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945) used a national-level anthropological definition of culture, which involved the influence of historical symbols and artifacts on values and ways of thinking by groups to define culture as “programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945) only dealt with a few groups.

Hofstede (1980, 2001) developed the predominant metric of culture, which was a five-dimensional scale that described power distance (the less powerful accept power of others), uncertainty avoidance (members feel threatened by the unknown), individualism (loose ties between individuals in society), masculinity (dominant male role in society), and long-term orientation (attitude toward the future rather than short-term). Although Hofstede found that individuals’ mental programs were reinforced from childhood by schools that included a national culture, Hofstede’s metric is more useful at the country or organizational levels than at the individual level (Hofstede, 2001).
For the current study, a number of scales or inventories that measure individual, rather than group, intercultural sensitivity are considered. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) developed a scale that measures individual reactions of changes to sensitivity, including denial/defense, reversal, minimization, acceptance/adaptation, and encapsulated marginality. The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education produced survey questions from which the Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale was developed to assess extent of student engagement with diversity, socio-political ideas, and religious perspectives (Pascarella & Blaich, 2013). For consumer product marketing, Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz (2011) developed the CVSCALE for individual cultural values, which was based on Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions and provided reliable and valid scores across national boundaries.

Chen and Starosta (2000) developed a valid and reliable Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, which was pertinent to education and was developed for use with individuals rather than nations or organizations. In the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, college students rated their own cultural awareness on five cultural competence subscales, including interaction engagement (enjoyment or avoidance of students of other cultures), respect for cultural differences (comfort or respect for other cultures), interaction confidence (confidence of discomfort for other cultures), interaction enjoyment (degree of sensitivity to other cultures), and interaction attentiveness (degree of attention to cultural differences). The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) was selected for this research because the cultural competency subscales and the application of the scale to individuals meet the current research need to assess graduate students’ areas of academic study, geographical region of origin, and use of social media sites related to their cultural competency (Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2002). The five subscales of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were used as a set of outcome variables in this study.

Problem
The problem is that the relationship among graduate students’ areas of academic study, geographical region of origin, use of social media sites, and their cultural sensitivity aspects are unclear (Howard, 2013; Tess, 2013). Students learn by using social media based on their cultural inclinations and backgrounds. Social media culturally affects student attitude and learning (Cao et al., 2013). For example, Arra (2010) looked at developing course objectives to improve cross-cultural student learning with social media. Cao et al. (2013) investigated how best to improve student learning in cross-cultural classes across disciplines. Using social media in curricula requires understanding of how social media can be used in learning to help students to foster cultural sensitivity (Okoro et al., 2015). Further investigation is needed because the literature reflects inconsistent findings about cultural sensitivity in higher education when social media is used (Arra, 2010; Cao et al., 2013).
Purpose
The purpose of this study is to identify whether differences in graduate students’ characteristics results in strengthened cultural competency. Strengthened cultural competency means receiving higher scores on the five self-reported factors of cultural competency including interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness, as measured by the Chen and Starosta’s (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

Research Questions
The overall research question is: What relationship exists between graduate students’ areas of academic study, geographical region of origin, frequency and number of social media sites, and their cultural sensitivity aspects. The subsidiary research questions are:
1. To what extent does the self-reported discipline of study of graduate students change the mean rank score of the five subscales of cultural competency?
2. To what extent does the self-reported geographical region of origin of graduate students change the mean rank score of the five subscales of cultural competency?
3. To what extent is there statistically significant correlation between the number of self-reported social media sites used and each of the five subscales of cultural competency?
4. To what extent does the self-reported frequencies of use of social media sites change the mean rank score of the five subscales of cultural competency?

Method/Design
This study uses the quantitative method. One concern was whether the required number of voluntary participants could be found. The statistical significance of the quantitative method was used. The quantitative method was appropriate for analysis of survey responses.

Design, Population, Sampling Strategy and Final Sample
The population was comprised of masters, doctoral, and professional graduate students from anywhere in the world between the dates of February 1, 2016 and June 30, 2016. Two sampling strategies were applied to recruit participants: (a) a purposive convenience sampling strategy and (b) a snowball sampling strategy. The purposive convenience sample used invitations to participate in the study posted on public group Facebook pages (Facebook, 2015) sponsored by the graduate student associations (including graduate students assemblies or graduate student senates) at the top 120 colleges and universities in size (National Center for Education Statistics, Fall 2014). Researchers involved in the study submitted personal requests to personal contacts and online discussion groups to transmit the study invitation to graduate students. Forty-three
people responded to the invitation to participate by accessing the online questionnaire. The observed sample size was determined by the number of participants who chose to complete the study, who acknowledged and digitally signed the Informed Consent, and who answered all questions in the questionnaire. Thirty-six out of forty-three respondents satisfied these criteria.

Variables
The predictor variables were academic discipline, geographical area of origin, frequency of use of social media, and the number of social media sites used. The predictor variables of discipline of academic study, geographical area of origin, and frequency of use of social media were categorical with two or more unordered categories. Area of academic study was a nominal variable with 29 unordered academic area categories. The number of social media sites used was an interval variable with values equal to the sum of number of social media sites that each participant reported using. The five subscales of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) subscale scores (interval scale) were the outcome variables (Table 1). Chen and Starosta (2000) defined the validity and reliability of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Item Name</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Subscale Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I don’t like to be with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I respect the values of people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I am open-minded to people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction attentiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>interaction enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction attentiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart’s subtle meanings during our interaction.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction attentiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I think my culture is better than other cultures.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>respect for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>interaction engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection
Instrument. The study instrument comprised questions to gather data for all predictor and outcome variables. Because the categories of the predictor variables and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale previously had been pilot tested elsewhere, no pilot test was conducted (Chen & Starosta, 2000). The study instrument was delivered by using an online survey on the SurveyMonkey™ website. A confidentiality statement and an Informed Consent document were included in the questionnaire. The instrument was made available to voluntary participants from February 2016 to June 2016.

Data Preparation. Data from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were downloaded from the SurveyMonkey™ website. Data were prepared for analysis by removing records containing incomplete responses. The responses for the Likert Items on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were coded (Table 1) by using the coding scheme of Chen and Starosta. After coding, the items in each subscale were summed to create one value, measured on an interval scale, to describe the subscale outcome (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Responses on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were normalized. Differences in variance between different subscales were tested by using the classical F test for testing equal variances (Fisher, 1939). Heterogeneous variance was observed among subscales (data not shown). Each participant’s subscale and overall scores were normalized for variance by dividing their score by the cognate variance for that subscale. Each subscale contained differing numbers of items. The normalized-for-variance subscale and overall scores were divided by the number of items in that subscale or overall scale. These normalized values were used in the analysis.

Data Analysis
Data were described by using summary descriptive statistics and graphs. Statistically significant skewness and kurtosis were identified (Doane & Seward, 2011) for several predictor and outcome variables. Consequently, nonparametric tests, which did not require normally-distributed data, were appropriate to analyze the data. When the predictor variables comprised three or more categorical, independent groups, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) was applied as an omnibus test to identify statistically significant differences in distributions of rank scores for cultural competency subscale values (outcome variables) across groups (categories of predictor variables). The Mann-Whitney U-test was applied for any comparisons that were made between any combination of two groups. All Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U-test p-values were the exact probability (two times the one-tailed probability) due to the small sample size. Differences in proportion between demographic and social media variables with two categories were analyzed by using the binomial test. For demographic variables with three or more categories, the chi square test was
applied to determine if the distribution of the observed data was statistically-significantly different from the expected distribution of the data if no differences in number of responses existed between categories. The level of significance for rejecting the null hypotheses for all tests was $\alpha < .05$. Statistical analyses were performed by using SPSS™. Graphs were prepared by using GraphPad Prism™.

For statistically-significant U statistics, Cohen’s d statistic was approximated from the Mann-Whitney U Test Z-score by dividing the quantity 2 times Z-score by the quantity square root of N. This approximated d was used as estimated post-hoc effect size (Leitman, 2016; Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001; Yatani, 2014). Post hoc statistical power was estimated by using the post-hoc Wilcoxin-Mann-Whitney (2 groups) achieved power calculation (one-tailed, asymptotic relative efficiency = .955) in G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Albert-Georg, & Buchner, 2007).

Statistical Analysis. Summary descriptive statistics and graphs were used to describe the data. For correlating the number of social media sites used with the five scales of cultural competency, the parametric Pearson correlation coefficient was used (Wilcox, 2009). The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to identify statistically significant differences and rank scores for cultural competency subscale values (outcome variables) across groups (categories of predictor variables) (Brzana, Yedinak, Gultekin, Delashaw, & Fleseriu, 2013; Kruskal & Wallis, 1952). The Mann-Whitney U-test was applied for comparisons between two groups (Kempf et al., 2014; Mann & Whitney, 1947). Differences in proportion were analyzed by using the binomial test (Karakawa, Murata, Hirasawa, Mayama, & Asaoka, 2013; McGarty & Smithson, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Levin, & Ferron, 2011). The chi square test was applied to determine if the observed data was statistically-significantly different from the expected data if no differences in number of responses existed between categories (I. Greenberg, 1985; McLaren, Legler, & Brittenham, 1994). The coefficient of determination (R2, reported by SPSS as partial 2) obtained from ANOVA was used to estimate post hoc effect size (Leitman, 2016; Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001). Observed power as reported by SPSS was use to estimated post hoc statistical power. The level of significance for rejecting the null hypotheses for all tests was $\alpha < .05$. Statistical analyses were performed by using SPSS™. Graphs were prepared by using GraphPad Prism™.

Results

Academic Discipline, Geographical Area of Origin, and Social Media Variables
Participants who were in the education academic discipline (13, 36.1%) outnumbered participants in other academic disciplines (Figure 1a). The observed data was statistically-significantly different from the data that would have been expected when no differences existed between groups ($2 = 396, df = 121, p < .0001$), which indicated that academic
discipline groups were not equally represented among the participants. More participants were from the North American region (30, 83.3%) than were from Africa (1, 2.8%), Eastern Europe, (3, 8.3%), or Asia (2, 5.6%) (Figure 1b). Geographical regions were not equally represented among the participants ($\chi^2 = 108, \text{df} = 9, p < .0001$). More participants used social media several times a day (34, 94.4%) than used social media three to five times per day (2, 5.6%). The proportion of participants who used social media several times a day was statistically-significantly greater than $p_{\text{null}} = .5 (p < .0001)$ (Figure 1c). The number of social media sites used by participants ranged from 1 to 10, with no participants using 7 sites (Figure 1d). The number of social media sites used was not equally represented among the participants ($\chi^2 = 288, \text{df} = 64, p < .0001$). More participants used 5 social media sites concurrently compared to the number of social media sites used by other participants.

Figure 1. Self-reported academic discipline, geographical area of origin, social media use, and cultural competency subscales.

Cultural Competency Variables
The number of participant scores in particular ranges of possible scores for the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale was calculated and graphed as histograms. The possible scores for the interaction engagement subscale were 7 to 35. Higher scores indicated greater cultural competency (Figure 1e). The participants’ scores were unequally distributed among the ranges of possible scores ($\chi^2 = 360, \text{df} = 100, p < .0001$). The range of observed answers was 20-35. Most participants perceived themselves to possess high cultural competence on the interaction engagement subscale because the histogram of number of participants’ scores indicated that the peak of the distribution of the data across the complete possible range of answers was offset to the right with the majority of subscale scores occurring at higher values.

The possible scores for the respect for cultural differences subscale were 6 to 30. Higher scores indicated greater cultural competency (Figure 1f). The participants’ scores were unequally distributed among the ranges of possible scores ($\chi^2 = 432, \text{df} = 144, p < .0001$). The range of observed answers was 18 to 30. Most participants perceived themselves to possess high cultural competence on the respect for cultural differences subscale because the peak of the distribution of the data was offset to the right with the majority of self-reported subscale scores occurring at higher values.

The possible scores for the interaction confidence subscale were 5 to 25. Higher scores indicated greater cultural competency (Figure 1g). The participants’ scores were unequally distributed among the ranges of possible scores ($\chi^2 = 324, \text{df} = 81, p < .0001$). The range of observed answers was 14 to 25. Most participants perceived themselves to possess high cultural competence on the interaction confidence subscale because the peak of the distribution of the data was offset to the right with the majority of subscale scores occurring at higher values.
The possible scores for the interaction enjoyment subscale were 3 to 15. Higher scores indicated greater cultural competency (Figure 1h). The participants’ scores were unequally distributed among the ranges of possible (2 = 180, df = 25, p < .0001). The range of observed answers was 9 to 15. Most participants perceived themselves to possess high cultural competence on the interaction enjoyment subscale because the distribution of the data was offset to the right with the majority of subscale scores occurring at higher values.

The possible scores for the interaction effectiveness were 3 to 15. Higher scores indicated greater cultural competency (Figure 1i). The participants’ scores were unequally distributed among the ranges of possible scores (2 = 252, df = 49, p < .0001). The range of observed answers was 6 to 15. Most participants perceived themselves to possess high cultural competence on the interaction effectiveness subscale because the peak of the distribution of the data was offset to the right with the majority of subscale scores occurring at higher values.

Relationship of Academic Discipline, Geographical Area of Origin, and Social Media Variables to Cultural Competency

To determine if differences in mean ranks for subscales of cultural competency existed between groups of the academic discipline, and region of geographical origin variables, the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Mann-Whitney U-test were applied. There were no statistically-significant differences in mean ranks (p > .05) among groups for all combinations of academic discipline, region of geographical origin, and frequency of social media site use for any of the five subscales of cultural competency.

Relationship of Number of Social Media Sites Used and Cultural Competency

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was applied to identify correlations between the number of social media sites used and scores on the cultural competency subscales. The number of social media sites used was statistically significantly correlated with scores on subscales of cultural competency. The number of social media sites used was positively correlated with scores on the interaction confidence (r = .364, p = .029) and interaction effectiveness (r = .355, p = .034) scales. The number of social media sites was not correlated with scores on the interaction engagement (r = .320, p = .057), respect for cultural difference (r = -.096, p = .578), or interaction enjoyment (r = .302, p = .073) subscales.

Using Multiple Social Media Sites: Facebook, Pinterest, Blogging

The interaction engagement score was increased when participants used Facebook, Pinterest, or blogging. The finding that using multiple social media sites correlates with increases in certain forms of cultural competency suggests that interventions to increase the use of multiple social media sites, such as Facebook, Pinterest, or blogging as a group, might contribute to increased intercultural competency.

To investigate whether using some combination of multiples of Facebook, Pinterest, and
blogging social media sites, by using all three of the sites compared to using only two of the sites, increases some subtypes of cultural competency but not others. A post hoc analysis was conducted in which participants were grouped into three groups based upon their Facebook, Pinterest, and blogging use. The three groups included those who reported (a) using all three sites, (b) using any two of the three sites, and (c) using one or none of the sites. Differences between groups for cultural competency subscales were analyzed by using multivariate ANOVA. Multiple comparisons were conducted using Tukey Honestly Significant Difference adjustment.

The omnibus multivariate ANOVA results indicated that a difference in mean subscale scores existed between at least two social media use groups for three subscales, interaction engagement (F = 3.741 ndf = 2, dfd = 33, p = .034), interaction confidence (F = 5.566 ndf = 2, dfd = 33, p = .008), and interaction effectiveness (F = 3.436 ndf = 2, dfd = 33, p = .044). Multiple comparison analysis suggested that using all three sites resulted in a statistically-significantly (p = .036) larger interaction effectiveness mean score (mean = .481; 95% confidence limits, .450, .512) compared to using one or zero sites (mean = .434; 95% confidence limits, .413, .454). Multiple comparison analysis suggests that using all three sites resulted in a statistically-significantly (p = .011) larger interaction confidence mean score (mean = .471; 95% confidence limits, .429, .513) compared to using one or zero sites (mean = .394; 95% confidence limits, .366, .422). Multiple comparison analysis suggests that using all three sites resulted in a statistically-significantly (p = .039) larger interaction effectiveness mean score (mean = 1.323; 95% confidence limits, 1.195, 1.450) compared to using one or zero sites (mean = 1.129; 95% confidence limits, 1.044, 1.214).

For the interaction engagement subscale, using three sites compared to one or zero sites resulted in a small increase (post hoc approximated effect size = .185) that was detectable even though the analysis had relatively low sensitivity (post hoc approximated power = 64%). For interaction confidence, using three sites compared to one or zero sites resulted in a medium increase (post hoc approximated effect size = .252) that was detectable in an analysis with high sensitivity (post hoc approximated power = 82%). For interaction effectiveness, using three sites compared to one or zero sites resulted in a small increase (post hoc approximated effect size = .172) that was detectable in an analysis with low sensitivity (post hoc approximated power = 60%).

There were no statistically significant differences (p > .05) in mean subscale scores between groups for interaction engagement, interaction confidence, or interaction effectiveness between participants who reported using all three sites and participants who reported using two out of the three sites (data not shown). There were no statistically significant differences (p > .05) in mean subscale scores between groups for interaction engagement or interaction confidence between participants who reported using two out of the three sites and participants who reported using one or none of the three sites (data not shown).
To investigate whether, in different social media use groups, scores for different subtypes of cultural competency differentially contribute to the overall cultural competency score, a post hoc analysis was conducted by using repeated measures one-way ANOVA. The repeated measures predictor variables for each participant were the normalized subscale scores. The outcome variable was the normalized values for the overall cultural competency score from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. The covariate variable was the nominal social media use variable from the previous analysis.

The repeated measures ANOVA showed no statistically-significant interaction (p > .05) between subtype of cultural competency and social media use group on the magnitude of the overall score. As was expected because the overall score depends on the values of the subscales, subscale was the only statistically-significant within-subjects main effect on the overall score (Greenhouse-Geisser corrected $F = 1640.03, df = 2.140, df_d = 70.625, p < .0001$). Agreeing with results shown earlier, there was a statistically-significant main between-subjects effect of social media use group on the overall score ($F = 3.996, df = 2, df_d = 33, p = .028$). This situation suggests that, in different social media use groups, different subscales did not contribute differentially to the overall cultural competency score.

Analysis

The analysis of the data reported here suggests that cultural competency is increased when people use multiple social media sites. Other characteristics, such as academic discipline of study, geographical region of origin, and frequency of social media use did not affect cultural competency. Academic disciplines were not equally represented among participants but were not associated with changes in cultural competency. Participants from North America, who used social media several times each day were over-represented among the participants but geographical region and frequency of social media use were not associated with changes in cultural competency. More participants used five social media sites than other participants. Participants self-rated their own cultural competency as being relatively high. The number of social media sites used was statistically significantly correlated with scores on the interaction confidence and interaction effectiveness subscales of cultural competency. Participants who used Facebook, Pinterest, and blogging demonstrated statistically significantly increased cultural competency on the interaction engagement, interaction confidence, and interaction effectiveness subscales of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. No interaction effect existed of social media use group and cultural competency subtype on the overall score on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, which indicates that the contribution of subtype of cultural competency to the overall score does not differ depending on the social media use group. Social media use group and cultural competency subtype individually affect overall cultural competency and the two effects do not
act in concert to affect overall cultural competency.

Limitations

Use of multiple social media sites to increase cultural competency is indicated from this research; however, analysis of the data is limited by the small number of responses, 36 students in the sample. Although any study with less than 30 subjects per group is questionable (Gay, 1987), the sample usually can be larger. Additionally, self-reported scores of the cultural assessment are a limitation although the assessment instrument was validated by Chen and Starosta (2000) who defined the validity and reliability of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. With these two limitations, further investigation is needed. Offering a motivational reward to participation may increase the number of students in future research.

Conclusions

In this age of globalization and change, common values and trust helps diverse people support shared purposes and outcomes (Pagel, 2012). Motivation and altruism for knowledge sharing on social media needs to be focused on education (Ma & Chan, 2014). Because social media are key to future learning, students need to engage with it for learning (Graham, 2014). In post-secondary education that improves cultural competency, researchers need to document successes and failures with using social media technology and a variety of social media sites (Howard, 2013).

The analysis suggests that cultural competency increases when graduate students use multiple social media sites. In particular, the use of three specific social media sites, Facebook, Pinterest, and blogging, were associated with increase of cultural competency in three areas: (a) interaction engagement, (b) interaction confidence, and (c) interaction effectiveness. The current finding that use of multiple social media sites contributes to increases in some forms of cultural competency was echoed in the scant literature available on the topic. The work of Murphy and Moulaison (2009) suggested that users of multiple social media sites possess a set of tools that can be applied flexibly to accessing content, including culturally-relevant content, on multiple social media networks. Use of increased access to culturally-relevant content may have acted to increase the spread of culturally-relevant opinions in a population. The works of Nunes, Antunes, and Amblard (2013), Doyle (2010), and Pierce (2015) supported this idea by indicating that having had access to the same culturally-relevant messages on multiple social media sites may have acted as a force to allow groups of people to converge on culturally-competent opinions. This convergence may have arisen as a result of having access to people from other cultures, as when McDermott (2013) observed that using blogs and Facebook increased engagement with the
language by allowing students to communicate with native speakers.

Greater understanding is required of how social media can be used in education to change graduate students’ learning to improve the cultural sensitivity of their attitudes (Cao et al., 2013; Okoro et al., 2015). The results of the current study suggest that incorporating use of multiple social media sites into the curriculum might improve graduate students’ cultural competence by increasing their engagement in cultural interactions, by increasing their confidence in cultural interactions, and by increasing the effectiveness of their cultural interactions. Although the current research identifies concurrent use of Facebook, Pinterest, and blogging as being important to increase cultural competence, additional research might determine if using combinations of other social media sites or different numbers of social media sites might further improve graduate student cultural competency.

References


About the author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linda A. Landon, received her PhD in molecular pharmacology from the University of Missouri and worked as a senior research scientist in applied molecular biology, cancer, pharmacology, and immunology research. Currently, Dr. Landon owns a private practice in designing, conducting, and reporting research in health policy, marketing, education, and medicine.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary W. Stout, EdD, Associate Professor, School of Advanced Studies, University of Phoenix. She received doctorate from the College of William and Mary, master’s from University of Virginia, and worked for Department of Defense, Army, and Marine Corps. She currently is doctoral chair for the University of Phoenix students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas K. Neeley, Ph.D. received his PhD in Instructional Technology from Wayne State University and works as a Technologist and Futurist at General Motors Company. Currently, Dr. Neeley is working on personalized learning and collaboration systems. He provides consultation on related topics to numerous universities and government agencies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>