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# Multicultural Education in Action: A Multiple Case Study of Black Elementary Aged Children's Identity Development and Engagement with Civil Rights Literature

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN ACTION: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF BLACK  
ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN'S IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND  
ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL RIGHTS LITERATURE

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
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**Dissertation Approval**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the United States education system a large achievement gap between African American and Latino students compared to White American students exists. Various studies have documented the gap, but there has not been much success in closing it. Recognizing that the educational system is growing more, not less, diverse, including due to the rise in enrollments of students of color and the decrease of the same by white students based on birthrates and immigration trends, the success of this increasingly diverse student population is even more important to the success of the nation. Preparing teachers to integrate multicultural content and pedagogy across the PK-12 (and higher education) curriculum is one means of addressing the gap. Doing so in early education creates stronger interpersonal and, thus, academic, foundations for all children; continuing to do so as children progress educationally will assure that all students are prepared to become active citizens in society. Ensuring that all students can find themselves affirmed in the curriculum is key to their individual, social, and educational identity formation and, thus, their future success in all quadrants of life.

Accordingly, this research seeks to contribute to existing literature on supporting all students' positive identity development through the use of culturally responsive content and pedagogical practices. Drawing upon Jackson's (1976b) Black Identity Development Model and Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, this research will explore racial identity development theory through examining the educational experiences of black children's interactions with "movement-oriented" Civil Rights-themed children's literature. The ultimate goal of this research is to identify reliable critical pedagogical strategies for in- and pre-service teachers to adopt to close the racial academic achievement gap. This qualitative, multiple case study of seven Black students, aged eight to twelve years, and their parent or parents was undertaken in

the context of a summer literacy program. Data sources included a demographic survey, pre- and post-classroom activity interviews, and classroom observation. Themes in the participating students' Black Identity Development that emerged in relationship to their engagement with culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogical practices were culled and examined against the participants' educational outcomes.

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*“We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.” ~ JFK*

Journey – an act of traveling from one place to another. This journey has been filled with emotion, challenges, encouragement, and confidence. I am thankful to those who fearlessly chose to travel with me and I extend my appreciation for guidance and support.

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*Dedicated to my parents who taught me importance and value of education . . . and to the  
beautiful children who showed me that education is so much more than academics.*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*I believe that education is the single most important civil rights issue that we face today. Because in the end, if we really want to solve issues like mass incarceration, poverty, racial profiling, voting rights, and the kinds of challenges that shocked so many of us over the past year, then we simply cannot afford to lose out on the potential of even one young person. We cannot allow even one more young person to fall through the cracks.*

—First Lady Michelle Obama, (2015, para 8)

### Introduction

The central question addressed by the Supreme Court during the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954, 1955) was whether segregation of children in public schools based on their race, deprived minority children of equal educational opportunities when everything else was equal (Saddler, 2005). This question has been, and continues to be, answered in the negative, as evidenced in an educational system in which children of color are repeatedly reported to have lower reading and numeracy scores in comparison to their white peers. In 2003, Education Trust, Inc. reported that, nationally, fourth grade African-Americans fell behind their white peers in reading. In fact, 61% of fourth grade African-Americans were below basic scores in reading compared to 26% of fourth grade white Americans (2004). These statistics attest to the reality that, even after the ruling of *Brown*, U.S. schools continue to marginalize minority students.

Our current educational system, where many African American students are failing, often puts the blame on, perceived, “unsupportive” parents, “lazy” students, and media influences (Saddler, 2005). However, an examination of the historical structure of schools and the biases that are perpetuated within the education system is necessary in order to understand why this



blame is constantly and inaccurately associated with specific groups of students, particularly people of color and the poor. With persistent failure of only racially diverse and/or working class and working poor students, the system must instead consider how race and culture influence the educational outcome of all students. Saddler (2005) suggests that black children suffer most in schools due to power structures in which school staff, who are overwhelmingly white and ill-prepared to affirm students who are racially and culturally different from themselves, have the power to label, classify, and define these students; coupled with the fact that they also often do not have the best intentions for these students for various reasons.

### **Identifying the Problem**

Teacher candidates entering the field of PK-12 education today are increasingly challenged to consider the variety of tools and strategies needed to teach well, this is especially the case for white candidates who enter schools with increasingly diverse racial and ethnic populations of students (Morrell & Morrell, 2012). In fact, increasingly, in the years since *Brown*, the majority of teacher candidates are European American, at least middle-class, monolingual English speakers, and have had very few prior substantive experiences interacting with diverse populations, and, therefore, may, in some senses, view diversity in negative or inaccurate ways (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Wood, 2009; Zeichner & Hoefft, 1996). Additionally, new teachers are too-often provided with scripted and one-size-fits-all curricula that do not include a wide range of differentiation directives for various dimensions of student diversity; this leaves little room for teachers to promote critical appreciation for differences among students, much less to affirm these differences through their own creative teaching practices. When teachers lack understanding of diversity issues it can negatively affect the educational success of their students (Gay, 2002). In an effort to preclude this from happening, teachers need to become familiar with the

experiences of all children in society and cultivate classroom-learning experiences that are unilaterally culturally responsive.

Accordingly, multicultural perspectives must become a part of both teaching and learning processes, reflected in both pedagogy and content (Banks, 2007; Delpit, 2012; Nieto 2010b). Multicultural children's literature is an essential resource for classroom teachers to use to not only engage a robust selection of texts, but through which to teach about topics such as racism, religious belief, gender equity, and socioeconomic class divisions, among others that are often not introduced in scripted and one-sized-fits all curricula. In these ways, multicultural children's literature provides opportunities for all children to build background knowledge in various content areas, while also building varied literacy skills (e.g., character recognition, plot familiarity) concomitant with literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, read-aloud fluency). But, though multicultural children's literature can facilitate the introduction of diversity topics to classroom conversations, teachers must still facilitate meaningful dialogue around these topic areas if this literature is to enable them to realize culturally responsive teaching practice and garner improvements in all students' learning outcomes.

When teachers engage multicultural children's literature with students to foster critical discussion of the broad ranges of diversity topics this literature covers in age-appropriate ways, students learn to broaden their perspectives on, and understandings of, society and their important place in it; when this happens, teachers have become culturally responsive educators who can and do affirm all students.

### **Background of the Problem**

In the early 2000's the United States entered an era characterized by the largest influx of immigrants and a rising number of U.S. born ethnic minorities (Banks, 2001; NCES, 2014). That

era continues; for example, from fall 2001 through fall 2011 the number of white students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in U.S. public schools decreased. However, the number of Latino students enrolled during this same period increased (NCES, 2014). The United States Department of Commerce (2000) has projected that by the year 2050 African American, Asian American, and Latino students will comprise close to 57% of all students in classrooms across the nation (p. 14). Thus, it is critically important for future educators to face and learn to embrace the reality that they will be working with students whose backgrounds will, more often than not, be unlike their own; teacher educators need to face and embrace this reality as well, and prepare their students accordingly (Clayton, 2011; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; McKown & Wienstein, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Wilson & Rodkin, 2011).

In addition to the differences that exist between teacher and students, research illustrates that students of color, specifically African American and Latino students, struggle most to adjust in school, and are overrepresented in special needs programs (Ford & Harris, 1999; Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). Further, African American and Latino students in many school districts are labeled “at-risk” or in need of special or remedial education services at twice the rate of their overall representation in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 123; U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 41). This research can tend to paint a picture of failing students, rather than failing teachers and an overall failing U.S. public school system. Instead, Howard (2003) argues that educators should be asking the difficult, yet obvious, question: “what, if anything, does race and culture have to do with the widespread underachievement of nonmainstream students?” (p. 197). Moreover, how can educators reconsider curriculum content and pedagogical practices to meet the needs of students of color to ensure their educational success in today’s classrooms? Locating educational failure in students, specifically in their race

or ethnicity or, worse, their “culture,” is a perception, that though erroneous, will persist until this deficit thinking is interrupted in teachers and, thus, there can be a shift in school curricula and teacher pedagogical practices that bring about equitable student learning outcomes across student populations.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### **Black**

For the purpose of this study the term Black was used to represent Black Americans and/or African Americans—the historical descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. This term was not used to identify skin color, rather the racial/ethnic group membership and associated cultural experiences. Throughout this work the term Black will be capitalized to represent the cultural group, not a color. Black, Black American, and African American will be used interchangeably for variation.

#### **Movement Oriented Civil Rights-Themed Multicultural Literature (MO-CRiTlit)**

There are various and broad definitions used to describe multicultural literature. Yokota (2001) defines multicultural literature as stories about groups of individuals outside of the mainstream of society and who are, in some way, marginalized; for example, people of color, working class and/or working poor people, people who speak English as a second language, and non-Christians, as well as people with disabilities, lesbian and gay people, people who identify as trans\*, women, among others.

For the purpose of this study I used a more specific definition of multicultural literature to describe any text *used as literature* that focuses on historically underrepresented people of color and their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement in American history (Menkart, Murray, & View, 2004). I call this body of multicultural literature “movement oriented Civil

Rights-themed multicultural literature” (hereafter abbreviated, “MO-CRiTLit”). Recently (in the last 10 years) there has been an increase in the availability of multicultural *children’s* literature that meets the definition of Civil Rights-oriented multicultural literature, thus providing teachers with a decent pool of such literature from which to select for use in their classrooms. It is vital that teachers be mindful in the selection of multicultural children’s literature, even that literature that appears to be, or is billed as being, movement-oriented, to assure that its content is factually and otherwise accurate, and does not promote stereotypes or superficial representations of historically underrepresented people of color (Kohl, 1993). The texts selected for this study provide true, authentic, and otherwise rich depictions of historically underrepresented people of color primarily during the historical period of the Civil Rights Movement.

### **Identity**

There are multiple factors that influence identity development including race, ethnicity, social class, language, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Gee (2000) suggests that identity is about “being recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context” (p. 99). This study focused on the racial identity development of young Black children based on their self-description of the racial/ethnic group or groups to which they claimed belonging. Study participant identity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 relative to data collection and analysis processes. Identity development will also be discussed further in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### **Servant Leader Intern**

For the purpose of this study the term Servant Leader Intern (SLI) will be used to identify the teacher of the class. The terms SLI, teacher, and facilitator will be used interchangeably throughout the study and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

## **Scholar**

For the purpose of this study the term scholar will be used to identify the participant in the study in the context of the summer program. The terms student, child participants, and scholar will be used interchangeably throughout the study and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Reading aloud to students is a practice that is consistently recommended for elementary teachers in order to encourage students' engagement with, and motivation to read text (Dugan, 1997; Sipe, 2000, 2002). Researchers have examined how teachers use "read-alouds" in their classrooms (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004) and the types of teacher practices used to analyze how students respond to the books that are read aloud (to them by teachers and/or peers and/or that they read aloud themselves) (Sipe, 2000, 2002). However, little attention has been focused on how book subject matter may influence teacher reading and student reading response. Existing research also suggests that when a reader becomes personally involved in a story it leads to higher levels of understanding of the story, compared to a reader who simply reads a story for take away information (Altieri, 1996; Dressel, 2003). However, the factors influencing reader "personal involvement" have not considered the racial identity development of elementary-aged Black children. The purpose of this study was to explore how teacher-student read-aloud interactions with multicultural children's literature, specifically MO-CRiTlit, influenced the racial identity development of Black elementary-aged children. Specifically, the primary question that guided this study was: *How does "movement-oriented" Civil Rights-themed children's literature influence the racial identity development of Black elementary-aged children?* Four ancillary research questions were also considered: 1) *How do children use*

*literature to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with classmates, teachers, and/or characters in the text? 2) In what ways does culture relate to children's understandings about themselves and about others? 3) What types of cross cultural understandings can be learned through children's literature? and, 4) How are critical pedagogy and multicultural literature used in conjunction to provide students a foundation to make connections, address disconnections, and dialogue about topics with other students their age?* These questions were informed by the study's conceptual framework (discussed next and again in Chapters 2 and 3) and also built from and on this study's literature review (discussed in Chapter 2).

### **Conceptual Framework and Brief Review of Topic Literature**

The conceptual framework for this study drew from four areas of research; Black Identity Development (BID), Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Literacy. Each of these areas is broad, complex and aligns with many different fields of study, including education. An additional element of the conceptual framework for this study was drawn from the Freedom Schools program created during the Civil Rights Movement and continuing today. All five of these dimensions were blended together relative to education to create a unique analytical lens through which furthering understanding of literary interactions of Black youth with MO-CRiTLit could be pursued through the study.

#### **Black Identity Development**

The topic of identity development often elicits resistance from individuals, especially when the focus of learning about identity is on race and racism (Tatum, 2003). Although there are various models of racial identity development this study draws from those that explicitly discuss the racial identity of Black Americans (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976b).

The Nigrescence model established by Cross (1971) and the Black Identity Development (BID) model established by Jackson (1976b) almost mirror each other in their stages of Black identity development. However, they were theorized and developed independently of each other. The Nigrescence model draws more from psychology and focuses on psychosocial dimensions of identity, and the BID model is more sociological in nature, examining identity from a sociopolitical stance. Accordingly, the BID model has more relevance for this study due to its use of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's as a key historical reference point. The BID model emerged from this movement and had particular relevance to the racism experienced during it by many Black/African Americans in the United States (Jackson, 2001). Furthermore, Jackson (2001) relates that the intention of the BID model was to establish:

...a framework to understand the different ways that Black people were responding to this era of civil rights; to understand how this change was influencing the thinking and behavior of Black people; and to examine the way that Black identity was evolving or developing as a result. (pp. 36-37)

This framework is vital to the study's focus on examining the different ways that elementary-aged Black children respond to today's civil rights issues as they are connected to this past. This model aided in identifying how the critical pedagogical engagement of the MO-CRiTlit influences the identity development of Black children and how, in turn, these children's academic performance is impacted. The Nigrescence and BID models will be described in greater detail in the review of literature in Chapter 2.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and the work of Derrick Bell beginning in the 1970s. CLS argues that there are various forms of bias, not in the



interpretation or application of law, but embedded within the laws themselves because of who created them and for what purpose (i.e., wealthy white men for the protection of their private property). Therefore, the law is not a neutral blunt instrument, but a tool through which societal power is wielded. CRT builds on CLS in articulating the specific forms of racial bias that are codified in the law. CRT seeks to foreground the experiences of people of color relative to the law to reveal the embedded racism within it. Williams (1991) asserts that

the simple matter of the color of one's skin so profoundly affects the way one is treated, so radically shapes what one is allowed to think and feel about this society, that the decision to generalize from this division is valid (p. 256).

This holds true in the context of education as well. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with being the first educational scholars to apply CRT to the field of education, specifically to pedagogical practices, finding that persistent educational problems, notably the racial achievement gap, can be explained by the revelation that embedded within educational policy, as well as practice, is racial bias. Through a CRT lens, practitioners who serve children of color and, thus, who need to know how to affirm them daily, learn to see these children through asset, not deficit lenses; that is, children's persistent educational failure is not a function of their "culture," but rather of systemic oppression designed to protect white privilege, in this case, educational privilege. Thus, changing the educational future of these children becomes tethered to culturally responsive practice, not cultural assimilation.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Kincheloe (2008) argues that, because there is constant change in social issues and related theoretical insights, critical pedagogy is always evolving. Attributed to a diverse group of theorists and practitioners, and not necessarily defined as critical pedagogy initially or always,

critical pedagogical practice can be found in the works of Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. DuBois, among other educators who have focused on the education of Black people in the United States since its inception (Kincheloe, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Defined as critical pedagogy, the practice first gained attention internationally with the publication and first English translation of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007).

Freire, a Brazilian educator, was a social justice education activist and influential researcher who created liberation-through-literacy movements, not only in Brazil, but throughout the world. He observed the struggles of the masses people in Brazil and developed an awareness of their impoverished and oppression. These observations shaped his work—work that was later used to improve these peoples lives, and the lives of other marginalized peoples around the world. McLaren (2000) calls Freire the “inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy” (p. 1).

Freire's vision for liberation is widely accepted, though still more internationally than in the United States; his work has provided the impetus for social action in education to bring about change in the educational marginalization of poor students and students of color the world over. Critical pedagogy promotes understanding of diverse forms of oppression, including class, race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural, religious, and ability-related dimensions of oppression. This understanding, in turn, provides educational researchers with the ability to discern connections between societal power structures, including in education, and human oppression, including that of students in urban, public schools in the United States. Additionally, critical pedagogy promotes understanding of how issues of power and oppression are embodied in everyday human life experiences, and, therefore, provides a basis for questioning various ideologies and related decisions, and the dominance relations they protect (Kincheloe, 2008).

As previously alluded to, critical pedagogy is practiced in varying contexts around the world. In education, educator critical consciousness must exist before critical pedagogy can be enacted. Gay and Kirkland (2003) explain that teachers who know who they are culturally, understand the sociopolitical contexts in which they teach, and can recognize and question how their assumptions and prior knowledge may impact the students they teach possess critical consciousness and leverage that consciousness in developing critical pedagogical practice. When teaching is coupled with critical self-reflection there is constant transformation and improvement of self and ones teaching reality (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2006). This task is not simple for teachers. Too often, teachers, all of whom have been inculcated by dominant ideologies, especially when those ideologies serve their interests, begin to view themselves and their students through oppressor lenses (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008). Although the demographics of U.S. classrooms are becoming more diverse, the curriculum remains heavily defined by European and European American cultural norms, experiences, and contributions (Nieto & Bode, 2012). As dominant ideologies play out—covertly or overtly—in the context of a classroom, youth from non-dominant or marginalized communities are confronted by the power of the dominant group. Consequently, they are influenced by the myths of those in power. Kincheloe (2008) describes one such myth as the notion that “African Americans and other non white people are not as intelligent as individuals from European backgrounds...” (p. 73). Even when this and other myths are exposed and challenged by critically conscious pedagogists on at least a daily basis, most African American children have long been, and continue to be, educated in a manner that implies this myth is true. For this reason, promoting widespread development of teacher critical consciousness and subsequent alignment of this consciousness with critical pedagogical practice is vital to changing the educational picture of Black children and youth.

## Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is related to critical pedagogy and the social justice work of Paulo Freire (Freire, 2000). Freire's work brought change to poverty-stricken areas in Brazil through a movement that empowered poor and otherwise disenfranchised adults to question social structures that conditioned them to remain in disempowered spaces. Literacy education was the first key factor enabling these adults to begin to face, question and challenge the status quo (Stevens & Bean, 2007). But mere literacy—functional literacy—was not enough to bring about transformational change. Additionally, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that literacy education should not only provide basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills, rather it must also be characterized by “a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people” (p. 187). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), true literacy is reflected in the ability to read “the word *and* the world” (p. 8). From these ideas the concept of *critical* literacy formally emerges. But, as previously noted with respect to the historical development of critical pedagogy, the notion of critical literacy predates its codification. For example, in 1977, Foucault described a form of critical literacy in his work exploring and encouraging disruption of power relations in society. Further, as critical literacy is rooted in the struggle of historically marginalized people to become educated, it is clearly also implied in the work of Marcus Garvey and Frederick Douglass (McCartney, 1993). A critical literacy framework encourages teachers of Black children to reconsider literacy instruction as “problem posing” education, where the relationships between hegemony, power, and literacy are questioned, at the same time that literacy skills are being taught and learned (Freire, 1973).

## **Topic Rationale**

The topic of this study evolved out of discoveries in my own personal and professional development. As a child my parents always stressed the value and importance of an education. I spent countless hours volunteering at a local school where my father began as a kindergarten teacher, later became the principal, and over which he now serves as a superintendent. It was during my time physically spent in the school from a young age that I realized teaching was my calling and, therefore, that the field of education was where I would focus my own educational journey as I entered college.

My father's first school was, at that time, and still is unique. It is a small school serving a student population in which the majority of students' are migrant workers. For many teachers, such a school setting might elicit notions of linguistic or cultural barriers. My dad and his teaching colleagues could have engaged the teaching of their students from the perspective that learning standard English was the priority; instead they entered into teaching their students by embracing the culture that each child brought to the classroom. Delpit (2006) suggests that teachers should recognize that the linguistics a student brings to the classroom are connected with loved ones, community, and identity—their culture. As a principal, my father continued to hold high expectations for teachers regarding culturally responsive interaction with their students and students' families (these expectations persist for teachers and principals under his superintendency). Through observation of how especially teachers met these expectations, I began to develop my own awareness of what today we call culturally responsive teaching practice (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This awareness emerged as an interest in others' identities and cultures. And, at that time, I did not realize what a significant influence it would

have on shaping my own pedagogical practices as I entered the teaching field: it has come to *define* who I am as teacher.

As a college graduate with an elementary education teaching degree, I was excited about my first teaching position in a kindergarten classroom. Based on my prior practicum and student teaching experiences, I felt as though I was prepared for my first year and dedicated a lot of effort to organizing classroom materials, planning instruction, and preparing myself intellectually and emotionally for the first day of school. I liken my feelings at that time to those that a child feels the night before their first day of school: I was anxious (in a good way), excited, and optimistic about what I thought was to come. I had not a single idea that my first day teaching, much less my first year, would mark the beginning of a *cultural transformation* in me. During my first few weeks teaching using a scripted curriculum, including pre-selected literature, I realized that my students were not engaged with the content or in the literary discussions. It was during this time that I made the decision to independently include more multicultural content and literature—on an instinctual level, I knew I needed to connect with my students on a much more personal level, outside of what scripted curricula and pre-selected literature allowed. It was very clear that the 18 five-year old African American students in my classroom were not engaged in the curriculum at least in part because there was not an opportunity for them to associate it with their own experiences. I began to ask the students to share some of their favorite activities, family rituals, and most memorable experiences to help facilitate *our* learning—to glean at least the beginning information I deemed necessary to meaningfully culturally differentiate my instruction. With this information in hand, I took advantage of the freedom I had inside the classroom to enhance prepackaged lessons with a variety of hands-on learning activities that relied heavily on multicultural children's literature. This experience taught me as a young naïve

teacher that my job was about much more than mere academics; it was about connecting with students, building a learning community, and fostering family engagement.

Now, eight years later, having established and still sustaining many meaningful student and family relationships, I realize that my teaching experiences in the close confines of that kindergarten classroom, located in an historically African American community, made me a culturally responsive teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). As a graduate student and emerging scholar, I now question—from not just experiential, but data-driven platforms—the use of scripted programs and emphasize the need to use multicultural children’s literature with all children, but especially those educationally underserved. The research is clear, all children benefit educationally from rich opportunities—especially those that use a critical literacy framework—for gaining knowledge about diverse cultures in the context of exploring ideas of power and agency that provide opportunities for questioning and acting to reconcile injustices (Fisher & Serns, 1998; Freire, 1973; Stevens & Bean, 2007).

While reflecting on these learning experiences and my associated *cultural transformation*, I realized that my perspective on teaching Black children is different from most others with whom I worked as a teacher, and continue to work as a graduate student. My pedagogical posture and choice to teach in an all-Black school did not come about because I wanted to be recognized as unique, rather simply because I wanted to effectively educate children and empower families where the need was great, thus where success would have meaningful outcomes. I consider my years teaching where I did as a privilege and a gift—that experience brought me to this study. As a graduate student I continue to question the efficacy of standard curriculum development and implementation, especially in considering how young African American children will make the culturally relevant literary connections necessary to develop positive self-identities like most of

their White counterparts do precisely because of how standard literature reflects only positive white characters (Helms, 1990a). These questions juxtaposed against modern day civil rights issues, like racial profiling, police violence, and poverty, have led to this study.

### **Methodological Rationale**

This qualitative research employed a case study approach. Case study method considers a phenomenon in a context (Merriam, 1998). In this study the phenomenon was the racial identity development of Black elementary-aged child, and the context was a summer literacy program. Consistent with case study method, this study was undertaken through rich analysis of the phenomenon across seven cases, with each participant pair (Black child and parent) representing a discrete case (Merriam, 1988). Using a cross-case analysis, this study sought to identify themes through which a deeper understanding of curricular and pedagogical influences on the racial identity development of the study participants could be gleaned and then applied to improving the quality of teacher preparation, teaching, and academic outcomes for Black children.

### **Scope and Significance**

#### **Assumptions**

This study was based on various assumptions. First it assumed that children of color have difficulty connecting to the standard school curriculum since scripted programs are so closely and narrowly aligned with Eurocentric norms. Another assumption this study held was that while all children initially develop their identities through home-based cultural settings, for Black children their identities change as they enter the overarching White social setting of school and, thus, influences their interactions with others—both with White teachers and peers, as well as with other peers of color (Jackson, 1976b). Finally, this study assumed that as children of color advance through their educational journey they are systematically excluded from the education



system because they necessarily receive an education that is different and inferior (Saddler, 2005).

### **Limitations**

This study may be viewed as limited because it only focused on experiences of a small number of Black elementary-aged students in the context of a single summer literacy program. While this limitation is evident, this study offers value because it can be used as a platform for future studies that focus on civil rights topics, racial identity, literacy education, and multicultural curriculum development—it adds to existing research in these areas, even if only in a small way. Further, as case study research, the validity of this study is established not by sample size or study scope, but rather by whether or not themes that emerged from it resonate with others' experiences. Accordingly, the multiple sources of data this study compiled can be used to establish credible findings and noteworthy implications consistent with case study research.

### **Significance**

This study has the potential to impact teaching practices in public schools through teacher education and on-going professional development programs for pre- and in-service teachers. The data collected helped identify how the use of MO-CRiTLit can provide a bridge for Black students to connect to, and interact with, text. In turn, this may extend understanding of how Black students develop racial identity, and the implications of that development for curriculum and instruction. Improving discrete educational experiences for Black students and their families by improving the educational training of especially White teachers can change the aggregated educational picture for Black children and, in doing so, provide a roadmap for improving that picture for all underserved children in the U.S. education system. More broadly, this study has

the potential to improve the quality of educational materials used in schools such that the development of critical literacy among children and their families becomes routine.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided the foundation and rationale for the research study. Chapter 1 also iterated the purpose of the study, its conceptual framework, and its unique operational definitions. This chapter, Chapter 2, provides a review of the current literature that informed the study.

In particular, this chapter reviews the historical literature on the first Freedom Schools movement that was a part of the Civil Rights Movement, and on the modern day Freedom Schools literacy program model. The literature in these areas provided specific context for the study. Additionally, this chapter reviews the literature on racial identity development, student centered pedagogy, and critical literacy. The study was situated relative to this existing literature. Finally, this chapter reveals gaps in this literature that the study sought to fill.

### **Freedom Schools**

#### **Historical Background**

The Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program is rooted in the American Civil Rights Movement and the accompanying efforts of college-aged youth who were committed to challenging societal racial injustices, particularly those manifest in education, at that time (Etienne, 2013). Beginning in 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was established by Civil Rights activists along with the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), made up of members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Etienne, 2013; Sturkey, 2010). These young activists created what was familiarly known as "Freedom Summer," initially a discrete voter registration campaign drive, subsequently developed into a longer-term social action project dedicated to bringing awareness to other issues of concern for African Americans (Rubin, 2014). On this

latter point, the SNCC leadership, in particular, had serious concern about the failure of law enforcement officers to protect Blacks who were being attacked while registering to vote. Accordingly, leaders of COFO believed that it might be beneficial to invite White youth from the North to participate in the Freedom Summer project. Because there had been support for Civil Rights Movement activities from portions of the White population, especially in Northern states, from the very beginnings of the movement, it seemed likely that White youth would be open to joining with Black youth on the project; indeed they were (Sturkey, 2010). Collectively, all of these youth believed that Freedom Summer would illustrate that Blacks and Whites could work together to achieve racial justice. This “movement” would later encourage other mixed race groups of people to collaborate on other projects designed to bring about greater race equity in local communities across the country (Cobb, 1991; Etienne, 2013).

From the work of youth on what turned out to be an intensely provocative and otherwise meaningful social change project, Freedom Schools were born and became foundational in providing literacy instruction, creative writing, citizenship education, voter registration, and other humanities-focused activities for college-aged youth (Cobb, 1991; Etienne, 2013; Sturkey, 2010). This Freedom Schools “curriculum” was not a set of lesson plans per se, but rather activity frameworks designed to cultivate young civil rights activists and support their activist endeavors (Cobb, 1991; Fusco, 1991). Thus, Freedom Schools’ sites were specifically designed to motivate college-aged young people to become active in their communities, by specifically identifying solutions to local problems faced by African Americans (Ligon & Chilcoat, 1999). With the use of engaging activity frameworks, encouragement from especially SNCC leaders, and exposure to the positive attitudes of Freedom Schools staff, these young adults were motivated to become agents of social change, at the same time that they developed knowledge

bases and skill sets that would enable to them to more fully participate in a society that was open to them. “These schools were viewed as an organizing tool and SNCC referred to them as parallel institutions that would produce students able to work for social change” (Rothschild, 1982, p. 403).

Initially designed as a basic literacy program, Freedom Schools became synonymous with community organizing, eventually developing into something much greater. Over time, however, various Freedom Schools have developed in different ways—some becoming more like traditional PK-12 schools, others maintaining the intentionally politically progressive orientation of the original Freedom Schools (Clayton-Robinson & Sally, 2001). Concerned about this bifurcation and what it meant for the Freedom Schools legacy and related continuing impact in Black communities, in 1995, the President of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), Marian Wright Edelman, sought to bring back what she refers to as the *movement* part of Freedom Schools by using the original 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project model. For Edelman, ‘putting the movement back’ into Freedom Schools meant reawakening commitments to social justice by reintegrating an intentionally sociopolitically-located multicultural educational approach into the Freedom Schools activity frameworks—an approach in which issues of power, privilege, oppression, and discrimination are foregrounded in teaching across the curriculum (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Today, fifty plus years after the Civil Rights Movement, the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools Program® celebrates their twentieth year spreading that *movement* paradigm across the entire United States in serving more than 12,700 children in 107 cities and 28 states and Washington, D.C. during the summer months (CDF, 2015, para., 4). These numbers speak

volumes about the power of young people working together to realize a common, though, perhaps initially, seemingly unattainable, goal.

### **Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools**

The CDF’s mission is to “assure that every child has a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities” (CDF, 2015, para., 1). High expectations, with appropriate supportive scaffolding to ensure every child can and does meet those expectations, are foundational to the CDF Freedom Schools Program mission. Alluded to above, the activity frameworks for this program provide the children served and their families a unique education founded in and on African American history, culture, and traditions that prioritize literacy, service, and advocacy. As literacy is the main priority of the program, students are engaged in individual reading and corresponding cooperative, hands-on learning endeavors (i.e., activity frameworks) developed by the educational curriculum committee of the CDF’s Freedom Schools program. Committee members include pre- and in-service PK-12 teachers, higher education faculty, community and school librarians, education activists and policy makers, among others, all of whom have particular content and pedagogical knowledge in literacy and multicultural education, including the theory and practice of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Members of the committee have built the Freedom Schools activity frameworks based on the extensive research literature documenting how powerful children’s and youth literature is in helping young people develop awareness of, knowledge about, insight into society at large, and their place in that society (Stevenson, 2015). This literature reveals that, especially, when children interact with texts where they can identify with the characters and/or their circumstances, there is high likelihood that they will be more

motivated to read (Boutte, 2002; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). The six-week, literacy-rich summer program aims to motivate children to embrace a love of reading.

As intimated above, the CDF's Freedom Schools Program model (i.e., the *movement* paradigm) is implemented in CDF Freedom Schools Program sites in PK-12 public and private schools, faith-based organizations, and community-based agencies. As previously discussed, while this model is rooted in the historical Freedom Schools, it is also unique in its highly relational approach (Clayton-Robinson & Sally, 2001; Jackson & Boutte, 2009). Each morning the children (referred to as "scholars" in the program) arrive on site where they are immediately greeted by program staff and the other scholars, who have arrived before them, and welcomed into the learning community. From this arrival moment and until their departure each day, the program staff engage the scholars and their parents with an extremely high level of energy that is intended to "infect" them and become a defining characteristic of the community. Each scholar is served a healthy breakfast and then scholars participate in Harambee (a Kiswahili word meaning "let's pull together") time during which the scholars celebrate, through singing, cheering, and chanting, each other and themselves as individuals and as a part of a community, as well as their accomplishments. During this 30-minute Harambee time, the positive atmosphere foundational to the scholars' growth and ongoing development is established. Harambee time also includes opportunities for scholars to hear a read-aloud by "guest readers," from various walks of life in the local community (including some who are well known locally and/or nationally) who have been invited to share their favorite stories. Harambee time energizes the scholars—an energy they carry with them into their ensuing classroom learning activities. The active nature of Harambee time at the outset of each day enables scholars to more easily focus their energy during the next three hours of engagement with the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC).

As suggested previously, the IRC is an intentionally culturally relevant activity framework, developed by the curriculum committee based on their personal experience with the CDF Freedom Schools Program model. Committee members individually recommend and collectively select culturally relevant children's and young adult literature that is based on real world happenings of particular significance (good and bad) to African Americans and African American communities (e.g., the Underground Railroad, the Civil Rights Movement, etc.), and, more broadly, on social justice activism. This remains of high importance as the American Civil Rights Movement is the least taught topic in American history and many states view the teaching of the Civil Rights Movement as a regional matter or, simply, only for children of color, thus not made central in mainstream PK-12 history curriculum (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). Books are also screened to be developmentally appropriate, to be reflective of the scholars' identities, and to inspire them to take action to make a positive difference in the world, especially for Black peoples. The texts are aligned with the program's six-week theme, "*I Can Make a Difference*," relative to self, family, community, country, and world, as well as through hope, education, and action. Jackson and Boutte (2009) state that the goal of the IRC is to help children fall in love with stories, books, characters, illustrations, values, and ideas of the literature.

After this literature is selected, committee sub-groups are formed based on members' areas of specific interest and expertise. For each book, sub-committee members collaboratively develop culturally relevant lesson plans. While the goal is not to specifically align the lesson plans to the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) the alignment has served as a byproduct so that sites can secure federal funding for program implementation. Lesson plans are designed to be highly interactive by providing myriad opportunities for cooperative learning. The IRC is unconventional in that it does not emphasize the mechanics of



reading, nor standardized reading assessment scores. Rather, it focuses on cultivating the scholars' motivation to begin to read and to continue reading, thus the selection of texts with characters that are “like” the scholars—through whom the scholars can see themselves (Jackson & Boutte, 2009). And although reading mechanics is not a focus of the IRC, many scholars learn literacy concepts and build literacy skills through their interactions with these texts.

Each IRC lesson is comprised of five to six components, completed over a two hour and forty-five minute block that includes a fifteen-minute break. The five to six components include: an opening activity, a main activity, a cooperative group activity, a social action activity, a conflict resolution activity, and a closing activity. Each IRC lesson is differentiated for four different academic levels based upon scholars' last academic grade-level completion. Level one is designed for kindergarten through second grade, level two is designed for grades three through five, level three is designed for grades six through eight, and level four is designed for grades nine through twelve.

As scholars' ages do not necessarily correspond to traditional grade levels, scholars of various age levels are represented in each level, which has various implications for ensuring that each scholar has an equitable learning opportunity. Nieto (2010a) argues that a focus on culture in isolation of broader school and societal contexts will not necessarily enhance student empowerment and learning. For that reason, IRC lessons begin with an opening activity where the scholars are, for example, asked to make predictions about the text based on the title and illustrations on the cover of the book. During an IRC main activity, scholars are asked to sit together for an interactive read-aloud of the text and then dialogue with one another about the events that occurred from the beginning to the end of the story. Scholars may also be asked to identify text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections in a group discussion so that each

scholar can teach and learn from all the connections made, especially to the characters and their experiences in the story. Upon completion of the interactive read-aloud, scholars may work in cooperative groups to encourage collaborative work and task completion, to further stimulate peer teaching and learning, and that require them to use higher order thinking skills by connecting to the text through poetry, song (lyrics and music), or letters. Stovall (2006) and Nieto and Bode (2012) suggest that educators who incorporate the arts in their classrooms create additional opportunities for their students to learn about social justice issues and/or through culturally relevant pedagogy, since art often reflects societal challenges at different historical periods and relative to different human populations. In this way, a social action activity and/or a conflict resolution activity can be woven into each lesson. Social action and conflict resolution activities are particularly valuable as they give the scholars the opportunity to identify concerns around which they can collectively organize and/or problem solve, including for on-going conflicts for which no effective solutions have yet been found (e.g., racial profiling) (Bickmore, 1999). Finally, a closing activity might have the scholars formally share with their peers the work they completed during the day. This gives students a platform to showcase their creative accomplishments, express themselves, demonstrate their learning, teach and learn from each other (again), and end as they began, celebrating themselves, each other, and successes.

### **Why the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools' IRC is Not a Scripted Curriculum**

The IRC is clearly different from traditional or standard reading curricula used in PK-12 schools. While traditional and standard curricula are designed, through the 'hidden curriculum,' to be culturally relevant (i.e., Eurocentric, based on the cultural norms of primarily White and at least middle class students), they are presented as neutral and objective and, thus, appropriate and adequate for all students (Howard, 2006). In contrast, the IRC is affirmatively designed to be

culturally relevant for students of color, primarily Black students, and it is overtly political and positional (CDF, 2015; Jackson & Boutte, 2009).

A scripted curriculum does not offer the teacher any or much flexibility in content delivery. Instead a scripted program is designed to achieve specific objectives, and to meet specific standards through a specific, highly-detailed teaching approach . The IRC provides a set of lessons as a guide for the teacher-as-facilitator to consider as he/she plans the lessons through which content is communicated. While these lessons have an objective, it is primarily up to the facilitator to determine how those objectives will be met—how she/he will undertake the facilitation using learnings/tools from their training aligned with the needs of the scholars. The IRC enables facilitators autonomy through which various opportunities for scholars to make culturally relevant connections between the IRC and their lives are intended to ensue. Black students’ rarely, if ever, have this experience through the implementation of scripted programs in traditional public education (Smith, 1992; Tatum, 2000).

Further, the implementation of a scripted program allows little to no room for critical literacy development, whereas the IRC specifically frames lessons around a wide selection of critically conscious multicultural children’s literature that encourages the scholars, through their reading of this literature, to question societal structures in order to build self-efficacy and agency.

### **Connection to the Study**

Prior research has been conducted on the CDF Freedom Schools program in the areas of program evaluation (Murrell-Powell,2001), adolescent literacy (Dunkerly, 2011), Curriculum development (Jackson & Boute, 2009), and teacher development (Davis, 2010; Jackson, 2009; Jackson & Howard, 2014). For this study, research focused on the IRC main activity of the interactive read-aloud and cooperative group activities in a level two classroom. The main

activity engaged four texts and related lesson plans focusing on MO-CRiTLit. As previously described, this educational experience is designed to teach literacy through motivation to read by capturing students' interests with texts that reflect their cultural identities and, thus, that support healthy identity development. As one of the most critical tasks for students transitioning from childhood into adolescence is the development of their identity, thus it is of paramount importance that educational experiences are designed with this in mind (Erikson, 1968). Perhaps even more so than in the past, today's society makes it difficult for people of color (including children of color) to imagine positive identity representations in mass media, thus they have to build those representations independently. Beginning in the late 1960s/early 1970s, Black social science researchers began to do just that, establishing models of racial identity development for Black people. In the next section, the foundational Nigrescence (Cross, 1971) and Black Identity Development (Jackson, 1976a, 1976b) models of Black racial identity are detailed.

### **Racial Identity Development**

In the United States race is often used to sort people into groups (Omi & Winant, 2014). But race is not actually a real thing—biologically speaking, race does not exist (Pang, Pang, & Clark, 2012). Rather, race is a social construction—something we generally accept as a concrete reality, even though it is not (Haddad, Clark, & Brimhall-Vargas, 2014). Social construction notwithstanding, race has real impact on people's lives—good and bad (Clark & Fasching-Varner, 2014). Assumptions about race are usually based on perceptions about physical attributes, ancestry, nationality, and/or culture; the perceptions are then codified law and policy and, among many other things, used to count people for demographic purposes (Haney-López, 1997). Identification with such socially constructed racial groups—self-identification and identification by others—influences individual and group identity as people come to internalize

this identification; thus, it impacts their interactions with one another and in society as a whole (Renn, 2001). For example, today's Black youth are growing up in an era where racial profiling and acts of violence against especially Black men by state agents (e.g., law enforcement, courts, etc.) not only continue to occur, but garner increased media attention; being raised Black often means having an oppositional relationship with authority (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The consequences of this for Black youth clear point not only to the need to improve race relations in society generally, but also to improve the relationship between Black students and their usually White teachers; these areas of improvement are critical for Black youth to develop the positive racial identity formations necessary to be successful in school and beyond (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976a).

Research suggests that parental socialization plays an active role in their child's understanding of societal norms. If this socialization is healthy, it can influence positive identity and positive racial identity development for children; this is especially true for children of color who are subsequently less likely to internalize negative stereotypes about their racial groups (Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, & Chen, 2009; Neblett, Small, Ford, Nguyen, & Stellers, 2009). Unlike White parents, Black parents and other parents of color are tasked with helping their children understand their racial identity at personal and societal levels, and then to develop a repertoire of responses for contending with various acts of discrimination they are likely to encounter (Hughes, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2006).

### **Historical Black Identity Development Models**

The notion of Black identity development arose relative to the sociopolitical histories that Black people have lived as minority group members in the larger society (Cross, 1971; Jackson 1976a). In particular, Cross (1991) cites the assassination of the Reverend, Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr., and the subsequent emergence of the Black Power Movement, as key catalysts for this notion to emerge. From this notion, models of Black identity development were established to provide a framework for understanding the processes by which, and the stages through which, Black people navigate their identities relative to race in society. Two models of black identity development have dominated the research in this area; the first is Cross' (1971) Nigrescence model, the second is Jackson's Black Identity Development (BID) model.

**Nigrescence.** Cross' Nigrescence (1971) model describes the "process of becoming Black," (Cross, 1991, p. 157) and the stages through which Black people may move as they undertake this becoming (Cross, 1991). There are five stages in the Nigrescence model: 1) pre-encounter, 2) encounter, 3) immersion-emersion, 4) internalization, and, 5) internalization-commitment. The first stage, "pre-encounter" is described as immersion in the worldview of the dominant culture, originally this stage was called the "self hating-Negro" stage (Cross, 1991, p. 159). During this stage an individual allows his/her identity to be shaped by the dominant culture that she/he has accepted as good, right, or normative. "Encounter," the next stage, describes "personal experiences that temporarily dislodge someone from his or her old world view and identity, thus making the person receptive (vulnerable) to conversion" (Cross, 1991, p. 159). This stage is primarily transitional, something a person moves through in leaving stage 1 and entering stage 3. Stage 3, the "Immersion-Emersion" stage, is described as an intense period where a person attempts to destroy her/his old, largely negative racial identity while, at the same time, begins to form a new, more positive, racial identity. Cross (1991) describes this stage as having two distinct phases:

While the first phase involves immersion into a total Black frame of reference, the second phase (emersion) represents emergence from the dead end, racist, oversimplified aspects

of Immersion...the person's emotions level off, and psychological defensiveness is replaced by affective and cognitive openness, allowing the person to be more critical in his or her analysis. (p. 159)

From stage 3, a person may move into the stage of "Internalization" where she/he embraces the new racial identity with confidence. Finally, in the last stage, "Internalization-Commitment," a person continues to build confidence in the new racial identity, concomitantly transitioning her/his consciousness from "uncontrolled rage toward white people...to controlled anger toward *systems* of oppression and injustice and racist institutions" (Cross, 1991, p. 159). Like most stage models, movement through the stages in this model is not guaranteed (a person can stay at any stage in the model for an indefinite period of time). Typically, movement from one stage to the next is occurs as the result of some kind of critical incident in the person's life; it is important to note that such an incident could incline a person to move backward or forward through these stages.

**Black Identity Development (BID) model.** Interestingly, though Cross and Jackson were building their models of black identity development at the same time (the late 1960s), they did so unaware of each other's efforts (C. Clark, personal communication, May 29, 2015). Jackson's (1976a, 2001) Black Identity Development (BID) model also has five stages: 1) naïve, 2) acceptance, 3) resistance, 4) redefinition, and, 5) internalization.

The "naïve" stage in the BID model is described as the initial point of a person's development—from birth to age three. During this period children are said to be vulnerable to their awareness of physical, and some cultural, differences between themselves and others. Though "they may not feel comfortable with people who are different, they generally do not feel fearful or hostile, inferior or superior," to them either (p. 40). The second stage, "acceptance," is

where internalization of racial dominance occurs—for example, messages about “what it means to be Black in the United States” (p. 41). Because so many of these messages are negative, and because being White has been constructed as so overwhelmingly positive in the overarching societal structure, a child in this stage may view being Black as a negative. In the third stage, “resistance,” Black people begin “to understand and recognize racism in its complex and multiple manifestations—at the individual and institutional, conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, attitudinal, behavioral, and policy levels” (p. 43). At this stage of development, individuals may resist power structures by acknowledging they exist, while deliberately manipulating around them or working in direct opposition to them (Jackson, 2001). Often times at this stage, “a person experiences anger, pain, hurt, and rage” (p. 43). In “redefinition,” the fourth stage, a Black person begins to focus on defining “himself [sic] in terms that are independent of the perceived strengths and/or weaknesses of White people and the dominant White culture” (p. 44). In this stage individuals direct their energy and attention toward interacting with other Blacks who are in this same stage, seeking primarily to “fully embrace Black culture” (p. 45). The last stage, “internalization,” is where, “Black people no longer feel a need to explain, defend, or protect their Black identity, although they may recognize that it is important to nurture this sense of self” (p. 45). As a Black individual enters this stage, it is important to her/him to consider how her/his racial identity influences and is influenced by other social identity dimensions, such as class, sexual orientation, religion, and physical ability.

### **Connection to the Study**

The main differences between the Nigrescence and BID models of Black identity development relate to the disciplines out of which each grew. The Nigrescence model is rooted more squarely in research in psychology; thus it focuses more on the individual or psychosocial



dimensions of identity development (Cross, 1991). In contrast, the BID model emerged in the field of education, by a researcher who subsequently founded the field of Social Justice Education; accordingly it focuses more on group consciousness in a sociopolitical context (a context in which issues of power, privilege, and oppression are foregrounded) (Jackson, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Additionally, the Nigrescence model is designed for use primarily with adults, whereas the BID model considers identity across the life span, beginning at birth. The study builds from Jackson's BID model because of its connections to education, sociopolitics, and children. In the next section, these connections are discussed further.

### **Children's Racial Identity**

Early research on Black children's racial identity used dolls to explore how growing up in segregated society and attending segregated schools impacted their views of superficial and/or stereotypical traits attributed to their racial group, particularly with regard to how these views influenced their learning and academic achievement (Clark & Clark, 1939). Routinely, Black children linked Black dolls to negative prompts, and White dolls to positive ones. Many different researchers have duplicated this research, in some cases several times, since it was first conducted, yielding the same results until the election of President Barack Obama (GMA, 2009; Jordan & Hernández-Reif, 2009). Shortly after President Obama came to office, the results of a duplicated study revealed that Black children were *beginning* to link Black dolls with positive prompts.

Aside from these doll tests, published studies that look specifically at the process of racial identity development among African American youth remain limited (Oyeshiku-Smith et al., 2009). However, in comparing and contrasting research using Black and White identity development models, as well as Gay identity development models, over the last 40 years, as well

as newer models looking at Indigenous/American Indian, Latina/Latino, and Asian American identity development, and identity development of people with disabilities and from non-Christian faith traditions, it is clear that group identity is more salient, and at much younger ages, for people from underrepresented groups (racial or otherwise), whereas individual identity is more central for members of dominant groups, especially White people (Brimhall-Vargas, 2011; Cass, 1979; Cross, 1971, 1991; Farzad Nawabi, 2004; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Hardiman, 1979, 1982, 1992; Helms, 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 1995; Horse, 2001; Jackson, 1976, 2001; Kim, 2001; Pliner, 1999). In fact, racial identity is not something that White people necessarily ever develop awareness of because, as previously discussed, in contrast to Black people, they do not need to do so to navigate effectively in society; the privileges associated with being a part of the dominant racial group insulate group members from and/inoculate them against the development of racial awareness (Hardiman, 1979).

More recently, school-based research on racial-ethnic identity development in children has been undertaken; a key question in this research is “how children come to understand their race and ethnicity and whether their racial-ethnic identity is at all relevant to their lives” (Oyeshiku-Smith et al., 2009, p. 145). In contrast to the referenced research focused solely on the development of racial and other single identity dimensions, these researchers contend that children’s racial-ethnic identity may develop differentially by gender, with girls showing faster overall development, but lower initial awareness of racial-ethnic identity. This suggests that when identity development is examined at the intersections of two or more dimensions of identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender), the relationship between dominant and non-dominant identities, and/or between multiple dominant or non-dominant identities may complicate how development processes unfold.

## **Connection to the Study**

As previously noted, this study used Jackson's BID model as a guide in exploring the racial identity development of Black youth and, to a lesser extent, their parents. Consistent with the greater salience of racial formation for people of color than for Whites, the discussion of race and racial identity development with the study participants was expected to be a culturally normative undertaking (even though the researcher is not Black; a factor discussed briefly in Chapter 1 and that will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4). In seeking to adapt the BID model for use with children and young adolescents, the study considered the impact that multiple identity dimensions may have, especially in school settings. Further, the BID model is used to contextualize the study as the Freedom Schools program is designed for immersion with culturally relevant curriculum and texts. Additionally, the demographics of traditional school settings are similar to that of the Freedom Schools classrooms but remain focused around Eurocentric curricula. This study particularly focused on the texts used through the culturally relevant curriculum provided by the Freedom School program in order to gauge movement in participants Black identity. In the next section, student centered pedagogy is considered as a key factor in identity affirmation and educational attainment.

### **Student Centered Pedagogy**

#### **Read-Alouds**

Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih (2012) document that educational space for students to have open-ended conversation around literature is rare in PK-12 schooling. Bohm (1996) argues that to begin to create such spaces, teachers need to assume more of a facilitator role in the classroom, and even act as a participant in the discussion of texts. To further investigate factors effecting classroom-based literature discussion, a year-long ethnographic

study of a second grade classroom teacher's dialogic practice in implementing read-alouds found that a "nonjudgmental attitude toward students' indiscretions, combined with a classroom environment built on personal and social relationships and openness, provided space and encouragement for students to share and express personal experiences" (Worthy et al., 2012, p. 319). Although this ethnographic study focused only on a single classroom, limiting generalizability of its results, it is still suggestive that when educators create affirming classroom climates, where students are encouraged to make personal connections to curriculum content through texts, significant personal, social, and academic development ensues.

Related research has demonstrated the benefits of read-aloud activities in motivating students to read and in developing their reading prowess (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Morrow, 2003; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). This prior research emphasizes the importance of student engagement with, and understanding of, literary features such as character identification, story setting, and text connections. These outcomes are most durably achieved when students undertake this learning through analytically challenging conversation of literature (Dungan, 1997; Sipe, 2000, 2002).

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culture "... is not a single variable or something that can be identified directly by a person's appearance, race/ethnicity, or national origin"; rather it is a function of people's shared histories and practices (Gutiérrez & Correa-Chávez, 2006, p. 154). Multicultural educators have long stressed that cultural experience is exceedingly important to take into account when developing curriculum and in imparting it through pedagogical practice in PK-12 classrooms; this is especially the case when teachers are primarily White, and students are increasingly culturally diverse (Horsford, 2011, 2014; Nieto & Bode, 2012). While White teachers may

recognize that their students hail from different cultural communities, they must come to understand how issues of power, privilege, and oppression differentially impact their students because of how traditional or Eurocentric curriculum is only aligned with the cultural experiences of White students and White teachers (Howard, 2006).

Not surprisingly, students of color fare more poorly in schools because, in addition to having to contend with the de facto vestiges of Jim Crow segregation, like more poorly resourced schools, they also have to navigate around issues of generally less well prepared teachers, who do not understand them culturally and who often carry deficit perspectives about their ability to learn and contribute to society (Horsford, 2011, 2014; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Yosso, 2005). The good news is that even White teachers can become excellent teachers of all children, thereby mitigating factors that negatively impact the educational success of students of color (Harry, Klingner, Hart, 2005; Howard, 2006; Horsford & Clark, 2014). One way that teachers can do this is by learning to teach through culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay and Kirkland (2003) argue, “culturally responsive teaching for ethnically diverse students should be a fundamental feature of teacher preparation and practice” (p. 181). Ladson-Billings (1995b) describes the relationship between teaching and culture as critical in arguing that teachers must be prepared to work well with culturally diverse group of students.

It is important to note that using a culture-centered approach in teaching benefits all students, not just students of color. This occurs because intentional engagement with human difference reveals varied perspectives, thereby enriching knowledge building and cultural understanding across the curriculum (Nieto & Bode, 2012). For example, teaching simply that, “Columbus discovered America” leads not only to one-dimensional thinking, but also to the promotion of White supremacy (Lui, Leondar-Wright, Brewer, Adamson, & United for a Fair

Economy, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Takaki, 2008). In contrast, asking students to consider if Columbus discovered, invaded, or bumped into the Americas, or if Columbus could have discovered a place where people already lived, encourages students to build higher order thinking skills, and about the centrality of people of color in American history and culture.

While research studies have intentionally focused on the importance of bridging student culture with curriculum and pedagogy for more than 40 years, Au and Jordan (1981) are credited with coining the phrase “culturally appropriate” in describing the pedagogical approach used by teachers in a Hawaiian school who incorporated students’ cultural backgrounds in reading instruction (p. 139). The term “culturally compatible” (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987) was also used to explain the praxis of teachers who were successful teaching Hawaiian children (p. 281). Mohatt and Erickson (1981) found that teachers who used language interaction patterns similar to those used in their students’ homes had higher student achievement outcomes; this instructional approach became known as “culturally congruent” (p. 110). However, while this research supports the contention that culturally informed pedagogical practices enhance student learning, it also implies that the goal of such practices is to assimilate students of color into White, American, and English-speaking culture as normative—the standard against which success is measured (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In seeking to push back against this implication, subsequent research prioritizing linkages between student culture and curriculum and pedagogy has used the term “culturally responsive” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181) to decenter even implicit Eurocentrism in seeking to build classroom and school cultures that are highly inclusive of all students’ home and community cultures (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Moll, et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1995b) takes this idea further arguing that:

A next step for positing effective pedagogical practices is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. I term this pedagogy, *culturally relevant pedagogy*. (p. 469)

This notion of culturally relevant pedagogy particularly supports the social and academic development of children of color, placing key emphasis on their literacy development as well.

### **Connection to the Study**

The study was undertaken in an educational space expressly designed for read-alouds and related discussion with young children. Further, the texts used for the read-alouds are likewise expressly culturally relevant for Black children. Beyond mere cultural relevance, these MO-CRiTLit texts are also intentionally sociopolitically-located. In the next section the significance of sociopolitics for engendering student critical literacy will be discussed.

### **Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy can be understood as the outcome of using a critical pedagogical approach to teach literacy—an approach that emphasizes teaching students to “read the word and the world” (Freire, 1970, 1972, 1985, 1990, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 4). Reading the word can be understood as the technical part of literally learning to read—the mechanics of reading; whereas reading the world might be understood as learning to read between the lines. Freire (1970) describes critical literacy as a process of coming to consciousness (conscientization) about issues of power, privilege, and oppression in the world, and then using that consciousness to push back against societal injustices. Freire (1990) developed a *literacy* curriculum that taught mostly rural poor people (campesinos) to read and write well enough after

40 hours of instruction such that they could pass the literacy test required for voter registration in Brazil. This curriculum was also a *critical literacy* curriculum in that in teaching people how to read, they also became conscious of the structural factors in society that created and sustained their poverty, as well as of how registering to vote and then voting for different leaders might lead to changes in those structural factors enabling them not simply to escape poverty individually, but to eradicate poverty from society through systemic change efforts.

In applying Freire's work to the teaching of children, the goal is, again, to teach reading and writing while also teaching self-efficacy and agency; children learn to read and write while also learning to resist the coercive effects of uncritical literacy among other things (e.g., standardized instruction, especially of language) (Comber, Thompson & Wells, 2001; Janks, 2000; Luke, 2000). Because critical literacy is rooted in the struggle (a problem) of historically marginalized people to become educated, it calls teachers to teach reading and writing through "problem-posing;" to consider issues of culturally relevant concern for students as problems in search of solutions, rather than simply static conditions of existence from which there is no relief (Freire, 1970, 1990, p. 27). Through problem-posing the relationship between hegemony, power, and (access to) literacy are called into question, thus revealed as mutable rather than fixed (Clark, 1990; Freire, 1970; Freire, 1973). Key elements of a critical literacy curriculum include sociopolitical analysis, cultural critique (especially of dominant culture and its manifestations), and action to bring about social change/justice. These elements are important to consider when seeking to transition from literacy instruction to critical literacy instruction, which requires rethinking traditional (biased) assumptions teachers make about learners, curriculum, power, and equity (Rogers, 2014). Further, these elements are not only important for teachers to consider,



but also students as they learn, through critical literacy instruction, to recognize and question power structures in classrooms, schools, and society at large.

### **Critical Literacy for Students**

According to Wiseman (2012), “classroom conversations about literature that occur in interactive read-alouds influence and affect children’s development of comprehension strategies, as well as their self perceptions and identities as readers” (p. 273). Wiseman summarizes the relationship between reading achievement and race as complex. One dimension of this complexity can be attributed to the fact that *most* teachers’ perceptions of African American students’ ability to perform, and actual performance, is negative; this leads to low teacher expectations even in the face of performance evidence to the contrary of these expectations (Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012). An ethnographic case study of a kindergarten-age African American male student identified by his teacher as an unmotivated struggling reader serves to illustrate this point (Wiseman, 2012). The teacher implemented interactive read-alouds to promote the student’s literary development and found that, when she used books that happened to align with this student’s developmental level, interests, and emotional needs, his motivation to read and ensuing literacy development improved (even in the face of her low expectations). While the student was a struggling reader, his positive response to, and engagement with, specific literature through participation in interactive read-alouds still improved his literacy skills. This study’s focus on interactive read-alouds with Black children add to the research examining the intersections of racial identity and literacy development.

When teachers hold high expectations and strive to make curriculum not only personally relevant, but culturally relevant for students, students are even more motivated to continue learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Nieto & Bode, 2012). In order for teachers to

accomplish this end, they need to value their students as individuals, understand the importance of their cultural backgrounds, then blend this value and understanding into the development of curriculum, for example integrating literature that resonates with their students. When teachers build curriculum on the personal *and* cultural experiences that students bring to the classroom, the ways that children respond to learning activities is positively influenced (Compton Lilly, 2004; Dyson, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Vasquez, 2003, 2004). As previously discussed, the curriculum committee at the Freedom School at which the study took place, has given meticulous attention to text selection in developing the IRC lessons. This is because the IRC is literature driven, thus, in keeping with a critically literate instructional approach, these texts must be personally and culturally relevant to the schools' students (relatable to their lived experiences) (Horsford, 2011, 2014). Additionally, IRC lessons use varied instructional strategies, especially dialogic ones that foreground problem-posing. While the IRC is, in fact, a reading curriculum, its focus is on motivating children to read, not on teaching students the mechanics of reading and/or how to read (Clayton-Robinson & Sally, 2001). While critical literacy prioritizes both mechanics and motivation, it locates the teaching of reading mechanics inside the cultivation of motivation to read, suggesting that motivation is more important (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In a qualitative case study, Kuo's (2009) descriptive data revealed that implementation of critical literacy in a college-based English conversation class in Taiwan was effective when social issue picture books were read aloud and then discussed by students in dialogue teams. Subsequent reflective writing papers documented students' ability to cull meaningful themes from the books in demonstrating improved literacy skills. In encouraging students (as readers) to not only make text-centered connections and to respond only to literature, but also to respond to

social issues, students built both literacy and critical literacy. Kuo (2009) concludes that teachers must consider their students, pedagogical practice, and teaching context to bring about critical literacy. These findings reveal the significance of implementation in critical literacy praxis. Teachers who employ pedagogical practices in any content area that encourage their students to relate their own experiences to the experiences of others, and to reflect, plan, and act in ways that can change—through social action—their own and others’ lives for the better, are more apt to perform better socially and academically (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Nieto, 2010a, 2010b). In contrast, pedagogical practices that do not enable students to use their own reality as a basis for literacy development are not only not critical literacy based, they are less effective in bring about student language learning and understanding of the sociocultural situations in which people use language (Kuo, 2009). In using social issue picture books to bring about student critical literacy through critical pedagogical practices, Kuo’s findings reveal that how students relate to literature and can be influenced by their relationship with literature to create change. The study built on Kuo’s work in essential ways. It applied it to an elementary school-aged group of Black students in the United States. It used social issue picture books related to a single theme, the Civil Rights Movement, that is relevant to, meaningful for, and significant in the students’ lives; these books were integrated into a comprehensive curriculum that was also related to the theme, and this curriculum was implemented in a school setting that prioritized the theme. Finally, the study built on Kuo’s work in prioritizing the goal of critical literacy in emphasizing the use of critical pedagogy by classroom teachers.

Shannon (2002) describes how daily literacy practices, including those related to media, engage people in various actions; he argues that critical literacy practices can emerge and do the same. In reflecting on how his family participates in literacy projects at home, school, and on the

street, Shannon explores how critical literacy becomes part of their everyday lives. For example, a school project became an opportunity for us “to struggle against the imposition of standardization through standards and high stakes testing” (p. 415). In the home, “we attempt to escape the technologies of a society of control that invite us to consume constantly, to rationalize our private lives, to prepare for work and to avoid engagement in civic life” (p. 415). And, on the street we “seek the power to represent ourselves to others in order to participate with them to make history and culture” (p. 415). Through detailed discussion of these and other projects Shannon illustrates to pre- and in-service teachers how critical literacy might be used in schools, including by inviting students to create their own literacy projects and then teach others about them to gain a sense of personal power. Through development of a repertoire of critical pedagogical practices that support the development of critical literacy, teachers become critically literate in the process of teaching students to become so (Freire, 1990; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Howard, 2006; Palos, 2011; Shannon, 2002). While Shannon uses his family’s activities to illustrate the power of critical literacy practice in everyday life, this study focused on how interactions with MO-CRiTLit texts influenced elementary-aged children of color to develop critical literacy practices related to personal and social change.

### **Critical Literacy for Teachers**

Rogers (2014) explored the ways in which 11 teachers, enrolled in a master’s program course, participated in a literacy lab to collaboratively develop strategies for teaching literacy and for implementing critical literacy in their classrooms. Using coaching practices (Allen, 2006; Dozier, 2006) and critical frameworks (Bomer & Bomer, 2003; Heffernan, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Vasquez, 2003) the researcher, who was also the course instructor, infused the entire semester-long course with different critically framed strategies. The teacher participants in

the course analyzed books, went on a “print walk” (looking out for textual materials) of a neighborhood, explored various multicultural children’s literature trade books, and designed literacy instruction all from a critical literacy perspective. Findings of the study demonstrated that, with initial support from teacher educators, teachers could rethink traditional assumptions about literacy, literacy learning, and the role of literacy in the lives of students and their families and design critical literacy practices (Rogers, 2014). However, research reveals that even one semester-long course does not provide ample enough support for teachers (and students) to fully transition from a traditional to a critical literacy paradigm; rather, perseverance through multiple such curricular exposures is necessary (Bomer & Bomer, 2003; Heffernan, 2004; Horsford & Clark, 2014; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Vasquez, 2003). This is because teachers will experience discomfort and uncertainty as they confront myriad sociopolitical realities that critically literate education uncovers; Nieto documents a pre-service teacher’s response in this regard as, “once you know you can never not know again” (Nieto, 1996, p. 112). While it is possible for “new knowers” to subsequently ignore the dynamic tensions that critical literacy brings out, in leaning into the tensions (risk taking) to extend student learning teachers will eventually build the comfort and skill necessary to teach from a comprehensive critical literacy framework that seeks to empower students to change their lives and the world (Cammarota, 2007; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Fishkin, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Nieto 2010b). Teachers’ *and* students’ critical literacy, then, emerges from critical pedagogical praxis, inclusive of culturally relevant such practices like collaboration, perseverance, and risk-taking (Rogers, 2014). Each of these components is vital in the success of literacy development. This study extended this success in using critical multicultural children’s literature to empower children and their families to lean into knowing and then to act on that knowing to improve immediate and

future circumstances for themselves and others, especially through on-going educational attainment.

Scripted curriculum rarely interests children, especially children of color who cannot see themselves in it nor find any real life connection to it; this leads to them lacking motivation to learn from this curriculum (Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004). But when children read books that are selected based on their interests and that are developmentally appropriate, there is a greater chance that they will build motivation to read and continue to develop their literacy skills. Issues of race, class, and language (among other social justice concerns) have been, and continue to be, prevalent in the lives of students of color in U.S. schools (Horsford, 2011, 2014; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Palos, 2011). As a result, progressive teacher educators have developed repertoires of practice to support pre-service teachers' engagement in critical literacy pedagogical practices in teaching about social justice concerns (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Adams, Blumenfeld, Casteñeda, Hackman, Peters, & Zúñiga, 2010; Jewett & Smith, 2003; Milner, 2010). Similar to Rogers' (2014) study, Jewett & Smith (2003) investigated ten K-12 educators' use of social justice-themed children's literature to move their students from making personal to critical connections with the stories; data sources included a review of the children's literature, teacher journals, and classroom observations of the students' responses to the texts. The educators' journals revealed that in learning about critical literacy approaches and in using social justice-themed books they began to question dominant societal systems, including in education. While the educators' remained somewhat tense about introducing socially relevant topics in elementary classrooms (and unsure how to go about doing so), they did also express a beginning understanding of how complex themes in texts geared for students of all ages could be used in classroom settings to start the critical conversations. Further, once these conversations

were started it was easier for “teachers and their students to move away from passive reading and become more actively engaged in texts that support critical conversations and social action” (Jewett & Smith, 2003, p. 73). Clearly, the main barrier to the proliferation of critical literacy approaches among teachers is not that these approaches do work, but that teachers do not know how to use them because teacher education programs do not provide them any or ample support to do so (Howard, 2006). Providing pre- and in-service teachers with grounding in critical literacy instruction is essential to its success as a pedagogical outcome; likewise, teachers must be provided the opportunity/space to try new things in their classrooms instead of being tethered to largely meaningless and otherwise ineffective curriculum scripts (Giroux, 2010). This study took place in a summer learning program classroom in which there was significant freedom for teachers and students to explore new pedagogies, develop skill and comfort for dialogue on difficult issues, and examine social problems, all in the context of interaction with texts chosen to encourage students’ motivation to read. Additionally, Jackson (2009) describes how SLIs are prepared to teach language arts in culturally responsive ways. While there was also a clearly established curriculum in this program, teachers and students had flexibility on how they engaged and moved through it. The program recognized both the need for a critical literacy approach, but also how overwhelming a task it would be for teachers to have to build such an approach entirely on their own. Thus, the IRC represents a middle ground between approach and script (though much closer to approach than script) in seeking to support teacher and student creativity, while also providing appropriate scaffolding for teaching and learning through critical pedagogies directed at bringing about critical literacy. This process and work prepares the SLIs to develop a sociopolitical consciousness (Jackson, 2011).

Institutional factors also impact the development and implementation of a critical literacy approach. As previously noted, such an approach carries risk—some greater than others. Beck (2005) discusses political risks in describing an incident that took place while she was teaching in an all-male maximum-security detention facility using a critical literacy approach. Consistent with this approach, Beck asked her students how they felt about stories she had them read, what points of view they saw represented in the stories, and how else they thought the stories could have been written (e.g., she used these questions to get her students to relate to the text). While foregrounding feelings can lead to emotional tensions, Beck’s intent was to use students’ feelings to deepen the discussion of the texts into dialogue inside of which the students could come to make meaning of the texts and use that meaning to interact in the world (Freire, 1990). A confrontation between two students who had two different points of view on the text emerged which led Beck (2005) to question, “if it was appropriate to teach critical literacy in a setting where the student voices are deliberately discouraged and silenced, such as penal institutions” (p. 393). According to Freire (1970) literacy is a social practice where “the literacy process must include the relationships of men [sic] with their world” (p. 212). If the world of Beck’s students was, in part, their detention facility, working with them to develop critical awareness of that world through literacy instruction was appropriate and risky. However, critical literacy also seeks to empower individuals to better their world; options for Beck’s students to do this was much more limited. But even when students’ voices are unrestricted, Shor (1999) suggests that they are still not created equal because, for example, some students are more articulate than others, especially when discussing social justice topics. Accordingly, teachers must create classroom climates in which all students feel empowered to speak and are given the space by other students to do so. Here again, teachers need to be supported in learning how to create such spaces. As



previously noted, this study took place in an educational setting built around the recognition that students' educational development and age are not aligned with traditional school grades.

Student induction into the setting, described previously, was designed to ameliorate the anxiety that any student may have about, for example, being in a classroom with younger students who are more literate, or with older students who are less so. Further, teachers were encouraged to adapt the IRC curriculum in ways that amplified the classroom as a safe and otherwise affirming place for all students to achieve program goals, inclusive of full participation in student-centered dialogue about contemporary social issues that affect their lives.

### **Addressing the Gap**

Very little research has been conducted on CDF Freedom Schools or on racial identity development in Black children, especially in schools. While the current research on student centered pedagogy, including on read-alouds and culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as on critical literacy is robust, it also reveals that teacher education programs do not adequately prepare teachers to use student-centered pedagogy to bring about student critical literacy, despite clear evidence that both are effective in closing the persistent racial achievement gap in PK-12 education across the nation. To create school and classroom environments in which children are racially affirmed, pre-service teachers need to be taught, through student centered pedagogy, to become critically literate so that they can, in turn, do the same with and for their PK-12 students. In particular, using texts that positively reflect students' cultural identity can encourage their broader and deeper engagement with curriculum and schooling.

This study specifically explored how incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the context of a daily critically-inclined, read-aloud literacy curriculum, serving predominantly Black children, in a uncommon classroom setting, could positively influence how these

children's racial identity developed. Further, in the context of the United States a whole, where being Black is not always viewed in a positive way, especially by authority figures, including classroom teachers, this study examined how the provision of *movement*-oriented youth literature could inspire Black children to see themselves not only as positive members of classroom communities, but as agents of social change in local and global society.

### **Conclusion**

As noted by Erikson (1968), students' healthy identity development from childhood into adolescence is vital to their immediate educational success and future successes in society. Societal dynamics, past and present, call educators to consider the experiences that all children, but specifically children of color, typically endure in negotiating their identity development (Peck, Brodish, Malanchuk, Banerjee, & Eccles, 2014). Being Black in America and Black in the classroom, even today, more than 50 years after the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, are still fraught with more risk than reward no matter how a Black child negotiates these spaces (Alexander, 2012).

Providing pre- and in-service teachers with various bodies of instructional strategies divorced from the sociopolitical realities of their students lives, does little to close the racial achievement gap and may actually worsen the self concept of Black students forced to align their identities with White identity norms to try and succeed (Berlack, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The need for comprehensive culturally relevant and critically literate teacher education and PK-12 curriculum, inclusive of pedagogical strategies that encourage critical conversations connecting classroom learning with real world happenings, is crucial for all students healthy identity development, especially those students who have been and continue to be marginalized by the proliferation of Eurocentrism in schools (Gay & Kirkland,

2003; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Oyeshiku-Smith et al., 2009). However, this kind of education is not something that can simply be taught, it has to be grounded in who we *are* as teacher educators and teachers; likely this kind of education can not just be “learned,” it has to be integrated with who we are as students (Gutiérrez & Correa-Chávez, 2006; Howard, 2003; Mosley, 2010). As illustrated by the Freedom Schools movement, when this kind of education takes place, both epic and local scale social change occurs—change that benefits individuals, underrepresented groups, and society as a whole. Starting small, with interactive read-alouds designed to influence not only the ways, for example, in which children learn literary concepts like comprehension and fluency, but also how they develop their racial self-perceptions and identities, can change the world.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 detailed the rationale for the study. Chapter 2 provided a review of the research-based literature related to the history of the Freedom Schools Movement, Black Identity Development (BID), Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Literacy. Additionally, Chapter 2 identified the gaps in this literature that supported the need for, and importance of the study, designed to fill those gaps. This chapter outlines the methodological approach the study employed.

### **Restatement of the Purpose**

The general purpose of this study was to document and analyze how students respond to the “read-aloud” experiences in classrooms. These experiences were examined through the lens of Freire’s (1970) theory of critical pedagogy. In particular, this study examined how “movement-oriented” Civil Rights-themed children’s literature (MO-CRiTLit) influenced the racial identity development of elementary-aged Black children (Menkart, Murray, & View, 2004). Using the Black Identity Development (BID) model as analytical framework (Jackson, 1976), this research also examined the ways that Black racial identity developed in these children more broadly.

### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

The primary question that guided this study was: *How does “movement-oriented” Civil Rights-themed literature (MO-CRiTLit) influence the racial identity development of Black elementary aged children?* Additionally, four ancillary research questions were considered: 1) *How do children use literature to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with classmates, teachers, and/or characters in the text?* 2) *In what ways does culture relate to children’s understandings about themselves and about others?* 3) *What types of cross cultural*

*understandings can be learned through children's literature? And, 4) How are critical pedagogy and multicultural literature used in conjunction to provide students a foundation to make connections, disconnections, and dialogue about topics with other students their age?* Prior to implementation, it was considered possible that additional questions might emerge during the study data collection process. However, none did.

### **Approach to the Study**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the existing research on which this study was based and extended, was qualitative in nature. The use of qualitative methods allows researchers to examine the lived experiences of research participants, often using their own words. In particular, the use of Case Study Method (Yin, 2009) enables exploration of participant experiences organized as single, discrete cases and/or through cross comparison of multiple cases (Merriam, 1998). For this study, I chose to employ a qualitative multiple case study to explore how MO-CRiTLit influenced racial identity development in Black elementary aged children in the context of a summer literacy program. This methodological approach enabled: 1) documentation of the experiences of young Black children as they maneuvered their way through a variety of learning experiences; and, 2) identification of durable culturally relevant and otherwise culturally responsive pedagogical practices that teachers can employ and teacher educators can promote to improve Black elementary aged children's personal engagement with books used in read-aloud instruction.

More specifically, I chose to employ multiple case study design in undertaking the study because it allowed me to engage each participant through the development of their case to examine her/him as an individual and her/his case independently, and then to cross-examine all the individuals/cases in order to identify common and divergent themes. This is consistent with

the use of case study methodology in the field of education and other disciplines, including psychology, medicine, law, and political sciences (Creswell, 2013). Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) argue that the origins of modern case study research as we use it in education today, first emerged in anthropology and sociology and then were adapted to research in educational contexts. Merriam (1998) and Yin (2009) both document the wide use of case study in educational research to effectively examine real-life experiences in contemporary settings (Yin, 2009). Finally, I chose to use a qualitative multiple case study approach to avail myself of the many data collection methods this approach enables, including face-to-face (classroom) observations, video recording, and interviewing (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

### **Methodology: The Multiple Case Study Model**

In this section I detail the methodology employed for the study in a step-by-step fashion. This detail includes discussion of the research setting, recruitment of participants, the study timeline, and data collection and data analysis processes.

#### **Setting**

The study took place in a suburban elementary school setting in a metropolitan area of the Southern United States, the site of a free summer literacy program developed and supported by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). CDF's national summer literacy program is implemented through individual 501©(3) non-profit organizations who opt to participate in it in any given year. CDF's program is designed to promote culturally responsive pedagogy in the provision of culturally relevant curriculum. Freedom Schools also promote culturally embedded curricular content and instructional practices. Freedom Schools are similar to traditional schools in that there is a teacher and students. However, these roles are identified as Servant Leader Intern and Scholars.

**Servant Leader Intern.** For this study, the teacher is referred to as a servant leader intern (SLI) The design of the Freedom Schools program is to have this position filled by college aged youth between the ages of 19 – 30 years, who have completed at least one year of college and have plans to complete a college degree, have a commitment to children’s advocacy, exhibit a positive attitude and behavior, have a commitment to servant leadership, are registered voters, and are enthusiastic about the Freedom Schools Movement. There are various responsibilities of the SLI, including attending a weeklong training provided by the Children’s Defense Fund where they are trained on the use of the Freedom Schools model. During this training, they receive interactive and detailed instruction on the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC), classroom management, teambuilding, and effective communication. In addition, upon returning to their respective sites, they are responsible for the set up of their classrooms, leading *Harambee* daily, planning, preparing and delivering the IRC and afternoon activities, attending and supervising field trips, and collaborating with each other and all other staff members to ensure a supportive and structured environment exists school-wide for all the children entrusted to their care.

**Scholar.** A student in the setting of a Freedom Schools program is identified as a scholar. This term is used to affirm, as a student, each and every child enrolled in the program. Scholars are between 5 – 18 years old, and have completed and/or were recently enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. CDF has a mission to serve marginalized populations and children of color, thus a majority of the scholars enrolled in the program are children from marginalized communities. The term scholar is also used to affirm the children’s being, by encouraging them to strive for excellence especially through knowledge-building.

## **Participants and Rationale for Participant Sample**

For this study, convenience and purposeful sampling were used to identify and recruit child and parent participants. Convenience sampling was used to gain access to participants from a specific geographical area (Merriam, 1998). Working with the specific Freedoms Schools site director for the region mentioned above, I set a date, during the first week of its summer program, to meet with all of the parents whose children were participating in the program this year (2015). This meeting took place during the program's regular weekly parent meeting (at which parental attendance is required as a condition of their child's participation in the program). In this meeting, I described the study and my role as researcher to the parents. Specifically, I shared my personal, professional and academic background, my connection to the program and site, the purpose of the study, the study selection criteria, and then answered any questions they had. Parents who met the study selection criteria (see also the discussion of purposeful sampling, below) *and* who expressed interest in participating were taken through the informed consent process for themselves, then asked to give consent for the children; I explained that their children would still have to give their own assent to participate. If the child was present at the time of parent consent, which was often the case, the child was able to assent at that time. If the child was not present at the time of consent, the child was given the opportunity to assent during the first week of programming. In this study, purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to identify participants from a specific racial/ethnic group; in this study that group was Black elementary aged children and their parent(s). Further, purposeful sampling would have also been used to identify the target number (8-10) of research participants for the study from a potentially larger group of participants who met the study criteria and agreed to participate. In this regard, purposeful sampling would have helped me to identify participants whose experiences were most closely



aligned with the research focus, and thus were likely to yield the most *information-rich* cases relative to that focus (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). For example, if through purposeful sampling twenty elementary-aged Black children in grades three through five, between the ages of eight and twelve, were identified, the 8-10 chosen to participate might have excluded those who grew up on military bases where Black racial identity development would be influenced in ways that are substantially outside the normative experience of most Black Americans.

Upon gaining consent/assent from all interested participants I determined that I could accept all of them because the number of interested participants was fewer than ten (eight). I also determined that I did not need to recruit additional participants because I had at least seven. Had I not secured enough participants at the initial weekly parent meeting described above, I would have contacted, via phone, additional parents who met the selection criteria, set up one-on-one meetings with each to discuss the study further, and, hopefully, secured the additional participants necessary to move forward with the study.

Once identifying eight parents committed to participate in the study, their children were placed into a classroom together (the site director created one class with only the consented/assented participants in it). Because all Freedom Schools classes are designed to have roughly the same number (8-10) students in them, and because the site director determines the class and student configurations, only these children, their parents, and their teacher knew about their consent for participation in the study. By grouping the child participants into a discrete class, their privacy, and confidentiality was easier to maintain; while everyone in the class knew that everyone else in the class was a participant in the study, each was de-identified through the use of pseudonyms, chosen by each participant for their family (last name)/themselves (first name), and, further through the use of pseudonyms chosen by me (for institutions, places, geographic

landmarks, temporal references, specific lingo/jargon, and other potentially revealing data). While this did not guarantee participant confidentiality, it did facilitate it. However, because all of the program parents knew the study was being conducted (from the initial information session with them about it), and because this study was with young children who might have unintentionally shared with other program students about their participation in the study (they did not), confidentiality was closely safeguarded. For example, if a parent and/or student who had not initially opted into the study had asked to participate in it later (none did), I, as the researcher, would have thanked them for their interest in participating and then informed them that the study participants had already been selected and that, due to the study time frame, I would not be able to include additional participants. I would have, however, let them know that I may conduct additional research in the future research and that if I did, I would reach out to them regarding their participation at that time.

Seven of the eight participants who initially agreed to participate in the study, completed the study. The eighth participant did not complete the study due to personal reasons and withdrawal from the program. These seven participants were elementary-aged Black children in grades three through five, between the ages of eight and twelve, and their parent(s). Thus the study, as a multiple case study, was comprised of seven cases. As mentioned previously, the case unit was defined to include the child and her/his parent(s).

The child participants of this study were considered Level 2 scholars in the Freedom Schools program. This particular group was selected due to their familiarity with school, thus the greater likelihood that they would (they did) have a longer attention span (Rice & Dolgin, 2005), greater ability to articulate their experiences with literature, and more time in traditional schooling from which they could make comparisons to their Freedom Schools' experience. Each

of these participant attributes assisted me in building rich cases. The terms parent participant, child participant, and case are used a little differently in this study than might typically be the case, thus defining them more intentionally here is important.

**Parent participant.** For the study, a parent was considered a legal guardian who is able to provide consent for themselves and for their child. This means over the age of 18, considered mentally stable, and not currently under adjudication. While some individuals under the age of 18 may be parents, as minors themselves, they might not easily be able to provide consent to participate in this study; for that reason this study only used parents who were able to provide consent as adults. The parent did not need to self identify as Black because for this study because I was only exploring the racial identity development of the child. All parent(s) participants signed an informed consent/parent consent form in order to participate.

**Child participant.** A child in this study was considered an individual between the ages of 8-12 years old, who was enrolled in grades 3-5 during the most recent academic school year (2014-2015), who self identified as Black during the assenting process (or an obviously related synonym, i.e., African American, Black American). The child and her/his parent(s) both had to agree to participate in the study. If a child did not assent to participate, even if their parent(s) provided consent for them to do so, they would have been deemed not qualified to participate in the study (this did not occur in this study). Likewise, if a child assented to participant, but her/his parents did not give consent for them to participate and/or did not agree to participate in the parent components of the study themselves, they would not have been included in this study (again, this did not occur). Children who were not between the ages of 8 and 12 and were not enrolled in grades 3 through 5 in the most recent academic year were not allowed to participate. Children who did not self identify as Black, were not allowed to participate in this study.

**Case.** For this study, a case was defined to include one child and at least one of her/his legally defined parents. Accordingly, in this study the term “case” referred to this combination of participants who made up the seven individual cases in this multiple case study.

A caveat in my original case definition emerged as I set out to report the findings herein. As just reiterated, I originally defined my case unit as the child participant and her/his parent(s). Conceptually, this is still how I am defining my case unit. However, in the process of presenting findings herein, when I included data collected through the parent interviews, the study focus on the participants’ Black identity development relative to their engagement with MO-CRiTLit, started to get a bit lost. Accordingly, I have moved the parent narrative portion of my cases into an appendix (see Appendix F). While I could simply have decided to redefine my case unit as solely the child participant, and saved the parent interview data for another study, this would have actually made my analysis of the child participants’ Black identity development more difficult because, absent the information I gleaned about each child from the parent, I would have had a much less robust picture/understanding of the child from which to reliably discern her/his racial identity and related development during this study.

### **Timeline and Data Collection Sources**

For this study, a timeline and data collection process was followed to assure that ample amounts of data were collected to explore the research questions. Each of these components were necessary in planning and executing the research.

**Timeline.** The following timeline served as the research calendar. The purpose of the timeline was to guide the study from beginning to end. While the dates listed were tentative, they changed very little in implementation given the need to align the study with summer programming dates of the study site.

04.01.2015 – 05.01.2015	Completed IRB, developed interview protocols for parent interview and student initial interviews, and undertook data collection and organizational planning.
06.18.2015 – 07.29.2015	Programming dates for Freedom Schools Summer Literacy Program.
06.22.2015 – 07.29.2015	Collected data at Manor Elementary School in Jamestown, Southern State (again, school and city names are pseudonyms). Video/audio recording of classroom read-alouds.
06.23.2015 – 06.26.2015	Conducted parent interviews and student initial interviews.
06.27.2015 – 07.27.2015	Conducted preliminary analysis of parent and student initial interview data, as well as audio/video recording data to develop student follow up interview questions.
07.27.2015 – 07.28.2015	Conducted student follow up interview.
08.01.2015 – 11.01.2015	Analyzed, organized, and wrote up data by case themes, results, and implications.

**Data collection sources.** Various data sources were used for the study. One data source was the parent interview. For children with two participating parents, interviews were conducted with both parents together. Gaining the perspective of both parents together reduced the potential for confusion (differences in opinion between the parents regarding the child were more easily reconciled with both parents being interviewed at the same time). Additional data sources included student initial and follow up interviews, classroom observation field notes, and video/audio recordings of the interactive read-aloud stories during delivery of the program curriculum. Parent interviews were conducted without the students (children) present; likewise

student interviews were conducted without the parent(s) present. No group interviews (of all the parents, of all the students) were conducted because the purpose of the study was to identify how each individual child was influenced by her/his interaction with the MO-CRiTlit.

Table 1 illustrates the research questions aligned with the corresponding data source(s), data source(s) time and administration, participant(s), and analysis tool(s).

Table 1 Data Collection Information

Research Question	Data	Timeline	Participants	Analysis
How does “movement-oriented” Civil Rights-themed children’s literature influence the racial identity development of Black elementary aged children?	Student initial and follow up interviews; Videotape Audiotape of interactive read-alouds; Observation	Week 2 - 6 June 18 – July 27 1 interview; 1 with each child participant during week 2 of programming June 22 – June 26 1 interview; one with each child participant during week 6 of programming July 27 – July 28	7 child participants	Hand coded interviews of children Identified patterns Grouped patterns Created word table Applied critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Black identity lenses
How do children use literature to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with classmates, teachers, and/or characters in the text?	Videotape /Audiotape of interactive read-alouds; Observation; Student follow up interviews	Week 2 - 5 June 27 – July 27 1 interview; one with each child participant during week 6 of programming July 27 – July 28	7 child participants	Hand coded Observations and interviews. Grouped patterns Applied critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Black identity lenses
In what ways does culture relate to children’s understandings about themselves and others?	Parent & student interviews	Week 2 June 22 – June 26 2 interviews; one with each parent(s) participant, and one with each child participant	7 child participants and their parent(s) participants	Hand coded interviews of parent(s) and children Identified Patterns Applied critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Black identity lenses.
What types of cross cultural understandings can be learned through children’s literature?	Videotape /Audiotape of interactive read-alouds; Observation	Week 2 – 5 June 27 – July 27	7 child participants	Hand coded—video recordings of interactive read-alouds Identified Patterns Applied critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Black identity lenses.
How are critical pedagogy and multicultural literature used in conjunction to provide students a foundation to make connections, address disconnections, and dialogue about topics with other students their age	Videotape /Audiotape of interactive read-alouds; Observation	Week 2 – 5 June 27 – July 27	7 child participants	Hand coded video recordings. Identified Patterns Applied critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and Black identity lenses.

***Parent interviews.*** Prior to interviewing the student case study participants, I conducted interviews with their parent(s). Interviews with the parents focused on collection of general demographic information about the student (child), the parent(s), and the family, paying specific attention to racial/ethnic identity considerations (see Appendix A); data collected in these interviews led to the development of additional student interview questions (beyond those already delineated in the student initial interview question protocol (see Appendix B); the student follow up interview question protocol was developed after the data was collected from both the parent and student initial interviews, as well as after the majority of the video/audio recording/observational data was collected. The purpose of the parent(s) interviews was to gain an understanding of the parent(s)' view of their child's (the student's) racial identity development, including a sense of the parent(s)'s influence on their child's racial identity development in the home environment. Through these interviews I also gained additional general information about the child (student) from the parent(s)'s perspective. All parent interview questions are grouped and aligned with the conceptual framework in Appendix A. As noted above in the timeline, parent interviews were conducted during week one (mid June 2015) of the summer literacy program. All interviews took place in a private location at the summer program site, during the programming hours or during another time that was more convenient for the parent(s). All interviews were audio recorded.

***Initial and follow up interviews with students.*** The initial interviews with the students focused on collection of data related to their racial identity development and their sense of connection to children's literature in general, as well as to the various topics embedded in the MO-CRiTlit specifically used in this study. All initial student interview questions are grouped and aligned with the conceptual framework in Appendix B. Appendix C contains the follow up



interview questions; these questions relate to the participants' Freedom Schools experiences and their Black identity development.

As delineated in Chapter 1, for the purpose of this study multicultural literature described any text *used as literature* that focuses on historically underrepresented people of color and their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement in American history (Menkart, Murray, & View, 2004). Interchangeably, I call this body of literature MO-CRiTLit. Recently (in the last 10 years) there has been an increase in the availability of multicultural children's literature that meets the definition of Civil Rights-oriented multicultural literature, providing teachers with a pool of such literature from which to select for use in classrooms. As previously noted, it is vital that teachers be mindful in the selection of multicultural children's literature, even that that appears to be, or is billed as being, Civil Rights-oriented multicultural children's literature, to assure that its content is factually and otherwise accurate, and does not promote stereotypes or superficial representations of historically underrepresented people of color (Kohl, 1993). The texts selected for this study provided true, authentic, and otherwise rich depictions of historically underrepresented people of color primarily during the historical period of the Civil Rights Movement. Eleven such texts were introduced during the IRC and used during the data collection process of this study. Table 2 contains the titles of the texts and author names.

Table 2 Interactive Read-Aloud Texts

Title	Author
<i>This is the Rope</i>	Woodson, 2013
<i>The Patchwork Quilt</i>	Flournoy, 1985
<i>Grandma's Gift</i>	Velasquez, 2010
<i>Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman</i>	Grimes, 2002
<i>Child of the Civil Rights Movement</i>	Shelton, 2013
<i>Freedom Summer</i>	Wiles, 2001
<i>A Gift from Papa Diego</i>	Sáenz, 1998
<i>Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez &amp; Her Family's Fight for Desegregation</i>	Velasquez, 2014
<i>Giant Steps to Change the World</i>	Lee & Lee, 2011
<i>Tutankhamen's Gift</i>	Sabuda, 1994
<i>Cowboys: Reflections of a Black Cowboy</i>	Miller, 2004

Students' initial and follow up interviews comprised the largest portion of the data of each case. As noted above, initial interview questions were organized into a protocol (again, see Appendix B), and a follow up interview protocol was created following the parent(s) interview, student initial interview, and the majority of video/audio recording/observation for use during the follow up interview with the students (see Appendix C).

Again, as noted above in the timeline, the student initial interviews were conducted during week one (mid June 2015) and the student follow up interviews were conducted during week five (late July 2015) of the summer literacy program. All interviews took place in a private interview location on site and were audio recorded.

***Video and audio recording of interactive read-aloud.*** Classroom observation and video/audio recording data collection focused on the capturing the students' experiences during the "read-alouds" of the eleven MO-CRiTLit texts. These texts were integrated into the already-established daily reading curriculum in the summer program classroom (i.e., instead of introduced uniquely for study purposes). The multicultural texts were selected for the IRC using

the criteria, discussed previously, established by Menkart, Murray, and View (2004) and Kohl (1993) to distinguish MO-CRiTLit texts from simply Civil Rights-themed children's literature texts or various other multicultural-themed children's literature texts. The read-alouds of these texts were video and audio recorded for further analysis (beyond the observation period). These read-alouds/recordings took place during the second, third, fourth, and fifth weeks of the summer literacy program. The classroom/curricular context of the read-alouds was a *reading circle*, where all the students could view the text and related illustrations and, thus, more fully participate in the discussions of them, facilitated by the teacher or SLI. The lesson plans built around each text were designed to encourage students to dialogue about the storyline and, more generally, to make personal connections with it.

To avoid as much student distraction as possible that might have arisen with the obvious positioning of the electronic devices in the classroom, the SLI and I discussed with the students the video and audio recording that was taking place in the classroom, the specific devices being used, and the associated expectations for their behavior (to act, as much as possible, as they would absent the presence of these devices which, more or less, they did). As the researcher, I was responsible for setting up all video and audio recording devices, and ensuring they worked correctly and were placed in the classroom so that all student participants were visible/audible all the time. The recordings were shown to/played for the students during their follow up interviews to help me clarify interview questions for a student, to help a student recall or explain an action/interaction that occurred during the read-aloud that she/his was asked about during the interview, and/or to enable a student to illustrate to me/help me gain better understanding of classroom experiences that appeared, in the recordings, to be influencing her/his verbal or non-verbal communication. This is an adapted form of retrospective video analysis (Baranek, 1999).

This form of analysis is often used to document child development and has proven to be beneficial in the building intentional developmental practices into educational processes.

***Focused classroom observations.*** As noted above, in addition to the video/audio recording of the interactive read-alouds, I also conducted focused classroom observations, documented in field notes, of students' classroom interactions. Based on the existing body of research on classroom observation, I focused these observations on key elements likely to be at play in these interactions (Dugan, 1997; Fisher, et al., 2004). These elements included: the physical setting (the classroom, the school), the study participants (the students), interactions among students and between the students and the teacher, and the nature of literary conversations that occurred between and among them. From the initial observation, a code sheet, based on these key elements, was developed to record specific interactions (e.g., behaviors, conversations, etc.) between students; each subsequent observation was based on the prior observation's code sheet, but additional codes were added to the sheet for any new elements that emerged. As the original key elements for classroom observation were not based specifically on research with Black elementary aged children, it was possible that the focus of these observations might change in the collection of this data for this study; they did not. Had they, I would have added additional key elements that emerged in this research to my code sheets.

In my role as the observer during the read-alouds, it was important for me to note how my presence affected the scene of the observation. While my intention was to simply observe and record field notes on the human interactions between the students and between the students and the teacher, my presence in the classroom made it inevitable that the teacher and students had to have at least some interaction with me as well. This interaction included participants

asking questions about texts and describing connections. Additionally, my observational data took note of the classroom environment (decorations, organization, furnishings, materials, etc.).

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

As previously noted, data was collected through interviews (with the child participants and parent participants), video/audio recording of interactive read-alouds, and focused classroom observations of student and teacher interactions. Through the data collected I gained an in-depth understanding of the students' racial identity development processes relative to Jackson's (1976a) Black Identity Development model; key data points enabling this understanding focused on my learning about the participants' unique homes, communities, and school experiences, and from the specific pedagogical practices utilized by the SLI which revealed each student's reasoning in their sense-making of the MO-CRiTlit used in the read-alouds.

Due to the multiple methods of data collection including parent interviews, student initial and follow up interviews, videotape and audio recordings of interactive read-aloud sessions, and the focused observations—triangulation was used in the data analysis process (Glesne, 2011). Triangulation was important to assure that the conclusions drawn from each data source was as accurate as possible and, thus, that overall conclusions that the study drew was likewise accurate. Cross-comparison of the conclusion drawn from each source enabled potential data analysis biases to emerge if, for example, conclusions in one area, contradicted those in others. The use of multiple data sources served to enrich each data source—providing the opportunity for the data collected in one area to shed greater light on data collected on another (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). For example, the use of the video recordings during the follow up interviews allowed for the participant to clarify meaning or elaborate on a topic introduced during the IRC.

All interviews were transcribed and critically read by the researcher for analysis. As the student interviews provided the bulk of the data in each case, they were analyzed through hand coding first, to identify emergent themes that were common in the experiences of the students across all the cases. This analysis process led me to group emergent themes common across two or more cases in order to identify patterns in the data. Data from the other sources was analyzed with these themes and patterns in mind. After the initial interview I recognized common patterns (e.g., description of classroom libraries and key motivators for reading achievement) and I used these patterns to analyze additional data such as the video recordings and focused classroom observation. I also looked for divergent case data—data in one or more case that did not align with and/or that contradicted the emergent theme data. However, none were found.

Throughout the data analysis and interpretation process, I kept the study's research questions in mind in assessing the data's efficacy in providing answers to the primary and/or ancillary research questions. Specifically, in exploring the themes and patterns that emerged from the data collection process I sought, and was able, to identify the ways in which the children's racial identities were influenced through their exposure to MO-CRiTLit during their read-aloud experiences.

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, in the Limitations sections of this chapter (shortly), and in greater detail in Chapter 4, because I am an outsider to the racial-ethnic groups at the focus in this study (I am not Black/African American), further because I am racially-ethnically mixed and, specifically, part White, I also engaged a Black peer-reviewer, with specific academic expertise in Black Identity Development, in my data analysis process. Through his engagement, I was able to further triangulate my study data, specifically to check and reconcile any biased or inaccurate theme and pattern development (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study followed all the guidelines iterated on the Research Protocol Proposal Form that was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval was necessary to secure—and was, in fact, secured—prior to my beginning any collection of data associated with the conduct of this study.

All information pertaining to the participants in this study was collected and stored in a confidential manner (i.e., on a password protected laptop, on multiple USB storage devices and/or external hard drives, in a locked area of the researcher's home and/or office (both at the research site and in the community of permanent residence), and in a locked area of the Principal Investigator's university office). Prior to any data collection, all study participants had the study explained to them; if they choose to voluntarily participate in the study thereafter they were carefully taken through the informed consent process. Each participant had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. This pseudonym was used throughout the entire data collection process to identify/de-identify the participant. Because there are several Freedom Schools literacy sites around the country, the specific site at focus for this study remained indistinct, referred to only by its general geographical location (e.g., a metropolitan area in the Southern United States).

### **Limitations**

I have both personal and professional connections to the study that could be considered to possibly limit the study. First, I have worked as a staff member of a Freedom Schools program in a southwestern state, though at a different site than the study site, for several summers. Through this work the connection with staff members at the study site was made. I am personally invested in the work of the site, convinced of its efficacy, and committed to its success. Second, as former Kindergarten teacher with Black elementary aged children and as a current doctoral

candidate in literacy education with an interest in multicultural education, I may be inclined to impose my own critical pedagogical practices and passion for multicultural children's literature, especially MO-CRiTLit, on the research. While I cannot erase these connections, being cognizant of the personal and professional biases that might surface in the conduct of the study as a result of them enabled me to "unpack" inappropriate influence of these biases in the data collection and analysis phases of the research. On the flip side, these connections also served as motivation to engage the study with the utmost integrity.

As the research focused on a summer literacy program, that the types of interactions with literature and related education experiences documented in the study may be interpreted by readers of the study to only be relevant to extracurricular programs like that of Freedom Schools. However, I selected Freedom Schools specifically because of its culturally relevant curriculum and focus on motivating children of color to learn. Though this curriculum and focus may be harder to find in a traditional curricular program (school year-based and public school-based classroom), it would not be impossible to do so, thus the study's results may still have broader implications. Further, while the participants could have been selected from Freedom Schools sites from various regions of the United States, limiting the study to the single Southern United States location lent an additional historical connection to the "movement-oriented" Civil Rights element of this study, in addition to facilitating researcher control over site programming logistics.

Finally, race and identity can be difficult conversation topics, especially between members of different so-called racial groups in the United States, most especially if one of those groups is a member of the dominant group (white, European American, etc.). As a mixed race researcher who benefits from light-skinned privilege and may be perceived by research



participants to be white, it was important for me to invest effort into gaining the trust of the study participants by creating a space where the participants were comfortable to engage with me openly and honestly on the topics of race and identity. Toward this end, my prior connection to the study site enabled me to trade on my “reputation” for being a person who is committed to curriculum and students prioritized by Freedom Schools. However, I did not rely on that reputation, but sought to build relationships anew with each and every participant by clearly communicating who I am: that I recognized that I was an outsider and that nothing they said about others who may look like me would offend me. Children whose parents did not agree to participate in the study because of my identity or any for any other reason were not included in this study. I employed the same self-effacing point of entry in describing the purpose and process of the study to the staff at the research site.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this study. Chapter 2 reviewed the research that informed this study. Chapter 3 outlined, in detail the methodology and how this study was undertaken.

This chapter imparts the findings of the study. These findings will be delineated and analyzed in three ways. First, a scope approach is used to present the cases. Second, within and cross-case analyses of the participants' racial identity development is undertaken, particularly as that development was impacted by their experience of "movement-oriented" Civil Rights-themed multicultural children's literature (hereafter abbreviated "MO-CRiTLit" (discussed further below)) during their Freedom Schools experience. Third, emergent themes derived from the analyses will be delineated and discussed relative to the research questions. Finally, the changes in the participants Black identity and the related role of the peer reviewing in assessing these changes is discussed.

### **Restatement of the Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of interactive read-alouds of MO-CRiTLit influenced the racial identity development of seven Black elementary aged children in the context of a six-week summer literacy program. This study also focused on how these children interacted with their peers, and/or the characters in the texts read aloud, and how these interactions influenced the development of their Black identity. Additionally, this study sought understanding of whether dialogue between the children (case study participants) and their peers had any influence on their racial identity development and, if so, how.

### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

This study was guided by a primary question and four ancillary questions. The primary question that guided this study was: *How does “movement-oriented” Civil Rights-themed literature (MO-CRiTLit) influence the racial identity development of Black elementary aged children?* Additionally, the four ancillary research questions were considered: 1) *How do children use literature to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with classmates, teachers, and/or characters in the text?* 2) *In what ways does culture relate to children’s understandings about themselves and about others?* 3) *What types of cross cultural understandings can be learned through children’s literature?* And, 4) *How are critical pedagogy and multicultural literature used in conjunction to provide students a foundation to make connections, disconnections, and dialogue about topics with other students their age?* Together these questions informed the study and together they will be used to analyze its results.

### **Using the Scope Approach to Present the Cases**

A scope approach is a method used to present data; it generally begins with broad, aggregate, group or larger scale data, and funnels down to increasingly more narrow, specific, individual or smaller scale data (Morrison, 2007). Specifically, I use this approach to present the case data from big picture to singular snapshot, in so doing I provide thick descriptive accounts of the study participants’ that, later, I use to ground my analysis of their Black Identity Development.

The main specific scope approach that I used begins with the Freedom school, the classroom in the school, Servant Leader Intern (SLI – facilitator of the IRC) in the classroom, an overview of the participants, and the child participants (learners of the IRC) in the classroom, These multiple scope dimensions were chosen because they correlate well to the study’s multiple

data sources, thereby facilitating my coding, theme development, and pattern identification.

The ancillary specific scope approach that I used in *within* the discussion of the child participants was two-fold. The first fold of this discussion begins with the participants general educational experiences, occurring in their traditional school settings, including their impressions of their schooling in these settings, their experiences of the pedagogical practices used by teachers in these settings, and their experiences with the K-5 curriculum and related literature in these settings. The second fold of this discussion focus on the participants' period of attendance in the Freedom Schools program, specifically their educational experiences with the IRC and MO-CRiTLiT. The findings presented through these discussions are drawn from the data collected in the initial and follow up interviews with the participants, video/audio recording of the interactive read-alouds in the classroom, as well as classroom observations. Additionally, as previously noted, during the follow up interviews the video recordings were also used with the participants to review topics discussed in the classroom, clarify meaning in those discussions, and make connections between those discussions and other elements of the participants Freedom Schools' experiences.

### **Analytical Tools for Examining Data Related to Research Questions**

As previously discussed, this study's conceptual framework will be used herein to guide the presentation and analysis of the data relative to the research questions. While the Freedom Schools program was intentionally designed with each of the pieces of the study's conceptual framework—Black Identity Development, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Literacy—in mind, in order to best present the study findings, rather than considering each of these pieces relative to only its usage in the Freedom Schools program in the presentation and analysis of these findings, all of these pieces were considered relative to the participants'

Freedom Schools experience in order to reveal how they all come together in the MO-CRiTlit. For example, in analyzing the data it was important to examine the SLI's critical pedagogical practices relative to the MO-CRiTlit—specifically, how she affirmed the participants' Black identities by making connections between their lives and those of important Civil Rights leaders in the texts, how she led them to read critically using problem posing, and, how, through the provision of ample opportunities for dialogue she foster the development of their critical literacy. Absent this use of critical pedagogical practices in the classroom, the results of this study would have been very different. Further, the scope approach reveals how all elements of the conceptual framework are layered into the students' experiences in the Freedom School community as a whole, as well as in the classroom, the curriculum, and, especially, the texts. As will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 5, while the MO-CRiTlit had the greatest impact on the study participants' racial identity development, this development would have been much less significant had the participants encountered these texts in a non identity-safe educational space in which critical pedagogical strategies were not used, or worse, not welcomed.

### **Role of the Researcher's Racial Identity/Development**

As in the discussion of the rationale for this study in Chapter 1, and discussed further relative to the study's methodological approach in Chapter 3, there is a strong connection between this study and my own racial identity and racial identity development proves.

My earlier work with marginalized student groups enabled me to recognize the educational inequities members of these groups face. But my inclination to recognize these and other inequities is situated in my own educational experiences. Because one of my parents is White and the other is Latina, growing up I often asked myself, "Who am I? What should I call myself?" Because of my physical representation (light skin, blonde hair, light eyes) many of my

peers argued that I was White. I also specifically recall being told by my teachers that I should check the White box when completing the demographic portion of standardized test forms. As I matured through adolescence and young adulthood, my bi-raciality became more salient to my identity. During this time I came to recognize that while others identified me as White (again due to my physical attributes and the associated privileges I enjoyed, including those derived from my essentially claiming—at least by default—a White identity (Hardiman, 1979, 1982, 1992)), I was not culturally White. I was raised by a Latina woman, thus many of my experiences were different than those of my peers who were raised by White women. My experiences were different because they were linked to many Latino cultural practices, as well as to White ones. By 21, I finally recognized that my experiences, like those of many biracial people, didn't fit neatly into one racial-ethnic identity dimension (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Casas & Pytluk, 1995). Despite having come to this recognition some time ago, this recognition was reawakened as I embarked on this study; this reawakening became particularly intense for me while undertaking the data collection and analysis phases of this study.

As a mixed-race researcher who benefits from light-skin privilege I recognized and planned for the possibility that my research participants might perceive me to be White. For that reason, I worked hard to create as safe a space as possible for them to engage with me—openly and honestly—on topics of race and racial identity. Despite this awareness and planning, from the time of my initial engagement with my participants, through my penning of this chapter and the next, I have felt particularly identity-vulnerable. As a result, I have been drawn into deeper and more self-critical analysis of my race and racial identity, concomitant with my undertaking of parallel identity analyses for my participants. It is of note here that my child participants recognized that I was not Black, that some of them also perceived me as White, and that of their

parents asked if I was mixed. Building from these initial interactions with my study participants I was able to earn and sustain, throughout data collection, their trust. Indeed, the time I have spent—personally, academically, and professionally—in the company of only Black people, has enabled me to develop a dispositional familiarity and comfort in their company that supported my relationship building with my study participants. While I have always recognized that I am an outsider because I am not Black, I have enjoyed a degree of insider status because of my long-standing connections with various Black communities. This is particularly the case in a majority-Black Charter school community in which my passion for educating all children, especially those in the underserved neighborhoods, as well as my White (and biracial) identity, were seen as assets. Still, in recognizing that while I am not *culturally* White, or at least not only culturally White, and that I am also not Black, I am acutely aware that my non-Blackness—manifest as limited appreciation for the nuances of my child participants’ Black identity development processes no matter my efforts to the contrary—may have “bled” into my data analysis in ways that are still unrecognized/unacknowledged in this study.

My engagement of a Black peer reviewer with expertise in BID certainly helped me to ‘stem the bleed’ here, so to speak, by providing another avenue for triangulation of my multiple-source data as I analyzed it relative to the research questions; according to “traditional” research metrics, this adds rigor and validity to my study results (Creswell, 2013; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). However, I do not want to use this compensatory study element to let myself “off the hook” here. Said another way, I want to be open and transparent about my own, inevitably racialized voice in the presentation and analysis of the study data.

Accordingly, presentation and analysis of the data in this study has included this

intentionally self-reflective element: its connection to my own identity, coupled with its connection to the identity development research. Of particular note in this regard was the struggle I had regarding the inclusion of the parent narratives as an additional dimension in my scope approach as discussed in Chapter 3. Moving these narratives represents a compromise, it still allows me to reference parents' discussion of things that, through analysis I link to the children's development of Black identity, but it also allows me to focus more on the children's discussions of the same. More particularly, how they see themselves racially and socially relative to their traditional and Freedom schools contexts, as well as in their home and neighborhood contexts. In this way the child participants' voices are made central in my analysis of their racial identity development.

### **Case Study Presentation and Within Case Analysis**

In this section I present the findings from the seven cases, focusing on the child participants' experiences in their traditional schools and in the Freedom Schools program, as well as their Black identity development generally (how they viewed their racial identity), and, more specifically, relative to their interactions with MO-CRiTLit (how these interactions influenced their racial identity). I also discuss other factors that may have played a role in the participants' racial identity development.

As previously noted, these descriptions are built from the data collected in the initial and follow up interview, the video/audio recordings of the interactive read-alouds, and the classroom observations. However, these descriptions do not reflect the sequence in which the data was collected; rather, the data was culled to reveal the nature of the participants' varied educational experiences and how those experiences impacted their racial identity. These descriptions include verbatim quotes from the study participants and their SLI.



## **School**

All of the participants in this study were enrolled in a literacy program referred to as Freedom Schools, hosted by Manor Elementary, which is the pseudonym I assigned to the school. In addition to this program, all of the students enrolled also attend Manor during the regular nine-month school year. Manor is located in a metropolitan area in the southern part of the United States. Manor is located in one of the most affluent parts of the city in which this study was conducted; however, all the participants are bussed in from a much less affluent area of the city (with the exception of Alex and Alexis who moved into another neighborhood in a different part of town during the most recent school year, but still attended Manor through the end of the school year). Interestingly, the schools population is not representative of the neighborhood surrounding it. While close to 3,000 school-aged children reside in this affluent neighborhood (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a, Table 1), none of the students enrolled at the school during the regular school year live in the neighborhood. In fact, the school-aged children in this neighborhood are zoned for a different neighborhood school; Manor Elementary is not an option. So while the median home value is \$268,300, it does not represent the student population of the school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b, Table 1). The neighborhood where the children are bussed in from is considered a high poverty area, one of the largest in this city. The school serves children in grades K-5, and has a student population of approximately 393 students with 94% of the student population representing Black and Latino students.

The demographics of the school, especially in relation to its geographical makeup, may have had a particular influence on the racial identity of participants in this study. The students had very little interaction with those in the schools community, and similarly, the school had very few White teachers as well. The absence of a diverse student and teacher population may

have influenced how they saw themselves racially and these limited interactions with others, especially Whites, influenced how they perceived themselves and others with similar group identity characteristics, because much of their interactions with “others” was through media outlets. Media outlets have been shown to promote negative stereotypes, especially for minorities, but specifically for Blacks as described in several empirical research studies (Davis 2005; Davis, 2007). In essence the school is segregated, as there are very few White children who attend the school. Research around school segregation like Clark and Clark’s (1939) was utilized in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954, 1955) case specifically because of the effects that school segregation has on Black children’s development. The participants’ attendance at Manor elementary may have influence on the participants Black identity.

### **Classroom**

Located at the end of a long hallway inside Manor Elementary sits the classroom where the scholars met each morning. Although the programming was held in the summer, the regular classroom teacher assigned to this space was allowed to leave the classroom decorated with their personal belongings, which was, for the most part, covered with butcher paper. The room did not visually display a welcoming or academically affirming learning environment, at first; however, the SLI (given the pseudonym Ms. Emily, described further below) a college aged student who is responsible for delivering the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) daily added substantive value to the learning space that she shared with the scholars for the duration of the program. Ms. Emily was responsible for designing the classroom with a theme, and transforming the space into a welcoming environment (similar to the duties of all SLIs). With a couple days of hard work and creativity, the space was transformed into an Eric Carle-themed classroom, designed with colorful pictures that represented *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* text (Carle, 1994), where the

scholars would eventually grow their own book caterpillars using circles to represent a text that they read during the summer.

The door served as a welcome for all scholars entering. It was decorated with bright yellow paper. The scholars' names were represented on caterpillars spread out across the door. The classroom had a reading circle (where the scholars participated in the read-aloud daily) located in the center of the room and each scholar had a personal journal on their chair that was used each morning to write in response to a daily journal prompt. This classroom design was particularly influenced by pedagogy deeply rooted in multicultural education, and is extremely consistent across programs relative to the National Freedom Schools program (CDF, 2015). The setting was also very different from a traditional schooling in which students sit in rows awaiting information to be disseminated by the teacher (often seen as the only person with knowledge) at the front of the class (Freire, 1970). The read-aloud circle also allowed scholars to interact with peers and the text, which encouraged relationships to be built among scholars and the SLI, within a small group dynamic (Clark, 2002). Additionally, the daily agenda was posted on a board located at the front of the class, so the scholars knew what they would be doing at the start of each day, which also provided them with cultural capital as it relates to their experience within the program. Each day the agenda had the title of the text, objectives for the lessons, and listed activities that would be completed in association with the text. Posting agendas provided the scholars with the expectations and they valued the activities, as they knew exactly what was to be completed during the time allotted for the IRC from the moment they arrived in the classroom until they went home for the day. Located directly behind the reading circle were three individual tables where the scholars worked cooperatively in small groups during the activities. Each group had assigned roles for the tasks that were to be completed. For example, a "runner" is the scholar

assigned to collect supplies from the designated area of materials. These jobs gave the scholars a leadership role in their classroom, but more importantly within their small groups. These roles changed often, and eventually, the scholars' assigned roles to each other within the small groups, demonstrating that they had become fully invested in the structural learning environment. With the classroom setup designed to be welcoming for the scholars it also showcased various titles of multicultural children's literature. Many of the texts in the classroom were used for the lesson, however a larger variety of texts were also on display. The classroom library was filled with books that represented the individual scholars in the program. The classroom library grew weekly with donations from the community and supporters of the program. The scholars benefited at the completion of the program as each participant received books to take home in order build their own home library. The home library aids in providing access and opportunity for children to read and engage with literature; it also promotes interest, enthusiasm, and motivation to read which translates to students being better prepared for school (Anderson, Wilson, Fielding, 1988; Morrow, 1997).

The classroom became a safe environment that may have influenced their Black identity based on the environment because Ms. Emily created a welcoming space where the scholars interacted with their peers daily and were affirmed daily in the process of learning.

### **Servant Leader Intern**

The SLI was initially not identified in the study protocol as a participant; however, in the context of my classroom observations, it was evident that she was a pivotal influence on the participants' identity development, particularly in how she facilitated their engagement with the MO-CRiTlit. Accordingly, she was retroactively consented so that she could be interviewed for the study.

Ms. Emily, is a first year SLI and served as the instructor for the seven child participants. She is a junior at a public university in the Midwest region of the United States pursuing a double major in Political Science and Africana Studies. For Ms. Emily being an SLI gave her the opportunity to “serve the community,” while also fulfilling the community service requirements associated with a scholarship she was awarded.

Ms. Emily has a diverse family tree. She identifies her mother simply as White, and her father simply as Black, however, she identifies herself as Black, though she admits this was not always the case. She discussed how her identification changed, and the constant identity struggle she has had throughout her life, mostly due to pressure from her maternal grandparents to choose White over Black. In discussing her racial identity with the child participants, Ms. Emily asked the scholars not to call her mixed stating:

Can I tell you something that makes me feel better? When you call me mixed it makes me feel like a cake or a drink. I am NOT a mixture! You can’t pull things out of me. So I am multicultural, I am multiracial, I am bi-racial. . . Don’t call me mixed cause that means you could take the Whiteness out of me or take the Blackness out of me.

Ms. Emily’s utter openness in discussing her own racial identity development with all the scholars in the Freedom School setting, as well as in sharing with them from other of her childhood and adolescent experiences, added value to their experiences; this was especially the case for the child participants in this study.

According to Ms. Emily, her higher education background in in Political Science and Africana Studies enabled her to become comfortable discussing complex and controversial topics generally, and specifically with the scholars relative to the MO-CRiTlit.

The participants described Ms. Emily as “knowledgeable,” and my observations of how she used multiple student-centered and culturally responsive and relevant pedagogical practices incline me to agree with this description of her. For example, during the read-aloud of *Separate is Never Equal* (Tonatiuh, 2014), Dre (one of the child participants) questioned the historically contextualized use of the “N-Word” (a derogatory word used to describe people of African decent, not spelled out for what should be obvious reasons). Ms. Emily stopped the lesson in order to address Dre’s question with the entire class in this way:

It’s ok to discuss it in an educational context. . . There’s an evolution of the “N-Word” I’m using this word to explain to you. I’m not calling anyone this, I’m using it as a way to explain it. The word “Nigger” right? The word “Nigger” is normally used to refer to Black people and it comes from like the idea of the word Nigrescence which is also a version of like being Black . . . So the evolution of this word you see like the word “Nigger” with the e-r at the end . . . So you start off with that and that’s what other people happened to call Black people predominately during the times of slavery because they weren’t using it necessarily to refer to skin tone but they were using it as a derogatory term. Derogatory means offensive, rude, mean, hateful . . . Encompassing that because Black people were undereducated because of the system. So the reason it is associated with being ignorant is because Black people historically have been prevented from education . . . So with the hard e-r you’re encompassing the idea of ignorance. From there, which is like so offensive, there was this idea of reclaiming . . . they reclaimed it so it went from being something hateful to something that African Americans used I would say like in the 80’s where it went “from N-i-g-g-e-r” to “N-i-g-g-u-h-z” and that’s what people would call other people but it wasn’t derogatory because Black people called each

other that. So this pop term of spelling in the 80's and early 90's was referring to like my group of friends. So after the 90's we go from "N-i-g-u-h-z" and then eventually we get to "N-i-g-g-a-s" . . . So eventually Black people reclaimed the word "Nigger" and used it to call each other "Niggas" . . . And [some] people don't think it's offensive because Black people reclaimed it for themselves and got to [use] name themselves. They took a word that was hateful and mean and they changed it around and flipped the script. They said you know what I can call my self a "Nigga" cause I'm not using it to be offensive . . . There is so much history behind this word.

In addition to being courageous in having this conversation with the child participants, Ms. Emily demonstrates her student-centered and critical pedagogical practices in, once again discussing racial identity, in this case Black racial identity in a manner intended to bring about critical race consciousness in the child participants.

Ms. Emily appreciated the sense of community that is encouraged in the Freedom Schools program. She described the program as a place she wanted to be because it provided her an opportunity to be active in the lives of children and families in underserved communities. In addition to working intimately with the children, Ms. Emily stated that she developed a close relationship with her fellow SLI's who shared similar passion for the populations the program serves, as well as for its family-oriented approach to that service.

### **Overview of the Participants**

The pseudonyms that were chosen by each child participant in the study are as follows: Dre, Dation, Alexis, Alex, Nyla, Brian, and Jeremiah. All of the participants self-identified as Black and as in level two of the Freedom Schools Program (as discussed in Chapter 3, meaning they just completed one of Grades 3-5 in the most recent school year 2014-2015). Although all

of the participants share the demographics that qualified them as participants in the study (including their race, age, grade level and participation in the Freedom Schools programming), and while, as a consequence of these demographics they also have some common experiences, ultimately their life and educational stories are unique. In particular, each participant had a unique interaction with the literature and related dialogue which, in turn, uniquely influenced their racial identity development.

### **Similarities in Experiences Across *Families* not Related to Research Questions**

The family structures of the participants in this study were varied. The mother served as the main parent participant in all cases, with one exception, in the case of Brian, the father also participated. All the parent participants grew up and attended PK-12 schools in the southern part of the United States. The parents are all high school graduates in their mid-to-late thirties, and almost all reside in the same community (with the exception of Alex and Alexis' family as discussed above). Each of the parents expressed having high expectations for their child/children, and mentioned parent involvement as a key indicator in their child's educational success.

All of the parents reported a negative experience or interaction between Manor's school administration and/or its teachers during the regular school year. Two examples of these interactions were described by Delores, Dation's mother. One involved the school administrators' requiring her to pick Dation up immediately following his referral by a teacher to the front office for behavior issues. The other involved the school's administration threatening to refer her to the Division of Child and Family Protective Services if she did not have Dation diagnosed for ADD/ADHD. Delores described these instances as not only affecting her child's education, but also her ability to provide him economic stability, noting that she had been dismissed from a previous job because of the schools' strict disciplinary policies and their impact on Dation; not



only had Dation been dismissed for the day several times, but also he was suspended more than ten times during the 2014-2015 (public) school year.

### **Similarities in Experiences Across *Participants* not Related to Research Questions**

All of the participants were born and raised in Jamestown (pseudonym), a community in the southern part of the United States, and attended Manor Elementary School during the 2014-2015 school year. Each of the participants described having regular responsibilities at home (i.e., cleaning room, taking out garbage, washing dishes, etc.). Overall, the participants all reported having positive experiences in school, with their peers, and described math as their favorite school subject. Also commonly, they all had difficulty recalling a text that they had read where they could identify with the characters, storyline, or events of the story, as well as in recalling the title of any texts they read during the regular school year.

The participants were familiar with each other because of their attendance at Manor Elementary; however, the Freedom Schools experience served as the first time the participants were together in a classroom setting as they varied in grade levels (grades 3-5). They all described Ms. Emily as a great teacher and expressed a strong connection to her teachings.

### **The Child Participants**

#### **Dre**

Dre is an 11-year old male who completed the fifth grade. He is the oldest of his single mother's (Alicia) three children (one brother and one sister). Dre considered himself to be a good reader and said his mother and grandmother taught him to read before he went to kindergarten. Unfortunately, for Dre, he does not have many interactions with his father despite his father living in a nearby neighborhood. Dre stated that he saw his father during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday, but prior to that interaction he had not seen him in a year. From Dre's body language, I was

aware that the absence of his father certainly has an impact on his life therefore, out of respect for his emotional state, I did not inquire further.

In the initial interview, when I asked Dre to describe himself to me, he used a series of descriptive words: “tall, big head, and red hair maybe or kinda colorful hair.” In describing his classmates to me and he responded simply stated that they were “intelligent” and said his classmates looked mostly like him. Dre then described his skin tone as “light” and proceeded to say that if someone asked him what race he was he would identify as Black.

Dre described himself as a leader, but admitted that he is also known for “playing around” in his classes during school. Interestingly, he stated that as he has gotten older he could more easily recognize when his behaviors were inappropriate for the setting and stops himself before he becomes disruptive. This was reflected when Dre described his teachers helping him in school by giving examples of when they were young and how they used to behave with their friends, which he interpreted as helpful to his behavior. He appeared to have connected to his teachers and trusted them for their advice on various topics.

During fifth grade, Dre stated that his math teacher had him tutor other students in the classroom: “[my teacher] broke off the people she trusted in math and knew that they wouldn’t give up on it and we would tutor. We would rotate around and work with the kids that needed help.” This process affirmed Dre as a leader in his classroom and he continued to grow as a student from this experience. He described this role as one that made him feel good: “I felt that people were looking up to me.”

Overall his school experiences have been positive, but he does recall being treated differently from other students in his classes:

My teacher sometimes, she was nice, but sometimes when the kids that were

good, like the girls, they would like hit on the boys and we'd tell her they were doing wrong things and she wouldn't believe us and she would just let them slide.

Moving into literacy experiences, I questioned how literacy learning was encouraged in the home as well as how he experienced literacy, specifically regarding interactions with text, in school. At home, Dre explained that his mother encouraged him to "read at a higher level." Dre's increased level of literacy engagement has made a tremendous impact on his siblings, particularly because he has been able to encourage them to acquire a similar level of success in regards to their academics. Additionally, Dre was able to create a chain reaction within his family dynamics, because his younger brother also understands the importance of taking the responsibility and a leadership role, and does so by reading to him and Dre's younger sister as well. Dre shared that he has several books at home that include non-fictional text, astrology and other science related material.

In terms of library visits, Dre discussed enjoying visits to the public library to check out books using his own library card. This demonstrated a sense of ownership he had towards his own education. However, Dre stated that he had recently chosen to stop checking out books because it was difficult for him to keep track of the items once he left the library. Dre was cognizant of the associated fines his mother would have to pay, which speaks to his maturity level. When he was checking books out, he stated his favorite books to read were chapter books, more particularly the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012). He stated that he was interested in the series because of the comic layout and the content was related to relatable life experience. Recently, series of texts similar to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) have become more desirable by young children, especially because they use the pictures help them connect to the

text use their imagination. This is similar to Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, (2014) findings related to how the format of the text changed the appeal levels of children in print material, as well as digital media and gaming.

Dre discussed his teacher reading aloud to his class once a week during fifth grade. When asked about the books his teacher read to the class Dre had difficulty recalling book titles, but was able to rely on his memory for details of several of the stories. Noting the variety of books available to him during his class trips to the school library, Dre explained that some books drew his interests more than others, especially the dictionaries, encyclopedias, fiction texts, non-fiction texts, and science fiction texts. Similar to his public school outlook, Dre had the opportunity to check out books from the school library but often chose to leave the books that he checked out at school, again in fear of losing the book.

Dre stated that his classroom library had books that are labeled by levels. In his public school, students are tested and then are placed at a certain level based on their reading scores. Based solely on using that information, there was a specific category that students were able to select books from within the classroom. In Dre's case he was reading at one of the highest levels in the fifth grade classroom. As a high level reader Dre is on grade level for his reading proficiency. Because the curriculum favors Eurocentric values it is not a surprise that Dre does not see himself represented in the texts nor is he able to relate to the types of situations introduced in the texts that are in his classroom library or school library because the leveled reading material is not culturally relevant.

**Dre's Freedom Schools experience.** As a first year scholar in the Freedom Schools program Dre appreciated participating because he felt safe. Identity safe spaces have been shown to promote student learning because it allows students to compare themselves to the text rather

than to normative values associated with race, gender, class, etc. (Davies, Spencer & Steele, 2005). This concept is important as Dre further associated his experiences in Freedom Schools and the connection with the texts. Dre stated that his experiences in the program are much different from the other summer program he attended in the past, where it was more of a traditional school setting rather than a multicultural one. Dre also stated that in the previous program he was required to read four books a week as well as pass a quiz for each text, using traditional methods in which students respond to an already established set of questions rather than using a critical lens to examine text. Dre exhibited a high motivation to read, yet he was only allowed to select books from the library at the program site. Fostering a motivation to read has been shown to be vital in early academic success (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2007). Dre expressed that the majority of books in his classroom did not align with his individual interests (social, academic, or cultural) therefore, he became discouraged with the process and did not enjoy attending that particular summer program.

In the Freedom Schools program, Dre exhibited enormous energy during the morning Harambee—the daily 30-minute active celebration where the scholars sing, dance and chant to praise each other’s accomplishments—describing his favorite part as getting ‘crunk’ (a word used to describe someone full of energy) during this daily activity. Dre explained that during Harambee he was able to release stress through drumming, singing, and chanting. He also mentioned how this was different from the regular school year, where he often felt overwhelmed with schoolwork. He described Ms. Emily as being “helpful, smart, encouraging, and understandable” throughout Harambee and other aspects of the program. Dre stated that he valued Ms. Emily’s passion to help the scholars become stronger in reading, but especially in learning their history. For instance, when Ms. Emily answered Dre’s question regarding the “N-

word” it appeared that other participants were anxious obviously because their traditional school teachers shied from these questions.

Ms. Emily used her knowledge base and did not refrain from addressing the students’ needs. Furthermore, Kennedy (2003) traced the origins, the connotations, and explored the controversies around the “N-word” and Ms. Emily recognized how the controversies around the “N-word” may influence the approach that others use when choosing or choosing not to discuss the topic. The pedagogical approach of sharing with the participants distinctly demonstrated that Ms. Emily was fearless in sharing historical content with the scholars. She also discussed marriage equality in detail, as it was a current event during the programming. Dre appreciated that Ms. Emily took the opportunity to stop the lesson and provide the scholars with this lesson. He described what he learned in Freedom Schools: “A lot! I can’t explain it. History, like how we [are] going out and using these words that we really don’t know the meaning of.”

Dre said that the field trips were some of his favorite memories from Freedom School; experienced learning through the field trips to near by area parks, theatres, and museums which also motivated him to attend the program daily. In particular, Dre detailed the motivational speech that former National Basketball Association (NBA) player Tyrone “Mugsy” Bogue relayed to over 1200 scholars during a field trip. This speech reminded him that he should never give up and always strive to be the best even in the midst of doubt by others. Dre’s attentiveness to this speech encouraged him to make positive choices throughout the remainder of the program.

Dre contributed to the classroom environment by being a leader amongst his peers. He often volunteered to assist Ms. Emily with various tasks including reading aloud, being a scribe, and working cooperatively with others in the class. Like many young boys Dre’s age, he was very active; moving throughout the classroom, interacting with peers, and perfecting his skills of

shooting a wad of paper into the trash can. In a traditional classroom setting, this type of behavior may be viewed as disruptive, inappropriate, and may lead to disciplinary action.

While enrolled in the Freedom Schools program, Dre was one of the most active read-aloud participants. The use of culturally relevant texts allowed Dre to make connections with the lessons and stories shared during the program. Dre describes an example of this connection in his description of *Reflections of a Black Cowboy* (Miller, 2004), his favorite text from the program: “. . . it talks about his life and how he loses his father. . . He missed him and they used to do everything together.” As previously discussed, it was clear that Dre was interested in building a closer relationship with his father. This became more obvious as the program came to a close when observing Dre’s interactions with program staff, especially Black male staff.

Dre was able to dissect the stories in the programs texts on a more personal level and had continuous connections to literature, dialogue, and activities associated with them. When I asked Dre said he would like to share *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013) and *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001) with his family because of the historical content. These books discuss segregation, Jim Crow Laws, and the racial inequities of the Civil Rights Movement. Dre and I reviewed the video of the interactive read-aloud of *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013), where he stated: “if I became president I would segregate White people.” The statement is a common stereotype that White people have of how Black people think and the reason that many White people fear Black power because of the idea that “they” (Black people) will do to “us” (White people) what “we” (White people) did to them. Even with this stereotype, this belief is fairly uncommon amongst Black people. However, Dre continued to express the reasoning of his feelings towards this statement as he said: “Whites had better experiences in education and like the world cause they got to travel more and they had more money for a better experience.”

Dre was familiar with oppression and the existing educational achievement gap. He appeared frustrated knowing that segregation was allowed and added that segregation still exists today as he explained further without hesitation:

. . . It's not as worse as it was back then but like the KKK and stuff is starting to come back. It's coming back to how it was during segregation and now instead of Whites treating Black people wrong its kind of both people getting treated wrong.

Dre connected his prior knowledge about some Civil Rights issues in society today. Media had an influence on way that Dre viewed the current events of recent police brutality cases as being similar to the American Civil Rights Movement describing how news reports show White police officers killing Black men. His mother Alicia confirmed this during the interview when she stated that Dre often asks about stories he viewed on the news regarding racial tension between police officers and innocent civilians. Alicia stated it as often difficult to have these conversations with Dre because, in her own words: "he is more outspoken than I am, so it's kind of hard." Nevertheless, he did express that his mom had conversations with him about Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and showed concern for his safety. He detailed a recent conversation with his mother:

. . . my dad had bought me a BB gun. . . I really didn't need it because of what was happening with the kids [in the news]. They was carryin' around guns and people were shootin'. Like the police officers were shootin'.

Dre recognized that having a BB gun puts himself in a compromising position in his neighborhood and in society in general. He said that when he plays with his BB gun he feels uneasy about someone reporting him to the police. Dre recognized the racial tension and the



violence in his own community and suggested that he could make a difference by writing letters to the police about the things that make him feel unsafe in his community.

During the six-week program Dre exhibited a sense of agency through the discussions about the literature. Dre demonstrated his knowledge of the topics discussed around the Civil Rights Movement and gained an understanding of how he had the ability to create change. He often demonstrated an interest in the texts around social justice issues and was open in regards to questioning. His behavior demonstrated a high level of maturity and the investment in his education. Furthermore, through the historical teaching of the Civil Rights Movement embedded in Black culture Dre felt inspired to learn about the history as this was something that was not taught during the traditional school year. He confirmed his appreciation for these teachings during his follow-up interview when Dre stated that he identifies as: “Black and proud!”

Black and proud was a phrase used during the Civil Rights Movement where Black people were encouraged to celebrate their heritage and pride. When I asked him what makes him proud to be Black he stated: “Being accepted in mentoring groups [outside of Freedom Schools]. Like there was this group that White people weren’t allowed in it wasn’t to be mean but it was about like havin’ conversations about being a Black person.” Dre expressed that these groups support his development and he appreciated having mentors. He believes that he will be successful if he continues to foster positive relationships and maintain his leadership role.

### **Dation**

Dation is a 10 year-old male who completed fourth grade. Dation lives with his younger sister, both his mother (Delores) and father and his maternal grandmother. During the interview there was slight mention of his father – only that he lived in the home. Initially, Dation described himself using descriptive words regarding his personality, but when further prompted, he

provided additional physical attributes regarding the color of his hair and the clothes he had on. I specifically asked him how I would recognize him if we had never met before and he stated: “my skin tone, brownish Black” as he felt this was his most recognizable trait.

Dation recalls pre-k being his favorite grade thus far in his educational experiences because of the learning that took place through play. Dation described his most recent teacher as being “nice, joyful, and helpful”. As discussed with Delores, during the 2014-2015 school year, Dation was placed on medication for Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADD/ADHD. The side effects of the medication have resulted in sporadic behavior ranging from lethargic (while being medicated) to extremely active and disruptive (when not medicated). Dation added that his teacher recognized when he became frustrated in class because the lessons were not being taught at a fast enough pace that reflected his learning ability, and would excuse him from class to have a moment to breathe and reflect before returning to the learning space. Often times, students need to understand how their teachers are involved with their learning and know that they care about their success (Klem & Connell, 2004). Dation had a sense of his teachers support and described his favorite subject in school as math. I asked why math made him so excited to learn and he stated: “. . . You get to do a lot of strategies . . . Math is something in the beginning of life because math helps you read too!” This led me to believe that he recognized that reading was essential for all subjects, including math.

Dation considered himself to be a good reader who enjoys visiting the library and reading nightly before going to bed. He said his favorite book was *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 2005) and he enjoys reading *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) and Transformer books™ for enjoyment. These types of books are popular, especially for young boys Dation’s age, as they peak interest in the topics, which sequentially motivates them to continue reading

(Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, 2014). Dation described his school library as having a variety of grade level books and the classroom library as containing leveled readers that are lower than the level that he actually reads, which often frustrated him because he would finish them quickly and was not challenged. He enjoyed checking books out from the library, but prefers not to; like Dre, he was fearful of misplacing the text. Dation preferred to read books in which he could relate to the characters but recognized that there was a disconnect between his own lifestyle and those of the characters in the text as he described “theirs” as being different than his, revealing:

. . . Their lifestyle is not like mine. . . my lifestyle is like a regular lifestyle. . . It’s kinda hard. . . It’s hard because you like, it’s always something that will get in your path but you will get frustrated. . . you be so mad you end up doing something and you gonna have to face the consequences.

Both Dation and his mother mentioned his behavior as being a challenge and the reason behind numerous calls home, often leading to suspension. Through the interview with Dation I sensed that he understood the concern regarding his behavior.

**Dation’s Freedom Schools experience.** Returning to the Freedom Schools program for the second year was exciting for Dation, who described the IRC and field trip experiences as his favorite memories from his previous year in Freedom Schools. Dation appreciated the authentic activities from the IRC and expressed this as he stated his favorite book was *Ashley Bryan’s Puppets* (Bryan, 2014) because it showed how something could be created out of random materials. Dation recognized through the text that you didn’t need a lot of materials to create something meaningful.

Through observations, I noticed that Dation displayed different emotions and behaviors through the duration of the program. One of the most significant behaviors that I recognized

through my conversations with Dation was his level of respect. He showed care and compassion, said please and thank you, and yes ma'am/yes sir when speaking to any adult. Initially, like many of the scholars, he was anxious about what the summer would entail and did demonstrate some active behaviors, but nothing that was of concern at the time. As the program progressed, Dation became more and more active with each day passing. One early Monday morning during the second week of programming, I observed him attempting to climb the wall and making loud growling sounds during Harambee. Originally, I believed it was a tactic to release energy and figured that he would be ready to enter the classroom at the end of Harambee; however, in this case I was mistaken. As classes were dismissed Dation chose to run carelessly around the gymnasium (where Harambee was held), run down the halls, and demonstrated great difficulty when it was time to join the reading circle in the classroom. Dation's challenges were concerning but through observation I learned that Dation's classmates suggested that they collaboratively work together to ensure that he would be able to participate with the group on activities such as field trips and cooperative group lessons. Through observations and interviews I became very familiar with Dation and the reasoning for some of his actions. Aside from his hyperactive behavior Dation could be found in the cafeteria during breakfast in a sluggish state, refusing to eat breakfast, and complaining of a massive headache. He said that these symptoms were due to the side effects of the medication he was taking before school.

Similar to his behavior, Dation's interactions with his peers varied from day-to-day. Dation was observed hitting and pushing other scholars and yelling uncontrollably across the room at/to his peers. In one instance specifically, there was another participant, Brian (who will be introduced further below) who Dation quarreled with often. When I asked him why they did not appear to get along he stated: "... I get tired of him always sayin' what comes to his mind or

when . . . somebody's talking or telling their story he's always interrupting." They both demonstrated negative behavior that was disruptive and Dation would torment Brian by calling him a "[s]tupid crack head" (mocking Brian's speech). His choices of phrases are those, which he had heard from others and repeated to get Brian to react in a negative manner. Dation often exhibited attention-seeking behavior and would act out in an effort to gain attention from Ms. Emily or his peers. For example, Dation would yell out at other students or could be found sitting on the back of the chair in an effort to distract others.

Ms. Emily displayed a calm attitude and was very patient with Dation. Her goal was to provide all scholars with a positive learning environment while enhancing their literacy experiences. Dation noted a difference between Ms. Emily and his regular teacher explaining:

. . . She laugh at some things we be sayin'. . . she let us share comments. But it's like she could tell us about other comments that's related more over the book . . . Ms. Emily gave us a lot of information.

Ms. Emily never declined to answer a question and Dation believed that he gained a wealth of information from the interaction with her and the literature. This was evident through my observation of Ms. Emily's introduction of the text *This is The Rope: The Story of the Great Migration* (Woodson, 2013) as she connected the story to her own family history:

During The Great Migration the southern states were tired of people treating them wrong because of racism and they were denied job opportunities and education. . . My grandfather was part of The Great Migration. He was the first person in my family not born into slavery. He migrated from Georgia to Pittsburg to work in the steel mills. That's how I connect to this story.

She modeled different practices that encouraged children to connect to the literature while connecting her own family history. Referencing the traditional school setting Dation believed that he completed more activities related to books in the Freedom Schools program adding that in traditional schooling he had more difficult work, tests, and minimal support when he was experiencing difficulty. Dation considered himself a good reader because he had a knowledge base and was fluent. He stated that the books that were used during the Freedom Schools program were different from traditional school and informed me that he shared details with his family about five books in particular:

- *Giant Steps to Change the World* (Lee & Lee, 2011)
- *Tutankhamen's Gift* (Sabuda, 1994)
- *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001)
- *Grandma's Gift* (Velasquez, 2010)
- *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013)

Through the use of culturally relevant texts and Ms. Emily's critical pedagogical practices Dation made connections surrounding the issues around civil rights. Dation described enjoying books that let him use his imagination, further stating that the books he read in Freedom Schools educated him possibly in a more historically meaningful way. The literary conversations around the texts provided opportunity to discuss and question topics that are often misrepresented in traditional school settings. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2014), popular narratives used to teach the Civil Rights Movement in traditional schooling illustrate a small group of leaders as being the activists, which is often not the entire truth; however, the texts used during the Freedom Schools program represented individuals that acted collectively to make powerful change. Concentrating on the program theme of "making a difference," I asked Dation

how he could make a difference in his community (week three's theme); without hesitation he responded: "stop that violence! They are violent out there . . . They be carrying guns and they be threatening people like they gonna do something to them." Dation lives in an environment that has affected his view of society, which in turn has a negative influence on his behavior. Children can be socially and academically impacted by consistent traumatization related to their living environment, socio-economic status, and violence among others (Quartz, Olsen, Duncan-Andrade, 2003). Dation has experienced this through his own neighborhood and during the summer program often questioned why society is this way today.

During the Freedom Schools program current events are discussed on a daily basis. Dation shared that he watches the news every morning for the weather forecast. He was familiar with the stories of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and others as he went on to describe today's current events as being similar to those of the Civil Rights Movement because of the prevalence of police brutality and rioting as a reaction to it:

. . . Like when Baltimore went crazy when . . . the officers wouldn't help the man when he was dying and they didn't try to help him or not they just sat there and let him die. . . You can tell when a police evil. You can tell from their eyes.

Dation had a mental image of police officers that may have been influenced from the media. During the summer programming there were partnerships between the program and the local police department, which provided an officer on site daily to interact with all scholars in effort to build relationships within the community, rather than as disciplinary enforcers. Dation built a relationship with Officer Bradley during the program and would often choose to sit at the table with him during lunch. While Dation continued to feel some negative feelings towards police officers, his interactions with Officer Bradley allowed him to reestablish trust.

I asked Dation about the types of conversations his parents had with him about growing up as a young Black male in the United States today and he informed me that they don't have conversations around the topic. He further went on to explain how he felt about being a young Black male growing up in society: ". . . I'm different and we have [a] special culture. . . It's like we do more sports. We play different sports most of the time. . . We like to do hard work." This was interesting to compare, as his description changed after being in the program for six weeks. At the end of the program he described himself as: "dark skin. . . I got black eye brows and new hair." Dation described his race as representing his skin tone and physical features. He is aware of his race but uses more descriptive words to describe his Blackness. However, he is familiar with cultural experiences around the Black culture. Because Dation's family values Black cultural experiences his construction of his racial identity is influenced by the foundation set by his family. Through the interaction with literature Dation's understanding of Black culture was strengthened through positive messages about his cultural group. The texts from the program provided a significant connection to the historical context while the related activities concentrated on the individual's experiences. Racial socialization messages encourage children's sense of identity by socializing them as part of a Black culture fostering an appreciation for their own cultural group (Hood, Brevard, Nguyen, & Belgrave, 2013). Dation continues to have issues in school. However, his family has sought out child advocacy resources, such as counseling centers and parent organizations to assist in his social and educational development.

### **Alexis**

Alexis is a nine year-old female who completed third grade. She is one of three children of her mother (Myah) and father; she has a much older sister in college and a twin brother, Alex, discussed next. Alexis describes herself as a good student because she follows the directions and



knows the teachers expectations. She recognized that her classmates often do not follow the rules but said she is not easily distracted or persuaded by her peers. Her favorite grade thus far has been second because she connected well with her teacher as she helped her with her reading. I was curious what Alexis' teachers used to teach reading in school so I asked her to describe read-alouds in traditional school and she indicated that they took place during specific times of the year stating: “. . . when it's winter time and Christmas she reads stories about the holidays. . . Christmas, Valentines Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving.” Celebrating holidays through the use of children's literature can add value to a child's education but if only the literature is used without the cultural teachings and understanding then it doesn't encompass the totality of learning about the holiday or tradition (Dietrich & Ralph, 1995). Alexis considers herself a good reader who enjoys visiting the public library and has her own home library filled with Freedom Schools books from prior years of attendance and various other series including *Goosebumps* (Stine, 2008), *The Babysitters Club* (Martin, 2012), *Junie B. Jones* (Park, 2012), and her favorite *Dork Diaries* (Russell, 2014). She enjoys reading by herself but did note that when it is time for the end of grade assessments she will practice her literacy packet with her mom. Alexis described an environment inside her classroom that is test-driven and focuses on the end of grade assessments rather than mastery of the material. Test-driven instruction is often associated with lower reading achievement, as students are simply practicing through a “drill and kill” type of learning environment (Tatum, 2000).

In school Alexis visits the library weekly so she considers herself familiar with the books in the library and in her classroom. When I asked her to describe her classroom library she explained: “chapter books, regular books, it's level F – Z.” She did not provide additional detail about the books but it was evident that the books available in the libraries were not ones that she

connected to in the same ways she has with the books from home. Alexis said that neither the school library nor classroom library had books with characters that she can identify with, but the Freedom Schools program had several. This reinforced the programs mission to help children develop motivation to read while considering it fun to do so.

Alexis described the teachers at her school as being mostly African American and biracial, but found them more difficult to identify with than Ms. Emily. I asked her to describe herself to me and initially she used descriptive words: “I would say my hair is out. Like this, like it’s in an afro or it’s curly. If I was meeting you today I’d say my nails are pink and I’m in a pink jacket.” She continued to describe herself using physical attributes, but later in the interview she began connecting her identity to others with similar racial characteristics. While discussing her emotions about the media and news coverage of the recent church shootings in Charleston, Alexis added more detail to her own racial identity explaining her feelings of sadness saying: “. . . they’re African American and I am too.” Although her identification was not explicitly salient, Alexis was able to feel a connection to the victims through her interactions with media outlets.

**Alexis’ Freedom Schools experience.** Alexis has lived the Freedom Schools experience every summer for the last four years. She stated that when she walked through the doors of the Freedom Schools building each morning she felt “hype” (a word used to describe a high level of energy one is feeling causing them to move and act more enthusiastically i.e. dance, clap, shake etc.). Her favorite memory of the program was when she participated in the fieldtrips and reading the stories daily. Alexis exemplified the theme of “making a difference” and noted that she too will change the world when she becomes the first female African-American president of the United States. Through her attendance in the program, Alexis had built a relationship with four different servant leader interns. She described Ms. Emily as one of them, who was described as

being “helpful, a good listener, kind, and respectful.” These qualities were different from her regular teacher and also her regular classroom, as she stated: “like the stories we read. . .when we ask Ms. Emily a question she gives us answers. . .If she don’t know the answer she will look it up for us.” She appreciated the fact that Ms. Emily did not avoid any questions that the she or the other scholars asked. Ms. Emily also provided a space for the scholars to anonymously ask questions about something they questioned from the text (the news, or other outlets) but may not have wanted to ask whole group.

Alexis believed in teamwork and helping others. Throughout the classroom observations Alexis could be found helping Ms. Emily gather supplies, keeping others on task, and fully participating in the daily conversations. During the observations it was evident that Alexis was curious about different topics that were introduced and discussed using the literature and cooperative group activities. She never demonstrated a sense of discomfort when discussing topics such as race, segregation, Jim Crow Laws, or marriage equality. In fact, Alexis often used a critical lens and questioned what was being presented in the texts. I recall vividly observing a conversation during the read-aloud of *Separate is Never Equal* (Tonatiuh, 2014) and Alexis questioned why segregation had to exist. She said for the first time she had learned that segregation was not only about Blacks and Whites but detailed more as she added:

I learned something, that not only African-Americans were segregated from White people that Mexicans was too. . .That just because you’re a different color and you’re from different places don’t mean you’re gonna get the same equalness of other people.

Furthermore, Alexis demonstrated awareness to the topics being discussed in the daily reading circle. During the follow-up interview she discussed the book *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013) as being a text that taught her more about the Civil Rights Movement.

Initially, Alexis described a basic understanding of the movement during opening activities of this text and others. Alexis actively raised her hand to tell what she knew; in this instance, she connected with Ms. Rosa Parks as an activist and later added Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. leading a march. As reported through the Southern Poverty Law Center's (2014) report, students likely recall these two names: Ms. Rosa Parks and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with the first four words of King's *I Have a Dream* (King, 1963) speech because they are the most common used names and phrases from the teachings of the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the read-aloud and dialogue about the text Alexis gained a substantial amount of knowledge around the topic of segregation and equality. In the follow-up interview I played a portion of the video where Ms. Emily facilitated the discussion of the text. I asked her to describe her emotions around the discussion and she described feelings of sadness and disappointment. Alexis went on to detail almost verbatim what Ms. Emily had taught her about the Jim Crow Laws, including minstrel shows explaining:

White people would paint their face Black and make fun of Black people and act like Black people are stupid and say stuff about them and people pay them money cause they thought it was funny . . . Why would a White man paint his face Black?

The discussion was one that Alexis described without difficulty adding that she was mostly disappointed in the people who made derogatory comments and actions towards African-Americans. From this discussion, Alexis went on to describe additional texts that she enjoyed and told how she will share these texts with her family. According to Alexis she learned about history and gained knowledge during the 2015 summer experience through the lessons facilitated by Ms. Emily. She believed the conversations that Ms. Emily facilitated were different from those in her traditional school classroom in significant ways that forced her to think more deeply:

“We talked about what people [Civil Rights Activists] did and about their lives”. Finally, she revealed that the books in Freedom Schools were not similar to those in the traditional school, explaining she was able to relate to books used in Freedom Schools due to sharing similar characteristics with the characters, adding: “Most of them is about African-Americans . . . and some of them is about people changing the world.” She expressed this idea in a way that showed her she had the ability to make a difference, which was different from what she had previously viewed in texts where the fictional characters were ones she could not connect with.

Through the duration of the program the scholars discussed historical events that have shaped African-Americans and Black culture. In the follow-up interview I asked Alexis how she identified and she responded: “responsible, respectful, and African American.” She recognized her race and did not use physical descriptive words as she did in the initial interview, but more thoughtful words to identify. She went on to further describe that all of her classmates shared similar characteristics because they are all bussed into the school from their far away neighborhood and they’re all African-American. Additionally, she acknowledged that she and Ms. Emily shared a similar characteristic because she too identified as African-American. Alexis seemed to be surprised by this connection she was able to make on her own, so in order to further gain an understanding of her connections I asked Alexis what, if any, types of conversations she had with her family about race and what made her proud to be a young Black female. She responded:

We don’t have those types of conversations . . . I don’t know! I’m proud to be Black because somebody like Martin Luther King who was like me and had my skin tone did something great for the country.

She pondered for a brief moment as she thought about how her family may have influence on her racial identity, but was unable to articulate any further connections; however she closed the interview discussing the work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was heroic and brought people together in order to evoke change.

### **Alex**

Alex is a nine year-old male who completed the third grade and is the twin to Alexis. He stated that his parents were his role models: “tell me to do the right things and go down the right path. Don’t follow people like you know are gonna ruin stuff.” Alex said he enjoys going to the library with his sisters and his favorite books are *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) and *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 2002). He stated that these were his favorites because he enjoys the pictorial representation in the text. Interestingly, Alex added that, as far as professional goals, he is interested in becoming a police officer when he grows up.

Through his educational journey thus far, Alex describes positive experiences between his teachers and classmates. Thus far, third grade has been his favorite, claiming that it was much more enjoyable than the prior grades because he learned multiplication and was challenged. It was clear that there was a strong connection with his most recent teacher, describing her athletic abilities and her college career as a basketball player at a university in the southern part of the United States. He further stated that his teacher performs read-alouds everyday; but could not recall titles of texts. I asked him to tell me about the classroom library and he described a set of leveled readers that were grouped by letters and each student was assigned to a specific group of texts. He stated that he progressed and increased his fluency in third grade moving from a level F to a level Q at the end of the year, which was a significant jump in the reading level. He attributed this increase to reading with his mother and sister on a regular basis. Once Alex

noticed his progress he became intrinsically motivated to continue to improve his reading on his own. I wondered how often he visited the school library and if he checked out books, so I asked and he responded:

. . . on Friday we go to the media center [inside the library] and we pick out a book . . . if we lose it or if it's damaged it will be up in our name and we have to pay for it . . . Cause if you don't pay for it / it will follow you all the way to college.

Alex described how the consequences of losing or damaging a book discouraged him from checking them out. Fortunately, Myah purchased books for Alex (and his siblings) that he could read at home to enhance his fluency. He describes reading at home with Alexis (discussed previously) and also describes reviewing his literacy packet that he used to prepare for the end of grade assessments. He had difficulty remembering the names of any of the books from the library (school and public) that included characters that looked like him; however, he described books that discussed bullying and said he could relate to the topic because he has seen bullying in his school before.

Alex used words that were descriptive when telling me how he identified focusing on his name, the sports he liked, and explaining his favorite past times as creating artwork and reading for leisure. When inquiring about Alex's understanding of racial identity I asked him how he would describe his teachers and classmates specifically asking him if they looked mostly like him or mostly like me and he stated, "I would describe them as, some have the same skin tone as me and some have the same skin tone as you. Cause my teacher had the same skin tone as you." Alex recognized the differences in race but did not go any further than the recognition of skin tone at least at first. Further in the program he recognized that it was more complex than the color of skin, which will be discussed further below.

**Alex's Freedom Schools experience.** Having attended the Freedom Schools program for four years Alex was quite familiar with the expectations and said: "being kind, showing respect and being a leader" were the characteristics of the Freedom Schools way, a phrase used to describe positive, actions, phrases, and emotions associated with the programming. For example, if a scholar said you're stupid another scholar would respond by saying that's not the Freedom Schools way. His favorite memories consisted of the variety of field trips including bowling, swimming, and visiting a local counseling center for children. He spoke highly of Ms. Emily stating that his favorite part of the program was that she answered questions that were previously unanswered. Due to the large class size in traditional school, Alex said that they did not get to ask many questions and the small class size in Freedom Schools allows for more discussion to further his and others understanding of the topics. He continued, indicating that this is different from his traditional school explaining:

. . . at regular school sometimes we do like, the teacher do the read to achieve test. And it's like preppin' for the EOG (End of Grade assessments) reading . . . we have five questions and you have to like chop [up] your story and [then] answer your questions.

Having just completed the third grade he was familiar with the emphasis placed on the annual standardized tests. He described how standardized test prep consumed instruction time during the traditional school year. Contrarily, Alex provided great detail about the different activities that he completed while attending the Freedom Schools program describing the field trips, the activities, and the books as intricate parts of the learning process. He expressed feeling good about being in the program everyday because he was able to participate in a variety of engaging activities that influenced his learning in a fun and enjoyable way. Ms. Emily was able to engage the participants in learning activities that builds motivation and connected them to the learning



process (Jennings, Rule & Zanden, 2014). During class Alex followed what other students did both as a leader and as a way to get attention; however, when redirected, he chose to make better choices as Ms. Emily was in constant contact with his parents.

Alex described his favorite book as *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001) because it illustrated the disparities between Whites and Blacks. He went on to describe how today, society continues to demonstrate inequality, strengthening his argument by referencing recent media coverage of the protests concerning the confederate flag. I asked him if Blacks and Whites are treated fairly and he said: “. . . I think they are getting treated fairly but I don’t think all the world is. . . I don’t know if everyone is getting treated equally.” Alex demonstrated critical thinking as he described equality through the scale of a global issue recognizing that civil rights issues existed elsewhere. Through the conversation he made a connection between the media, the literature, and the dialogue in class. The dialogue often brought up topics that Alex had many questions about. Ms. Emily created a space where there was a level of comfort in the classroom that allowed him to be open and honest while further fostering his learning. Alex did feel comfortable discussing the varying topics in class and was very open about expressing his views towards his feelings and beliefs in this regard. There was an understanding that everyone would be respectful towards one another in class and the classroom was a safe space to have these difficult conversations.

In class he enjoyed working with his peers during the cooperative group activities because it provided more opportunity for learning. He also stated that sometimes he would have preferred to work alone, not necessarily because of his classmates, but because of his preference for completing certain tasks. He also didn’t mind reading aloud in class and his mother believes this is attributed to the experience provided by the program particularly in helping him get stronger in reading stating: “In school I wasn’t very good in reading but I still passed my end of

grade test for reading and math.” Alex demonstrated progress in traditional school but at the same time recognized that he was not a fluent reader. Alex attributed his participation in Freedom Schools as helping him gain fluency and proficiency in literacy development. He described the books in Freedom Schools as books that gave him more information and taught about the historical events in American history that are at the center of the Civil Rights Movement: “when we read the books we do a lot of activities that relate to the book and do a lot of stuff like asking questions and she [Ms. Emily] answers them for us.”

Having had the various conversations regarding race around the topics of the Civil Rights Movement I asked Alex how he would describe himself to me. He began to use descriptive words giving his name, age, and the name of the school he attends. I specifically asked him what his race was and he stated that he identified as Black. I asked him what made him proud about being a young Black male growing up in the United States today and he explained: “A lot of people did a lot of things for blacks to have equal, to be equal and have the freedom.” I asked him to tell me what he appreciates about being Black and he stated: “Happy to still be here. . .happy to have the parents that I have . . . happy to be in the world right now.” Alex related the historical events around segregation to his own individual being. During the read-aloud of *Talkin’ about Bessie*, Alex recognized his racial identity but questioned why people had to be identified by race and couldn’t just be identified as people. Alex expressed that he knew he was Black but had difficulty understanding how this was important in a daily context. This is understandable considering the majority of his classmates and his neighbors look like him.

## **Nyla**

Nyla is a nine-year old female who recently completed third grade. She is the oldest in the household of her single mother’s (Ann) two children and also lives with her newborn sister

and maternal grandmother. Nyla's favorite subjects in school are reading, writing, and math.

Nyla confirmed that she enjoyed school and was eager to tell me about her experiences.

I recognized Nyla was anxious coming into the interview and I allowed her time to describe what was causing these feelings of anxiousness. She detailed her most recent experience in third grade she described having a teacher that made her school experience difficult recounting:

. . . the first day of school she was like, she was nice to me and helping me with my work on the first day. But when the second day came and all the rest of the days she was like / she was mean. Cause like, when I raise my hand to answer a question she be seeing my hand but she be picking on somebody else.

She went on to describe being placed in groups and the teacher physically moving students in the class to their group: “. . . Like she always [would] grab me [by my arm]! She always grab everybody in that classroom and move them where they don't supposed to be.” Nyla described being uncomfortable in that class, stating that she would go home and tell her mom that she didn't want to go back to school. Ann also alluded to these instances and said that for these reasons she demanded that Nyla be moved to a new class. While the process took a long period of time, once Nyla was moved she expressed being in a more positive learning environment and described her *new* third grade teacher as being great, nice, and funny. I noticed the shift in emotion when Nyla discussed her most recent teacher and it was clear that the negative experiences that she faced in her old classroom had impacted her learning experiences during third grade. Fortunately for Nyla, her mom recognized the challenges that she was facing and continued to provide additional support and learning experiences at home. After she expressed

her emotions towards this experience she was able to open up more regarding who she was as an individual.

I asked her to tell me about the type of student she is in school, she explained: “. . . when I’m in school I respect my teacher and I follow directions. . . I be a leader instead of following behind other people who do bad.” She further explained that her mother expects her to be a leader in school and make the best choices in everything she does. Nyla’s goal is to be a doctor when she grows up and work in the hospital like her grandmother. She communicated in great detail some of her favorite activities in school including: using the computers, reading books, learning to tell time, and counting money.

Nyla possessed a strong motivation to read that was fostered by a variety of books at home, some of which were passed down to her from her mother. Her favorite books to read for enjoyment were part of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (Kinney, 2012). I asked her to describe her classroom library and she stated that there were books with puppets such as *Click Clack Moo* (Cronin, 2011) and several books on different levels. She further noted that her classroom library and school library do not contain books with characters that she could identify with. Nyla appreciated her mothers commitment to visiting the library weekly to check out books.

Nyla often offered to assist her classmates on their assignments and exhibited similar kind gestures throughout the six-week program. I was interested to see if she would describe herself using descriptive words that mirrored the kindness she exhibited towards her classmates, but she had difficulty understanding the question, so instead, I asked her what makes her unique and she described in detail her race:

. . . if somebody said I’m like Black or White and they’re like light skinned or a different color . . . they would say like you can’t be in our group you gotta be in the

White group or the Black group. And if I wasn't White I couldn't be in the White group. I would be in the Black group. . . It's that I couldn't be in the light skinned group or the White group. . . I was in the Black group.

Nyla described how being placed in groups is something she has experienced in school describing being placed with White groups and Black groups. The dynamics of the groupings had a negative effect on her learning and possibly her Black identity. Nyla was more focused on wanting to be friends with everyone not because of their skin tone but because she wanted to be friends and have camaraderie.

**Nyla's Freedom Schools experience.** As a second year Freedom Schools scholar Nyla arrived each morning encouraged and ready to learn. Knowing that Nyla enjoyed reading it was no surprise that Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) time was her favorite part of the Freedom Schools day. Each day everyone in the site was required to stop what they were doing and read anything they wanted for 15-30 minutes. The scholars began to create their own motivation to read because they were invited to choose their reading material from a variety of options to including books, magazines, Internet blogs, newspapers etc. Offering students a choice in their requirements keeps them invested in their education and allows them to make selections based on interests rather than selecting texts randomly (Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, 2014).

Nyla described Ms. Emily as "nice, kind, and helpful". Nyla initially chose *Giant Steps to Change the World* (Lee, 2011) as a book she would like to take home and share with her family because it talked about heroic beings. However, she then changed her mind and decided to share *Separate is Never Equal* (Tonatiuh, 2014) because she wanted to discuss the text with her mom including how historically schools were segregated because it was very interesting to learn. Nyla

demonstrated interest in the books that she was reading during the program, so I wondered if the books in her regular classroom were similar. She explained:

In real school like we don't have these kind of books. We have books that [are] on our level and all that stuff and in Freedom Schools they got different books that people can like read.

I asked her if she could connect to any of the texts from the program and she described *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage* (Schroeder, 2009); she stated:

. . . the little girl that was makin' sculptures . . . Like I make stuff and um I draw it out so I can copy it like with play dough and clay . . . We got the same color and we make stuff out of clay.

Nyla later stated that she doesn't read books with characters that look like her often.

Nevertheless, as she discussed the various titles she demonstrated proficiency in recalling details from the stories used in the program. Nyla at times appeared to be shy but did not hesitate when reading aloud, but Nyla reminded me that she preferred to listen. I asked her what makes a person a good reader and she responded: "well, reading a whole bunch of books." Nyla lived this experience of reading various books as she often reads alone at the bus stop, on the way to school, and nightly at home. She also expressed enjoying reading with her mother and grandmother when possible: "every time she go to the mailbox, she gets her newspaper and she read[s] it. She tells me what's this word? I sound it out and read it." During the daily dialogue around the text for the day in the program, Nyla was engaged but she seldom participated in the discussions often. She enjoyed working in the groups for the cooperative activities and told me she preferred working with Alexis (discussed above) and Jeremiah (discussed below) because they work well together.

Many of the current events that were affecting the United States were discussed during the Freedom Schools program. I asked Nyla if she watched the news while participating in Freedom School and she said she did but couldn't recall specific stories from the news.

During the follow-up interview I asked Nyla how she identified racially and she initially described her skin tone and followed with her uniqueness: "I'm brown . . . Well I tell them that I'm Black . . . Um, some of my friends are White and most of them are Black." She said she is proud to be Black because her entire family is Black. She went on to articulate that, more importantly, she is a leader and not a follower. She believed that she was unique because she had friends that were Black and White, which was interesting to hear as it led me to believe that she knew her classmates did not have similar relationships. It also showed that she was aware of the different races and still remained prideful about her race regardless of the stereotypes that were often part of the discussion in the Freedom Schools classroom.

### **Brian**

Brian is a nine year-old male who completed the third grade. He is a part of a blended family that includes three step brothers (one of whom is Jeremiah discussed next below), an older biological sister, his biological father (Tony) and his step-mother (Amanda). He described his favorite books being *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) and the *Captain Underpants* series (Pilkey, 2002). Brian is an active child who at any given time can be found seeking attention and disturbing others. When he grows up he wants to be a stay at home dad and spend quality time with his children: "I'm just gonna pass college and then when I have me a wife she gonna have some kids and if they don't listen to me the belt is going to their butt."

We began the interview by first discussing how Brian saw himself as a person, family member, and student. When I asked him how he described himself he first replied: "sometimes

bad / sometimes good.” In an effort to clarify what being “bad” and “good” meant to him, he went on to describe fighting as a “bad” behavior and said that he sometimes fights with people he doesn’t like at school. He countered that with his “good” behavior describing how he helps his teachers in school. During the initial interview some difficulty arose in getting Brian to cooperate and engage in the conversation. It was difficult to understand him as well because he has a speech impediment that caused him to have trouble with blends, but he also chewed on his shirt, passed on many of the questions, and replied “no” to numerous questions without putting thought into his responses.

Brian had difficulty describing his favorite memories from his regular school years as well, even though they were so recent. He did state that second grade had been his favorite because his teacher was the best at helping him learn the material. When I asked him to describe his most recent teacher Brian took a deep breath and a long sigh before stating: “I guess happy.” He did not have anything further to say about his teacher and as I noticed a change in his posture, I did not push the topic any further. Brian believed that he was a good reader but through observation it was recognized that he can become distracted easily, making it difficult to concentrate on any single tasks. He explained that the school library and classroom library are filled with books that are very easy to read and were not challenging in the slightest. He visits the public library on a regular basis to check out books but does not bring books home from the school library because he prefers the selection at the local public library.

Later in the interview I asked Brian how he identified and he responded with a one-word answer stating: “good.” I could tell Brian was attempting to disengage in the interview because he answered questions quickly without putting any thought to the question. I continued to ask the questions with more specificity. I then asked him how I would recognize him if we were meeting



for the first time and he alluded to his race: “I would say all my skin colors and stuff. . . Black I guess.” He went on to say that he had more to share but said he was not comfortable sharing at that time. I informed Brian that if and when he felt comfortable sharing he was welcome to. I asked Brian how he would describe his classmates and he explained: “they look like me but they just don’t like me.” I asked Brian why he feels his peers don’t like him and he expressed it in more detail: “They make fun of me because [of] the way I talk.” As discussed earlier, Brian’s speech impediment makes it difficult for him to pronounce blended words, especially ‘st’ blends. For instance, the word “mister” would be pronounced as “mitah” or the phrase “stop it” would be pronounced “top it”. Brian had been enrolled in the same school for a number of years yet he has never been referred to a speech pathologist, had an IEP meeting or any other related service to correct his speech. Interestingly, Tony, Brian’s father (discussed above) also has a similar speech impediment. Speech services are provided in k-12 public schools as a resource to students who demonstrate need. Even though students are often referred out for behavior issues often times their academic needs are not addressed with the same fever in schools. It was evident that Brian was bothered by the topic and chose not to engage even when an attempt was made to revisit the topic.

**Brian’s Freedom Schools experience.** Returning to the Freedom Schools program for the second year, Brian appeared to be excited about what the summer would entail for him. Brian described the extracurricular activities as being some of the best memories from the summer and explained that teamwork was important, especially when using the paddleboats. He concluded that he would like to have the opportunity to take more field trips during the traditional school year.

Brian was an active student inside the classroom and often would need redirection from Ms. Emily. When I asked Brian to describe his relationship with her he said: “I would say bad cause nobody in there like[s] me except her.” Brian chose this time to explain his classmates discontent for him. Through observations in class Brian’s peers often would display a sense of frustration if they were unable to complete a task because of his behavior. Even as his peers would ask him kindly to stop doing something, usually something disruptive to the class, he would continue, which in turn led them to shy away from interacting with him. I again asked him to describe Ms. Emily and he stated she was the best, being helpful, but at times having to raise her voice, often because of his behavior. Through my review of the audio and video recordings when Ms. Emily did raise her voice it was often due to redirection towards Brian’s behavior. He suggested that Ms. Emily yelled because he described her class as being filled with: “. . . bad kids / just like me!” I asked him what kinds of behaviors he exhibited that made Ms. Emily have to raise her voice and he said he would often talk back. From the interactions with Brian, and based on video recordings, Brian often displayed attention seeking behavior as a way to gain popularity with his peers over the six weeks of the program. Brian expressed feeling disliked and in turn used these attention-seeking behaviors in the classroom to gain acceptance from peers or to initiate positive social relationships, but it had the opposite effect (Peretti, Clark, & Johnson, 1984). However, as mentioned before, this behavior had a negative influence as it made him feel as though his peers did not like him, which they didn’t as they often expressed. During the course of the follow-up interview Brian chose to answer many of the questions with letter responses, which represented the first sound in the word. For example, I asked Brian how he felt about being at the Freedom Schools program and he responded: “B . . . Well I’ll say C.” When I asked him to explain what he meant he said:

Kinda . . . I be feelin' like it's gonna be a bad day for me . . . Every time when I try and have a good day it turn out bad. Every time when I feel like I'm gonna have a bad day it turn out good.

I asked Brian to explain further and he explained he would rather wait until the end of the day to answer. Similar to the initial interview, Brian's follow-up interview presented some challenges in getting him to participate and engage. I provided a number of breaks for him to return to class and then resume the interview where we left off, but it did not seem to impact his further engagement.

Over the course of the six weeks of the program, Brian experienced interactions with the literature, dialogued with his peers, and participated in extracurricular activities. He enjoyed the texts that were used for the lessons and said that it would be difficult to select a favorite from the books that he read during the summer. Once I told him he could select more than one he chose *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013) and *Tutankhamen's Gift* (Sabuda, 1994). I asked him what he liked about these texts and he described in detail the story line from *Tutankhamen's Gift* (Sabuda, 1994), adding that if he was king he would be a "good" king. Brian saw the position of the king as someone who would have to display positive behaviors and realized that if he was to be in a similar situation, he too would have to be "good". He further stated that *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013) taught him that Black and White people should be together and that skin color should not matter. He added that this makes him happy, explaining: "Black and White people get to be together and I get to be wick you / because you're . . . I don't wanna say this but kinda White to me." Brian's idea of racial identity is based solely on skin color. I asked Brian if he believes that Black and White people are treated equally today and he exclaimed: "YES! / Ok, Sorry I yelled but Yes!" Brian yelling was an example of

his impulsive behavior and he did recognize his action; however, the same behaviors he exhibited in the classroom were reiterated in the interview. Brian also stated that he could relate to the characters in the book *Tutankhamen's Gift* by (pointing to the character on the front cover) because he recognized that the he and the character were both Black.

Many of the conversations in which Brian actively participated were related to race, although he experienced difficulty determining how Ms. Emily racially identified. During the read-aloud of *Talkin' About Bessie* (Grimes, 2002), Ms. Emily discusses how she identifies as a Black female because she has a parent who is White and a parent who is Black. Brian very interested in the conversation told Ms. Emily: "You White!" Disagreeing with Brian Ms. Emily said: "I'm not White" Brian again argued: "You is too White." This led to the discussion presented earlier by Ms. Emily in relation to how she does not identify as mixed. Brian argued with Ms. Emily while she tried to explain to him how she identified. But Brian related these conversations as being based only on skin tone. When I discussed this with him during the follow-up interview he explained that he didn't understand how she could be Black because of the color of her skin. While we were on the topic of race I asked Brian to describe himself and he responded:

I would say a samwich. You know [what] a samwich mean? A Samwich mean good but this kind of samwich means bad . . . People wanna eat me. That mean[s] people wanna try to like me but they can't / they don't want to.

Brian said this to describe that he believes people don't like him and they do try to but they end up being mean to him, often because of his behavior. During the conversations around race Brian expressed some discomfort. For example, in the historical lesson of the "N-Word" (discussed above) Brian asked Ms. Emily to stop saying the "cuss word" because it was making him

nervous. However, once Ms. Emily explained to the group that she was using the word in an educational context he listened to her explanation and eventually expressed that he understood her reasoning.

Finally, as mentioned while discussing Dation, there was constant conflict that existed between Brian and Dation. They both strived for attention and fed off of the behaviors of each other. They have been known for hitting and cursing at one another at one moment and then sitting together and having a friendly conversation just minutes later which was observed through observations.

### **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah is a nine year-old male who completed third grade. Jeremiah repeated second grade due to incomplete work, which led to him not performing on grade level. In the beginning of the initial interview I asked Jeremiah to tell me about himself and who he lives with. Jeremiah stated that he lived with his mom and nobody else. From his behavior I could tell that there was a sense of uneasiness and having already interviewed his mother and stepfather, I chose to see if he would discuss their relationship as we got further into the interview. When I asked if anyone encourages him to read at home he informed me that his mother did daily, but still did not mention anyone else in the home. I asked if anyone else at home reads and he opened up about his brothers explaining that they too read at home. Again I asked who else lives in your home and Jeremiah explained: “My older brother and my little silly brother and my stepbrother [Brian].” Jeremiah did not make mention of his stepfather or older stepsister during the interview except in this one instance. Because I could tell that it was a topic that he did not want to discuss I did not ask any other questions regarding the members of his family and continued the conversation on the topic of school.

Jeremiah's favorite subject in school was math because he claimed it was easy and he enjoyed it. He also enjoys science and completing experiments with his classmates. He told me that social studies was a difficult subject for him to complete the work, explaining: "I always have to write something and I don't know well where do you put / And well I don't know what a question means." If the subject matter is difficult for him he becomes frustrated and will avoid the work instead of asking for help. Jeremiah described himself as smart, kind, and nervous. He often displays a sense of shyness when interacting with other children and adults. When Jeremiah grows up he wants to be a mutant similar to those from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles™.

He described his most recent teacher as being kind, nice, and friendly and stated that she helped him with difficult problems that he had in school. Jeremiah enjoys reading books and described his favorite books to read for enjoyment as the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (Kinney, 2012), Sonic Sega series™, and the *Big Nate* (Peirce, 2012) series. Interestingly, they were all graphic novels, and similar to those from other participants. Jeremiah visits the public library regularly. When describing his classroom library he explained: "... not really chapter books. But there are levels of books like level A, B, C, or level O or P." He went on to add that he reads on level R and that there are not necessarily many books on his reading level based on the standardization of the reading levels in his classroom. He described the school library as having a variety of books: "Some of them are easy book and some of them are hard books." He could not recall seeing books in either library where he could see himself represented in the text, stating: "I read books but none of them look like me." However, he did describe being able to relate to an event in a story illustrating a portion of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012): "He always have something happen bad when trying to do the right thing. Just like Me . . . I was trying to act good

and somebody tryin' to make me act bad cause they're talking about me." Jeremiah tended to be shy in class and he would often ignore his peers; however, he described becoming irritated when people talked about him, which made him want to act out.

Jeremiah considered himself a good reader and added that he has his own books at home that he reads. Jeremiah also commented on his teacher who ensured that they go outside for recess, daily. He explained that he did not enjoy recess because he hated playing outside. I was curious why he said this and asked him to describe himself to me in an effort to gain a better understanding of how he perceived himself he said: "real shy and nervous." His shyness may have impacted his interaction with his peers, which could possibly explain why he did not want to have free play with his classmates. I asked him to describe his classmates and he responded: "Definitely this one puffy hair which almost is an afro but no and same skin color like me . . . Black. And um and maybe uh a red shirt."

Through the observations I noticed something different about Jeremiah that was different from his peers; he was very quiet, kept to himself, and seldom interacted with others. I asked him to tell me how I would recognize him if we had never met and he described himself as he stated: "Someone that has thin hair and big eyelashes aaaaaannnd a blue coat." He wore the blue coat, as described, nearly every day of the summer program. It was one of the first things I recognized when I encountered him. I asked him about the blue coat initially because of the extreme summer heat and he related it to being treated differently from his peers and explained: "No one ever talk[s] to me and when they see me they look away . . . That's why I always wear this jacket with my hood on always looking down." Jeremiah said he is both "angry" and "friendly" but described himself as having a personality that he was not proud of, but found it difficult to change or accept as a part of himself. Jeremiah had some underlying issues regarding self-esteem,

self-efficacy, and self-consciousness, all of which are fundamental factors influencing his racial identity, particularly when comparing himself to others, more specifically within his specific group membership (Black). This is supported particularly in Cross' (1971), Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith's (1997), and Jackson and Hardiman's (1976) stages/categorization of Black identity development, specifically as it relates to positive and negative self-attributes, as related to individualized perceptions of group membership. Noting that Jeremiah's racial identity, or lack thereof was primarily related to only physical characteristics as he continuously made reference to negative feelings towards these characteristics.

**Jeremiah's Freedom Schools experience.** Entering the Freedom Schools program for the second year provided Jeremiah with some insight on what he would expect for the summer. He described feeling unhappy about attending the program because he didn't like the other children in the program. However, I observed how this quickly changed as Jeremiah developed a close relationship with his servant leader intern, Ms. Emily, from the beginning of the program. He often asked Ms. Emily to join him at the table for breakfast, could be found sitting next to her at Harambee, and embraced her every chance he could. I observed his interactions with Ms. Emily in the classroom and I asked him to describe her: "Perfect, great teacher and mmmmmm, the greatest teacher I had!" He added that he is happy when he is in the classroom stating: "... I'm most[ly] like the [only] good one." Because several of the other participants in the study were often disruptive, especially his stepbrother Brian, Jeremiah considered himself a good student, mostly because his behavior never constituted redirection. He described some of his favorite memories from Freedom Schools as singing at Harambee, writing in his journal, and learning to play tennis during one of the weekly fieldtrips. He also indicated that he was fully engaged with the activities from the IRC and illustrated various activities that he completed



during the cooperative group activities. During the discussion of the activities he described his discontent for working in groups with his peers, explaining: “. . . Brian and Dation never could work together as a team.” Jeremiah noticed that Brian and Dation often demonstrated conflict, and he continually attempted to separate himself from both Brian and Dation due to their disruptive behaviors. Jeremiah described the other scholars in the class as being unfriendly because they did not talk to him, even though he claimed not to like it; however, during the video recording of the cooperative groups, there were interactions between him and his peers, When I replayed these instances for him he replied: “But I don’t like talking cause they’re talking about something boring.” Due to Jeremiah’s shy behavior he often would not lead the discussion in the cooperative group activities and because he was not a leader in facilitating the conversations he found himself disengaged from the topics.

During the follow-up interview, Jeremiah expressed some frustration while discussing the dialogue around the texts explaining that during the facilitation it was difficult to hear and he had trouble writing. However, Jeremiah was able to recall details from the texts used during the program and said that his favorite book from the IRC was *Separate is Never Equal*. He expressed that he enjoyed the illustrations in the text and added that it earned a medal. Additionally, Jeremiah told me the lesson he learned from this book as he explained: “. . .it teach me that Blacks can do anything they want to . . . And it doesn’t matter [what] your skin color [is].” When we discussed the literature used Jeremiah described the characters of the books as brave, because of the various tasks they completed and the challenges they faced. This conversation led to discussing the civil rights issues that society is facing today. I asked Jeremiah if he watched the news, and he replied: “Of course!” He believed the news was important to watch and it provided information on current events. He added that some of the stories included people going to jail

and men escaping from prison, which showed that his viewing was current. After he discussed the topics he further exclaimed: “And the police are mean . . . Cause they tell you stuff that’s not / they don’t care if you’re Black or they don’t care if you’re proud . . .” The media influenced the way that Jeremiah viewed the police and he further added that when he encounters police officers he considers their race prior to interacting with them as he described: “. . . I never look at White police. I only look at [the] Black ones.” Because of the recent media coverage of the police brutality Jeremiah has formed an opinion of police officers based on their race. Jeremiah stated that he and his family do not have conversations about the news stories, but if he were to bring up a topic from the news he would talk about the police. He expressed feeling unsafe around police officers and described his reasoning further, “. . . your hands are up and you put them down for something they just shoot you for no reason.” Similar to other participants, Jeremiah referenced the shooting of Michael Brown and described how individuals’ actions can lead to being in an unsafe position.

Throughout the follow-up interview we discussed topics around race and referenced Black and White groups of people. Jeremiah described the White groups of people as having greater economic wealth than Black groups of people and discussed how White people get to have pets like dogs, cats, fish, or hamsters but Blacks do not. He added further that White people have nicer houses and better schools. Jeremiah is part of the majority of students attending Manor Elementary who are bussed there. He had clearly observed the differences between the neighborhoods, thus recognizing neighborhood and school segregation.

Finally we discussed racial identity as I asked Jeremiah if his family had conversations about being Black and growing up in the United States. He initially said they didn’t have those conversations but went on and disclosed: “. . . you’re Black and you’re supposed to be proud of

it. . . I'm never gonna be proud [to be Black]!" Jeremiah did not appear to be satisfied with being Black and added that Black people today are treated similar to the days during the Civil Rights Movement as he said: "When you're Black people always pick on you. . . [For instance] cause how my face look." His descriptions explained further why he continued to wear a jacket throughout programming to cover his head and face. Jeremiah continued: ". . . I think I look ugly with the oval head. The head I have is an oval!" Jeremiah believed that his head was shaped different from his two brothers and because of this he did not like to show his face or hold his head up. Observing him during the daily interactions with his peers and servant leader intern provided more insight into the racial identity development of Jeremiah.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

A cross-case analysis was undertaken to identify similarities and differences in the participants' cases built from this study's multiple data sources (e.g., video recordings, interviews, observations). This analysis process involved hand coding the data in order to identify themes that emerged across cases, as well as data patterns within the themes.

Discussion of case similarities and dissimilarities is organized under the following themes: Parental Roles in Development, Early Literacy Development, Motivation to Read, Standardization of Literacy Curriculum in Traditional Schooling (Scripted Programs), Historical Teaching of the Civil Rights Movement, and Learning through Extracurricular Activities. These themes will be discussed relative to the study's conceptual framework built from the review of the literature on Black Identity Development, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Literacy, especially as the intersections of these literature bases converge in MO-CRiTLit. Additionally, the case congruencies and incongruencies will be discussed in relation to the following subthemes that emerged from one or more of the themes: ***Role of Servant Leader***

*Intern, Lack of Interaction with Multicultural Children's Literature in Traditional School, Access to Literature* and *Freedom to Question*. These subthemes are also discussed relative to the conceptual framework.

### **Parental Roles in Development**

Active parental engagement was evident throughout the data collection process and was consistent in the seven case studies. More specifically, the role of the mother was especially significant throughout the research study; specifically their commitment to the study and the relationship described by the child participants. Although Dation, Alex, and Alexis' father lived in the home, their mother demonstrated the dominant parental role in their educational development. Though single mothers raised Dre and Nyla, their mothers received additional support from loved ones (family members for Nyla and family friends for Dre). Throughout the data collection process each of the mother's provided valuable insight into their child's educational and social development identified during the parent interviews and their presence in the program.

Parent participants' descriptions of their interaction with administration during the traditional school year as compared to the interaction with program administration during Freedom School were very different, especially in terms of creating a safe space. Parents stated they felt more welcomed during the summer programming and suggested that their level of involvement was due to the invitation to take part in their children's learning in more intimate ways. Although the children's regular school had the traditional PTA meetings, it was not as inviting or frequent. The Freedom Schools program implemented a parent involvement component that included weekly parent meetings for families. The parent workshops focused on cultural and educational development for families in assisting to improve the learning process for

children. Research shows that a parental component increases parents engagement in their child's education and involvement with school activities, especially in high minority and low economic populations (De Gaetano, 2007).

### **Early Literacy Development**

Study participants described a strong support in their early literacy development, which included being read to at home by their parents, siblings, or both, as well as frequency of visits to the library (public and school), and being encouraged to read outside of school. The participants described being read to at home as well as reading with their family. The parents regularly encouraged their children to read. Regular visits to the school library and public library provided *access to literature* and an opportunity to select books to read for enjoyment. As part of the participants' *specials*, participants visited the library (described as the media center) and were able to engage with literature more frequently. The participants credit the school library for having a greater selection of texts compared to their traditional classroom libraries, but discussed hesitation of checking out books in fear of losing the text and having to pay for the lost book. In addition to being fearful of losing the texts, the participants described having difficulty in finding books that they were interested in or could relate to. All parent participants reported having an interest in visiting the public library with their child and understood that interactions with the literature was an important aspect in their children's literacy development. Similar to Krashen's (1993) findings, the parents also agreed that children who have consistent access to books are better prepared academically, hence, the importance of regular trips to the school library and public library were intricate. Regular visits to the school library and public library allow for children to explore, share, and choose books for reading for enjoyment, which is suggested to be

a powerful incentive in reading achievement (Krashen & McQuillan, 1996; Ramos & Krashen, 1998).

The participants valued the opportunity for choice in their reading materials, not just at home but during the program, especially during DEAR time. Throughout the program this was a clearly noticeable observation as they selected magazines, comic books, and MO-CRiTLit to read during non-classroom time as well (breakfast, lunch, or free play). The participants viewed literacy activities in a positive manner, did not have to record the text on their reading log and were intrinsically motivated to read.

### **Motivation to Read**

All participants described having a strong motivation to read and on average considered themselves good readers. The data revealed that having the option to choose the text provided participants with more motivation to read. Children who are afforded the option to choose their reading material are more motivated to read and make additional effort to read for leisure therefore simultaneously increasing their fluency and knowledge base (Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Hummenick, & Littles, 2007). Additionally, the participants stated the Freedom School's classroom culture and setting contributed to their growth and development as readers. Generally stating their shared literacy experiences fully engaged the emersion of their motivation to read. Although each of the participants described having high motivation to read prior to starting the program, there were two areas that the participants mentioned as reasons hindering their motivation to read during the regular school year, more specifically in their regular classroom:

- 1) reading in the traditional classroom was mostly for instructional purposes and connected to the work being completed in the classroom, not necessarily for enjoyment; and,

2) the lack of culturally relevant texts was apparent as the participants discussed the classroom as having a variety of leveled readers and a lack of texts that they could relate to as literature to read for enjoyment.

These reasons have shaped their views on their motivation to read leading to their performance in the classroom.

### **Standardized Curriculum in Traditional Schooling**

All of the participants reported having experienced learning from their teachers through a “scripted” standardized curriculum; that is, their teachers used predetermined and preassembled curriculum to deliver content. More specifically, participants mentioned their literacy curriculum as being leveled and scripted, which has resulted in a skewed view of their literacy achievement and educational expectations caused by a force adoption of high-stakes assessments. For Alex and Alexis the expectations of their most recent teachers were heavily embedded in the process of assessment. The participants described an emphasis being placed on the end of grade (EOGs) assessments and discussed the pedagogical practices as supporting the mastery of specific testing skills not necessarily the content that would ensure their long-term academic success. Schools serving a high population of African-American and Latino-American students place emphasis on a more narrowed standardized curriculum, more so than schools in culturally affirming contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This focus ensures that teachers teach content that will most likely be tested in the given year rather than content that is proven to be essential for students’ long-range success. For example, fluency was a topic that participants discussed as being an area of focus in their learning environment. Participants described a beginning of the year fluency level and end of year fluency level based on the classroom set of leveled reader texts. They also described having to master a specific level prior to advancing, even if the text was below their

reading levels, a common example of how low expectations are implicitly framed in classrooms (Banks, 2005; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2012). Additionally, participants had difficulty describing topics from the leveled readers, simply stating that the main focus was to read for fluency and not focus on comprehension through a critical literacy perspective. Participants described difficulty connecting with the text, almost ensuring they would retain little from these texts. They also believed that the texts in their classrooms were likely from a Eurocentric perspective because they had difficulty making even superficial connections with the text in general, and the characters in it specifically. The absence of these connections, along with their racial group not represented in the text left participants with a *lack of interaction with multicultural children's literature* in their traditional school curriculum, in contrast to the opposite experience with the Freedom School texts. There was a lack of interaction with multicultural children's literature in traditional classroom settings across all cases. Further, all participants described events that were part of their traditional schools as being ones that they couldn't connect to, not just because of the characters appearance, but also in the elaborated stories which they believed were fictitious in nature and unlikely to happen to them. Freire (1983) promoted the theory that culturally relevant reading material should be included in literacy instruction and pedagogical practices in order to engage students in the learning process as well as transforming individuals from learners to thinkers.

### **Historical Teaching of the Civil Rights Movement**

The child participants related learning through the use of MO-CRiTLit as a true, authentic, and rich depiction of historically underrepresented people of color during the Civil Rights Movement. The lack of national history core content standards makes it difficult to measure the expectations of student knowledge on the Civil Rights Movement. The Southern



Poverty Law Center (2014) recently reported, through examination of individual state standards, there is a need for integration of a comprehensive approach to civil rights education.

Child participants discussed their appreciation for historical content knowledge, especially during the interactive read-alouds. The participants reported having a *freedom to question* during the dialogue of the MO-CRiTlit. This practice was different from their traditional school year. Throughout the data collection process, various questions concerning civil rights were asked by the child participants and addressed by Ms. Emily. The topics included: marriage equality, the naming of Black people and the history of the “N” word, as well as the history of slavery, menstrual shows and segregation. Through these rich discussions, participants generated a progressive learning cycle that supported their cultural awareness and academic enrichment. Through these interactions with the SLI and the text, child participants also developed a strong personal connection with Ms. Emily. This made the *Role of the Servant Leader Intern* significant in their experience, particularly because it aided in their cultural awareness and was supported through a positive learning environment. As described by child participants, Ms. Emily enriched their experiences; noting she was *fearless* in her approach to facilitating dialogue around the topics introduced through the MO-CRiTlit.

### **Learning through Extra-Curricular Activities**

While access to literature and motivation to read were revealed in the data there was a theme that emerged as all participants recounted additional learning experiences. All of the participants identified a variety of learning through multiple undertakings of off campus field trips that included their visits to: amusement parks, learning centers, theatres, and museums. They describe these outings as being most memorable during their attendance in the Freedom School programming, because a majority of the students do not have access in their personal

lives for economic reasons and their regular public schools do not invest in these types of learning opportunities. While many metropolitan cities lack adequate parks, areas for outdoor recreation, and open space near homes, especially in low-income areas, the region in which the study was undertaken was filled with these opportunities (Byrne, 2012; Sherer, 2003; Wolch, Byrne, & Newell, 2014). The participants described their neighborhood as knowing all too well the inequities associated with economic hardship and a lack of access to these and other learning opportunities. While public parks were accessible, much of the equipment was old, outdated, and deemed unsafe by their parents. Furthermore, participants described this type of learning occurring during the Freedom School programming in the summer, because their regular public school was too focused on ensuring they were prepared for the assessments.

### **Brief Discussion of Change in Black Identity**

Child participant narratives, audio/video recordings of interactive read-alouds, and classroom observation were used to determine racial identity stages using Jackson's (1976b) Black Identity Development model by reviewing how each participant viewed their Black identity (as previously noted, the parent participant narratives also informed these determinations, see Appendix F). While all the child participants self-identified as Black, notable differences in their Black identity development came through in their case data. Initially, all the participants used largely non-expressly racialized words to describe physical attributes and express their Black identity (e.g., big hair). Through the interaction with the texts, related dialogue, and in making connections and disconnections between the characters in the text and their own lives, as well as in building cultural understandings, noticeable differences in how each participant perceived and experienced "being Black" emerged.

I assessed the child participants' level of connectedness to/disconnectedness from their race and racial group membership over the six weeks of the program using Jackson's (1976a) model of Black Identity Development relative to all data sources, and in conjunction with a peer reviewer (discussed further below). Some participants Black identity and related development was more explicit (Dre and Jeremiah), while others' (Alex and Brian) was more implicit. Racial salience (Sellers et al., 1997)—defined as the extent to which a person's race is a relevant part of their self-concept at a particular moment in time – is an assessment parameter, related to racial identity, introduced by my peer reviewer based on his recognition that it also varied in my participants and was much more explicitly positive in some participants' daily routine (Dre) and much more negatively so in other's (Jeremiah). Participants who made implicit racial identity connections and/or disconnections were more difficult to assess using salience or Jacksons (1976b) model—less explicitness meant that their racial identity salience and/or development could be interpreted in multiple ways, thus aligned with very different stages in Jackson's Black identity model. For example, while Dre, Dation, Alexis, Nyla, and Brian all recognized racial inequities and questioned racialized societal factors, but Alex and Jeremiah described being Black in ways that were not as distinct. Specifically, Jeremiah's narrative aligned closely with "White ideals" as he expressed the notion that Whites had an advantage over Blacks. Based on Jackson's (1976b) model, Table 3 (see Appendix D) explains the participants' assessed initial stage of Black identity based on their initial interview, and their assessed final stage is based on the data collected during their exposure to MO-CRiTLit. As delineated in Chapter 2, Jackson's (1976b) five identity stages are: 1) naïve, 2) acceptance, 3) resistance, 4) redefinition, and, 5) internalization. The change in the participants Black identity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

## **Role of the Peer Reviewer**

In addition to previous discussions of my decision to engage a peer reviewer, typically a peer reviewer provides an external check of the legitimacy of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). The legitimacy of this research, was checked by my peer reviewer through his asking me pointed questions about how I interpreted my participants' words, actions, and, together, their meaning generally, but specifically in the assessing their Black identity development (Creswell, 2013). As previously noted, my peer reviewer racially identifies as Black, is an emerging scholar in multicultural education, and has specific expertise in Black identity development.

My peer reviewer and I individually determined the participants' initial and final stages of Black identity development according to Jackson's model (1976a), then we compared our placements. As previously noted, we each assessed their initial stage of Black identity based on the participants' initial interviews (my peer reviewer reviewed their interview transcripts), and their final stage based on data collected during their exposure to MO-CRiTlit (my peer reviewer reviewed the classroom video/audio recordings). Somewhat unexpectedly, based on my concerns about my outsider racial identity status as previously discussed, there were strong similarities in both our initial and final placements across the participants.

## **CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided an overall introduction to this study including the rationale for research. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature and empirical research that informed the study. Chapter 3 outlined the methodological approach and design of the study. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the seven cases studies and the findings of the cross-case analysis.

In this chapter, a discussion of the emergent themes relative to the literature presented in Chapter 2 is provided. Additionally, a discussion of movement-oriented civil rights-themed multicultural literature (MO-CRiTlit) is presented to illustrate how the participants Black identity was specifically influenced through interactions with MO-CRiTlit. The implications and significance of the study are discussed relative to recommendations for further research, policy, and practice, especially in critical literacy and multicultural education. Finally, limitations of the study, discussed briefly in Chapter 3, are revisited, and conclusions, drawn from the study as a whole, are articulated.

### **Discussion of Emergent Themes Relative to the Research Questions**

In this section, I revisit the study emergent themes delineated in Chapter 4 relative to the study's main and ancillary research questions. As a reminder, these themes are: Parental Roles in Development, Early Literacy Development, Motivation to Read, Standardized Curriculum in Traditional Schooling (Scripted Programs), Historical Teaching of the Civil Rights Movement, and Learning through Extracurricular Activities; the main research question is: *How does "movement-oriented" Civil Rights-themed literature (MO-CRiTlit) influence the racial identity development of Black elementary aged children?*; and the ancillary research questions are: 1) *How do children use literature to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with*

*classmates, teachers, and/or characters in the text? 2) In what ways does culture relate to children's understandings about themselves and about others? 3) What types of cross cultural understandings can be learned through children's literature? and, 4) How are critical pedagogy and multicultural literature used in conjunction to provide students a foundation to make connections, disconnections, and dialogue about topics with other students their age?*

### **Parental Roles in Development**

The parents' role had an influence on the participants Black identity due to their own consciousness of their own Black identity and their parenting practices. Parent participants maintained this role throughout the study as they detailed how their approach to parenting has influenced their child's social, academic, and racial identity development, especially around discussions of race and academics with their children. The role of the mother was dominant in the study and influenced the child's development in positive and affirming ways. Mothers expressed having active involvement in activities outside of school to ensure their children had positive experiences around their social identity development, expressed having high expectations in their academic development, and played an active role in their child's understanding of racial identity development. Each of these roles were and are important in a child's development leading the mothers to discuss these topics with their children more often and intimately than they did with their own parents. Rice and Dolgin (2005) discuss how an individual's self and group identities begin to form prior to their school attendance, pointing to the importance of their development at home in shaping them through adolescence and into adulthood.

Parent socialization had an active role in their child's understanding of societal norms and their influence helped shape positive interpretations of their identity development. The

parents all described having high expectations for their children in and out of school. Parents described a strong commitment to ensuring success and constantly reinforced their goals for their children's success. The parent participants strived to assure that their children were not placed in groups that inappropriately labeled their children due to perceived deficits associated with race, class, and gender, by perceived academic ability.

Academic development was an area that the parents, again, strived to assure was addressed, specifically in regards to their children meeting and exceeding expectations. However, due to the school environment, many of the parents had a negative outlook on the administration and staff at Manor Elementary, but did not allow that situation to alter the expectations they set for their children. Alex's mother, Myah described a conversation with school administration and Alex's teacher regarding the end of the year assessments:

I came to the meeting and they gave me a [literacy] packet . . . I'm telling him [Alex] you got to pass this buddy . . . I stayed on him to [the point] where he leaped out of the third grade with straight B's.

The parents expected their children to maintain good grades and in general wanted their children to be successful. Academic success was vital to their child's development regardless of the career path they chose according to the parents.

Parents discussed recognizing patterns of racial discrimination in employment settings and these observations influenced the way that they approached parenting. A connection between school performance and advancement opportunities later in life influences a child's educational performance and may influence their Black identity (Ogbu, 2003). Dre's mother, Alicia described having conversations with Dre about the racial tensions that exist in society today and discussed the way that the media influences Dre's views of societal issues around race. While

she recognized that Dre was more outspoken than her other children, and even herself, she felt it was important to have conversations with him about social awareness and stereotypes. Alicia described how Dre was inquisitive, especially about what he sees on the news, stating:

. . . right now it's just the racial stuff like some of the stuff with the cops. That's all you see on the news pretty much . . . He will ask why would something [be] done a certain way and sometimes I don't know how to answer a certain question.

As a parent she recognized the impact it had on her child but expressed having difficulty addressing the questions and uncertainties that were displayed in the media. Alicia credited a close relationship with her friends as being a support in an effort to help her children understand the societal issues.

The parents recognized that negative stereotypes can possibly have an affect on their children. The media has influenced the participants' social identity and due to the increasingly higher number of topics that reported issues of race the participants Black identity may have been negatively affected.

### **Early Literacy Development**

All of the participants displayed a strong foundation in their literacy development, especially in their descriptions of how literacy was encouraged at home. They described being read to at home generally by their mother, reading aloud to siblings, and visiting the public library on a consistent basis. Assuring that children have access to texts is an important predictor of early literacy development, while a variety of text also influences motivation to read therefore impacting fluency (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Dickinson & Smith, 1994). The parent participants recognized the importance of their role in their child's literacy development and



created a positive space for this learning to occur by ensuring a print rich environment in the home and maintaining active participation in their activities

The parent participants described generally having a strong foundation in their own literacy development growing up which may in fact influence the way that they raise their children. All of the parent participants credited their children's interactions with culturally relevant literature to their enrollment in the Freedom School program. Myah (Alex and Alexis) described the program as having a large influence on her children's literacy development describing how challenges arose for Alex during the traditional school year: ". . . He was having a little issue . . . by coming to this program and learning the literacy . . . the reading . . . they make it very clear that it [literacy] is important." The parent participants stated that they viewed literacy as important and stressed the need for more culturally relevant texts in the traditional school setting. Parent participants disclosed their reasoning behind visits to the local library as opportunity to expose their children to literature where their children can see themselves represented in the text. Due to the use of MO-CRiTLit, child participants were able to connect to literature in a manner that, as they described, was very different from their traditional schooling; the participants described having difficulty connecting to the literature because they could not relate to the characters. As the participants recalled their interactions with the literature, they also detailed the connections they made personally with the literature and the characters. Nyla described having a connection to *In Her Hands: The Story of Augusta Savage* (Schroeder, 2009) and explained the connection with the main character as being similar in race as well as the types of activities that they enjoyed. Similar to Nyla, other participants experienced related connections and described these connections as being new learning experiences through

interactions with the literature, which led them to identify with characters and/or storylines in the MO-CRiTlit.

Parent participants' foundational focus on early literacy contributed to the way that their children viewed the importance of literacy development. Because the parents viewed early literacy development as a key indicator to their social and academic success, they understood the long-term benefits that mastering literacy would have on their children. Furthermore, because the parents could relate to difficulties they experienced as a child in regards to their own literacy development benefited their children as they pushed them to develop their literacy skills. For instance, Tony described not enjoying reading as a child and avoided the task as often as possible; however, once he began to make connections to the books and the characters he was more motivated to read. At home, Tony continuously strives to connect literacy activities to ideas that are relevant to his children's lives.

### **Motivation to Read**

The Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) combined with the dialogue during the facilitation influenced the participants' motivation to read. Through the use of MO-CRiTlit the participants were engaged with literature that they could connect to through the physical characteristics of the characters and the topics that were relevant to their history or life today. Given this strong motivation to read and interact with the books from the Freedom Schools program the participants Black identity was influenced through the interaction with MO-CRiTlit.

All participants considered themselves good readers and had a high motivation to read. The motivators for the participants varied across all cases, yet all participants had a strong desire to read choice texts (books that are selected specifically by the reader). Brozo, Shiel, and Topping (2008) argue that motivation must continue throughout a child's early education to

support their academic growth. The participants suggested a desire to see more MO-CRiTLit texts from the Freedom Schools program in their own classrooms and recognize that the texts in their libraries are highly related to the scripted curriculum program.

The participants described having a large interest in graphic novels – chapter books with a combination of pictures and text. Specifically there was a common preference for certain texts across child participants with the series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) *Dork Diaries* (Russell, 2014), and *Captain Underpants* (Pilkey, 2002) being the most prominent choices. More recently, graphic novels have increased in popularity because they are a relatively new format of texts in today's classrooms and libraries (Jennings et al., 2013). The participants described these texts as being some of their favorites due to the comic view style. These types of texts have been credited with increasing student motivation and comprehension due to the engaging illustrations aside the text (Jennings et al., 2013). However, because of the popularity the participants described difficulty in locating these texts in their classroom libraries and suggested that they visited the public library in order to gain access to these titles. The parents expressed familiarity with their interest in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2012) series and were said to have purchased individual books and/or the set to provide them the opportunity to fully engage with the texts.

During the parent interviews, parents expressed concern around the graphic novels due to the multiple pictures throughout the text. This is a common concern, as many parents have suggested that their children are not reading books on their reading level because of the various pictures. Due to the increased emphasis on the reading level by the teachers at Manor Elementary, a fallacy of what is or is not on their child's level has been created. While graphic novels may not specifically align with the reading levels in the classroom curriculum, Lavin (1998) notes

that students use more cognitive thinking skills during their reading of a graphic novel compared to a traditional novel because they are using cognitive functions while sequentially reading the illustrations. It is a common misconception that texts with illustrations are essentially a lower level text, which often influences the types of texts that parents provide for their children and in some cases may influence the types of texts that teachers provide in their classroom library.

Unfortunately, as students gain proficiency with text, teachers often tend to assign more print-heavy materials that include traditional novels, potentially removing the visuals that support motivation and ultimately comprehension (Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, 2013).

Furthermore, regular visits to the library (school and public) allow children opportunities to explore and choose texts ultimately for enjoyment, which is a powerful incentive for reading achievement (Ramos & Krashen, 1998). Similarly, Edwards (2009) and Snowball (2005) found that the use of graphic novels, especially with young readers, will improve reading comprehension and motivation. The participants described the main motivators as being culturally relevant and interesting. As discussed in the findings each participant identified texts from the Freedom Schools IRC that they would share with their family indicating that MO-CRiTLit influenced their motivation to read.

### **Standardized Curriculum in Traditional Schooling**

The participants reported their experiences in their traditional schooling as being highly integrated with a scripted standardized curriculum. With an emphasis on Eurocentric values the standardized curriculum may have hindered their Black identity development. Additionally, the participants described having few interactions with MO-CRiTLit in their traditional schooling. There was a common description of classroom libraries being connected to the standardized

curriculum and a lack of choice literature. For example, Dre and Jeremiah detailed their interpretation of the classroom libraries as:

Dre: like they label the books and they [teachers] tell you what level you [are] on and that's what category you go to [choose a book from].

Jeremiah: there are books that's not really chapter books . . . but there are levels of books like level A, B, C, or level O or P.

The participants reported having a lack of interest in the lesson activities and books that were implemented in their traditional classroom because they were far below their reading abilities and consisted of uninteresting story lines. All of the participants had difficulty identifying a book where they could relate to the characters in the text and this could have hindered their Black identity due to the lack of exposure.

Additionally, they described the teacher's pedagogical practices as being test-driven and having a strong implementation of "drill and kill" activities for students to practice skills for mastering the test as opposed to the content. As reported, a common literacy instructional practice included reading a passage and answering a set of questions (Tatum, 2000). This practice is very common for students in preparation for the end of the year standardized state tests. Unbeknownst to the students, their active engagement with these types of activities was preparing them for the assessment.

An important part of a reader's literacy development is the act of interactive read-alouds as it helps students to listen to a fluent reader and increases student motivation (Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih, 2012). However, there was a lack of integration of interactive read-alouds and multicultural literature in the classrooms. While research suggests that teacher read-alouds across all grade levels support literacy instruction (Dreher, 2003; Martin,

1993; Richardson, 2000; Sipe, 2000; Trelease, 1989), the participants reported occasional read-alouds by their traditional teacher. Alexis and Dre recounted their most recent teachers practices:

Alexis: . . . she reads stories about the holidays, when it's holidays time.

Dre: . . . Maybe [she reads] once a week.

While a majority of educators agree that frequent teacher read-alouds are important (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) they have difficulty implementing them as they are tasked with a standards based approach to teaching that does not promote bending the pre-packed curriculum. Additionally, there have been various studies on teacher read-alouds (Bintz, 1993; Elley, 1992; Ouellette, Dagostino, & Carifio, 1999) but a lack of discussion around the processes that effective teachers use to implement read-alouds and enhance student learning.

Another key element to interactive read-alouds is the opportunity for teachers to introduce literature that the students may not generally have the opportunity to view, mostly due to the standardized Eurocentric curriculum used in U.S. schools (Hedrick & Pearish, 2003; Morrow, 2003). The participants of the study reported a lack of interaction with multicultural children's literature in their traditional school. Moreover, participants discussed having insufficient opportunity to discuss topics outside of the traditional curriculum not only because of standardization but because their teachers were unwilling or unable to provide meaningful discussion around the text, contrary to Ms. Emily's approach. The participants described the discussions around MO-CRiTLit in the Freedom Schools classroom as being unlike their traditional school where asking questions was not a common practice. Additionally, participants noted that it was uncommon for their teachers to discuss community and current events during their traditional schooling, yet these topics were discussed daily during the Freedom Schools

program, especially during cooperative group activities around social action. Alex described that when he did have questions regarding current events, it was only discussed if time allowed and if it directly related to what they were learning in class, adding: “Sometimes kids be bringing it [news stories] up and when we have spare time we talk about it.” Contrary to their traditional school experiences the participants experienced a different approach to learning during the Freedom Schools. The participants demonstrated that their interest in listening to the interactive read-alouds enabled them to connect with others, express themselves, and make sense of the world. This was revealed through the data as the participants actively engaged in the interactive read-alouds of the MO-CRiTLit. Furthermore, they were exposed to multiple texts where the characters and/or storyline in the text were ones that they could relate to.

### **Historical Teaching of the Civil Rights Movement**

The Historical Teaching of the Civil Rights Movement positively influenced the participants Black identity. The Civil Rights Movement remains to be the least taught topic in American PK-12 history classes and often viewed as important for specific regions or groups of people specifically southern states and children of color, but not others (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). Geographically, participants attend a traditional school in Jamestown (pseudonym) in the southern state of the United States and have benefited from a more detailed teaching of the historical time period due to additional teacher resources and connection to the movement in their traditional schooling. An examination of the individual southern state where the study was conducted was valuable as it provided indication of the level of expectation for teacher delivery of content. According to the report, the southern state received a “B” which indicated that there was a commitment to educating students about the Civil Rights Movement

however, noted that there is room for improvement for teachers to enhance their teaching (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014).

During the initial participation in the Freedom School program the participants knew familiar names (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Ms. Rosa Parks) and phrases (I have a dream), literature suggests these terms as the most related names connected to the Civil Rights Movement (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). Throughout the Freedom School program, participants detailed specific learning experiences that led them to develop an additional awareness of the historical events of the Civil Rights Movement and other people involved in the movement. In addition to learning the historical teachings participants also detailed how in contrast to their traditional schooling they had gained an appreciation and love for reading texts that they could relate to the characters, illustrations, values, and ideas (Boutte, 2009). The participants embodied these traits, which was evident in the data as they described relating to each trait. As an example, Brian saw a relationship between his own physical characteristics and the main character in *Tutankhamen's Gift* (Sabuda, 1994), while holding the book next to his face and pointing at the character stating: “see me and him look the same . . . see? BLACK!” Brian described the racial similarities between him and the main character in the text. Throughout the program Brian and other participants often recognized the physical similarities of the characters. Alexis described a connection to the illustrations during the dialogue around Jim Crow laws through the text *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013): “I was feeling sad and disappointed when the people did that [painted their face black] cause they’re making fun of African Americans.” Alexis utilized critical literacy skills to question the text and dialogue about the issues of power, privilege, and oppression, even though they were not taught to use critical literacy through the traditional school curriculum. This demonstrated the unique



strategies for creating motivation embedded in the Freedom School programming. Wiseman's (2012) research on the relationship between reading achievement and race was relevant as the participants described conversations about the literature and the affect it has on comprehension as well self-identity.

The values of the MO-CRiTLit provided the participants with factual and accurate recounts of the historical events of the Civil Rights Movement. The participants gained an understanding of the values related to these specific texts as noted in Dation's description of how he interpreted *Ashley Bryan's Puppets* (Bryan, 2014): ". . . it inspires you [to know] that you can do something [or anything you want to do] in your life and you should never give up [on whatever goals you set for yourself]." Participants identified multiple messages during the read-alouds, IRC facilitation, dialogue, and activities while in Freedom Schools. These three examples affirmed the participants as young children of that through a student-centered pedagogy they could become critically literate while questioning the power and misrepresentation in texts. Even Jeremiah, the least racially affirmed participant in this study, described connections to the literature and the ideas discussed in which he related to the text. His most vivid description of these connections was demonstrated after reading *The Honest to Goodness Truth* (McKissack, 2000): ". . . she [Libby] is telling the truth too much which wasn't the good truth. It was the bad truthness but all she was doing was telling the truth but she was telling the truth that no one liked." The main character of this story (Libby) had been in trouble for not telling the truth to her mother. Her mother demanded that she always tell the truth and in doing so, Libby hurt other people's feelings because she was completely honest. For instance, Libby told her teacher when her friend Willie had failed to complete his homework. Eventually, Libby's mother discussed

with her how to assure she was telling the honest-to-goodness truth. The participants used their connections through the traits to relate their learning to the real world (Freire, 1970).

Drawing upon the newfound knowledge of historical events of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s the participants suggested that there are still inequities and civil rights issues that exist in society today. Dre explained this idea when he said: “. . . Now they’re [Blacks and Whites] treated equally sometimes. Except like when Whites are killing Black people for no reason and stuff like that.” The participants inquired about the recent police brutality issues between those in authority and young Black men, as well as the multiple church shootings during the summer of 2015 in South Carolina. Fortunately, Ms. Emily helped unpack many of the questions that they had not only about the current events but also including the historical events of the civil rights movement. The participants recognized, and later reported, that Ms. Emily had a unique approach to her teaching. Alex described her approach as being different from his regular school experiences in this way: “Um in regular school we don’t get to ask a lot of questions cause there’s more people [and not enough time to get to all of us].” Due to the small class size in Freedom Schools, there were more opportunities for participants to ask questions and fully engage in dialogue about a variety of topics, while gaining an understanding. Furthermore, in the traditional school setting, the focus is teacher-centered as the teachers are viewed as the depositors of information as described in Freire’s banking model (Freire, 1970). The Freedom School program, specifically in this case Ms. Emily focused on the participants as being knowledgeable and affirmed their comments within the discussions.

Ms. Emily used critical pedagogy to express her knowledge and passion for social justice, while educating the scholars on things most teachers, White, Black, or otherwise may shy away from. The scholars described Ms. Emily as knowledgeable and recognized that she did not refuse

to answer any questions that the participants solicited. Dre explained what he learned from Ms. Emily's teachings during his first summer in the Freedom Schools program:

A lot! History! Like how we going out and using these words that we really don't know the meaning of. We just be goin' out and sayin' it just to say it . . . Like curse words, she taught us the history of curse words . . . She said that White people used to call Black people Negroes. And then the word changed and now these days people use it as in their souls and meaning friend . . . If you're gonna call them your friend you should just say bruh or friend or brother or somethin' like that instead of using that word cause there's a lot of history behind it.

Dre also described how this newly acquired knowledge gave him agency and said he would inform others of the historical foundations of the "N-word," suggesting that the next time he heard someone use it he would teach them the history behind it in an effort to enlighten others as to why he chose not to use the word. This not only displayed an increase in knowledge and awareness in participants, but also a proliferation in their ability to advocate for themselves and others through a sense of responsibility. Collectively, the participants reported a strong connection to the dialogue and the MO-CRiTlit; the participants further explained that when given the opportunity to share what they learned from the Freedom School program they would certainly incorporate MO-CRiTlit to inform others of their history. Nyla described having a desire to share the book *Separate is Never Equal* with her mother after participating in the Freedom School program: "I want to talk to my mom about this book and read it to her . . . In this book another group of people were treated badly too / the Latino people." Ann initially reported that Nyla was unmotivated to learn and rarely discussed anything positive during the

traditional school year. Through the interaction with MO-CRiTLit in the Freedom Schools, she reacquired a love for learning, especially through culturally centered material.

All of the participants had a connection with Ms. Emily. She was extremely approachable during the facilitation of the interactive read-alouds, during the cooperative group activities and during the extracurricular activities. Child participants described their relationship with Ms. Emily as one of mutual respect, concern, and understanding for each other. When describing her classroom, Ms. Emily explained that she wanted to create a setting that was student-centered where the participants could be creative, trusting, and in control of their learning. Through the observations of the cooperative group activities it was evident that there was a level of comfort between the participants and Ms. Emily. During the first week of the program, while working in cooperative groups for the activity around the text *Grandma's Gift* (Velasquez, 2010), Ms. Emily was situated between scholars as she assisted with creating a visual representation of Harriet Tubman, a liberated slave from the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the cooperative group activity she rotated between the groups to check for understanding and informally assessed their learning. This process allowed her, as the facilitator, to determine if she needed to revisit a topic based on the participants' interpretation and visual representations of the text. As she worked with the groups of participants, other participants were able to enjoy soft and soothing stimulating music as they completed the activities. Participants freely move around the room to obtain and return supplies, view their peers' work, and discuss the activities with each other. On this day, as the cooperative group activity came to a close, the participants reconvened at the reading circle to share their work. This process allowed for the participants to discuss what they learned and ask questions. In this particular closing activity, Dre and Alex questioned where slaves slept as they were traveling to the plantations. Ms. Emily responded:

They slept in what I think were huts. Like shacks with no floors in them. Remember when we read *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1992) and they would sleep on the ground and sleep on trees or in a graveyard at one point . . . they would travel for days and months on end without seeing a real bed.

The participants were silent after Ms. Emily's explanation. Then, Alex broke the silence: "That's scary sleeping in a graveyard!" Noticing that the discussion was going in another direction Ms. Emily thanked the participants for their active engagement in the discussion and expressed her curiosity for learning about what the remainder of the participants learned who had not yet had the opportunity to share. The critical pedagogical practices demonstrated that Ms. Emily was culturally aware and present in terms of the feelings that arose from this discussion as well as the participants' attempts to change the direction of the discussion or task because it had become an uncomfortable topic.

The participants credited a majority of their learning experiences to the culturally relevant curriculum and Ms. Emily's affirming pedagogical practices. Utilizing MO-CRiTLit provided an unique opportunity for the participants to engage with literature and dialogue about historical events, heroic beings, and historical modern civil rights issues, which are similar to the same issues that the participants experience today.

### **Learning through Extracurricular Activities**

Learning through extracurricular activities influenced the participants Black identity through the social interaction with peers, the interaction with Ms. Emily, and teamwork during field trips. Throughout the program there were multiple activities planned weekly and the participants had access to additional learning that emphasized teamwork and camaraderie through first time experiences with nature. The outings provided an opportunity for participants

to interact with other attendees of the program outside of their classroom and build relationships with additional program staff. Furthermore, while the participants described a desire to physically engage in outdoor activities, they did not have access to safe and appropriate spaces in their own neighborhoods or school. Research has highlighted the need for children to have access to *play* outdoors; however, spaces are generally created to reflect the needs for the dominant culture, validating their values, and dismissing others (Matthews & Limb, 1999). Brian described the expectations during traditional schooling stating: “. . . we barely even go on field trips . . . all we gotta do is just [s]tay at [s]chool.” Throughout the program participants visited local area attractions including theatres, swimming pools, museums, and state parks. Many of the participants had not had prior experiences in the local area attractions prior to the summer program, due to limited access. The organization that operated the local Freedom School programming recognized the need for additional learning; therefore they created a context that provided extracurricular activity opportunities to extend the program participants learning. As an example of this extended learning, participants visited a state park during week 5. This particular outing was memorable for participants as they described firsthand experiences with nature. During this daylong field trip participants were engaged in activities including paddle boating, swimming in an area lake, and miniature golf. As participants recalled details from this outing they described the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and trust for one another.

The program purposefully included extracurricular activities because of the benefits that it provided the programs attendees. Individuals who have access to outdoor activities support human health through physical activity, stronger immune systems, and cognitive functions, which reduces stress, depression, and the influences of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Taylor, Kuo, Spencer, & Blades, 2006; Townsend & Weerasuriya, 2010). Furthermore,

children's connection to the outdoors and related activities can lead to reduced negative emotions, reduced rates of child obesity, increased attention span, and improved social interactions (Bowler, Buygun-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010; Kuo, 2010; Munoz, 2009).

The participants described fresh connections to the outdoors during these activity trips and these connections influenced their racial identity due to increased positive social interactions with peers and program staff. Participants also connected their learning during the extracurricular activities to the MO-CRiTLit from the IRC, as explained by Dation in discussing his overall experience of the program during the summer of 2015: "It was fun and it was like / I experienced a lot of stuff like we go on field trips, I see new things, and when we read books I learn more stuff than I knew during school time." The IRC provided opportunity for the participants to connect to the literature inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, due to the flexibility of the afternoon activities the organization was able to plan outings that aligned with participant needs. This was illustrated as Myah shared an example of how participant needs were met as she explained a tragedy that occurred during the 2013-2014 school year at Manor Elementary when one of Alex and Alexis' classmates drowned while trying to save thier sibling who fell in a creek. Acknowledging this event, the organization assures that the program participants visit a local swimming facility multiple times during the six-week program to strengthen their ability to swim and their confidence around this activity.

Each of these themes imparted evidence of the influence that MO-CRiTLit had on the participants during their experiences in the Freedom Schools program. The discussion provided rich examples of how the participants interacted with the literature and how their exposure to the MO-CRiTLit influenced their Black identity.

## Discussion of MO-CRiTlit

There are multiple categories situated under the umbrella of multicultural children's literature (e.g., religion, social groups, gender, families, race, etc.) providing opportunity for children to expand their knowledge and understandings about various topics. The texts that were used in this study introduced topics that were not necessarily available to the participants during the regular school year or in their school library but were culturally relevant to the lives of the participants.

Texts such as *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (Shelton, 2013), *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001), *This is the Rope* (Woodson, 2013), and *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* (Velasquez, 2014) discussed issues of segregation, historical events of the Civil Rights Movement, and societal inequities. Additionally, the use of texts around cultural experiences such as *Grandma's Gift* (Velasquez, 2010), *The Patchwork Quilt* (Flournoy, 1985), *A Gift From Papa Diego* (Sáenz, 1998), and *Cowboys: Reflections of a Black Cowboy* (Miller, 2004) allowed for participants to connect to the literature relative to their own lives and families (as presented in the findings in Chapter 4). The texts represented the lives of the participants in that characters introduced were ones they could relate to in the literature. Additionally, because the participants had few interactions with MO-CRiTlit outside of the Freedom School program, the critical pedagogical practices of Ms. Emily and MO-CRiTlit culturally affirmed them, which influenced their Black identity. Through the implementation of MO-CRiTlit and the facilitation of the lessons the participants were able to construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with the literature.



### **Discussion of Changes in Black Identity through MO-CRiTlit**

Participants' racial identity was influenced by all the themes (parental roles in development, early literacy development, motivation to read, standardized curriculum in traditional schooling, historical teaching of the Civil Rights Movement, and learning through extracurricular activities). The parental role was significant because the parent took their own adolescent experience into account when deciding what to do in order to promote positive social and academic behaviors in their children. This led to the enhancement of their children's early literacy development, especially in terms of the types of literature they read. Because of their interactions with MO-CRiTlit, participants were able to gain knowledge not accessible to them during the regular school year, and this also increased their parents' awareness to expose them to even more literature that was not necessarily available during their educational experiences, which ultimately led to increased visits to the library. The Freedom School program also assisted with this by providing the participants with books to take home and build their own home libraries, leading to a greater motivation to read. The increased motivation was unique to each participant in terms of connections to the literature, their attitudes towards reading, and learning in general was positive during Freedom School. Due to the participants positive attitude towards the program they were more receptive to the critical pedagogical practices and the implementation of the culturally relevant curriculum, which led to an increase in awareness for race as well as historical events. Additionally, the curriculum affirmed their inner self and generated a knowledge base that was grounded in Black history.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, the participants' Black identity was determined based on the data collection process, reporting of the findings, and analysis in conjunction with a peer reviewer. The participants each had their own unique experiences with MO-CRiTlit, which

influenced their Black identity. Brian described having difficulty with his peers which halted his social development. His behavior in the classroom kept him from effectively building appropriate relationships. Jeremiah also had similar difficulties, but for very different reasons. Jeremiah was a quiet student, and had no observable behavioral issues in Freedom Schools, but had self-identity issues, especially in regards to physical image. He described White ideals as being better and suggested that his view of being Black will never be positive because he believed that: “Blacks do not have fun and are also not allowed to have pets” linking these attributes to Whites. Jeremiah’s identity was more influenced by Whiteness, which showed his resistance to Black identity affirmation because of his parent’s socialization, explaining that Black people were not often viewed positively in the home. Despite his parents views of negative images of Black people at home the books allowed him to see Black people in a positive way. For example, Jeremiah described his connection to the main character in the text *Kid Caramel Private Investigator: The werewolf of PS40* explaining that he too could be a private investigator. Additionally, the diverse Freedom Schools program staff affirmed the scholars daily through connections with MO-CRiTLit and positive interactions. The characteristics described by the participants, analysis of the interview transcripts, and analysis of the audio/video recordings were used to determine the participants Black identity stage.

Unlike White parents, Black parents and parents of children of color are thought to help their children understand their racial identity at personal and societal levels and encourage them to develop responses for the negative encounters they may face during their interactions with others (Hughes, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2006). This idea is confirmed in the work of Cross (1971) and Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith (1997) in discussing how people of color must contend with the perceptions of their race and the abilities associated with their racial

groups that Whites don't because of positioning in societal structures, especially regarding social norms. The participants in the study had little interaction with individuals from other racial groups due to their neighborhood and school environments, which impacted their racial identity in negative ways. Their neighborhoods and classrooms demographically represented their Black racial group and the media had a prominent influence on the ways that the participants viewed White people, particularly those in authoritative roles. The Freedom School program helped counter this impact by providing them a safe, culturally affirming environment that included critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and positive interactions with the staff and a variety of community members in authoritative roles.

In examining the child participants Black identity it is important to highlight that identity is not linear and the child participants racial identity mirrored this non-linear movement. As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants stage of Black identity were determined prior to their exposure to MO-CRiTlit to determine how their interaction with the literature influenced their Black identity. The initial stages are reiterated in Figure 1. The child participants Black identity stage post-exposure to MO-CRiTlit is illustrated on the continuum of the Black identity development model (Jackson, 1976a) in Figure 2.



Figure 1 *Initial Stages in Black Identity*. Interpretation of Black identity pre-exposure to MO-CRiTLit

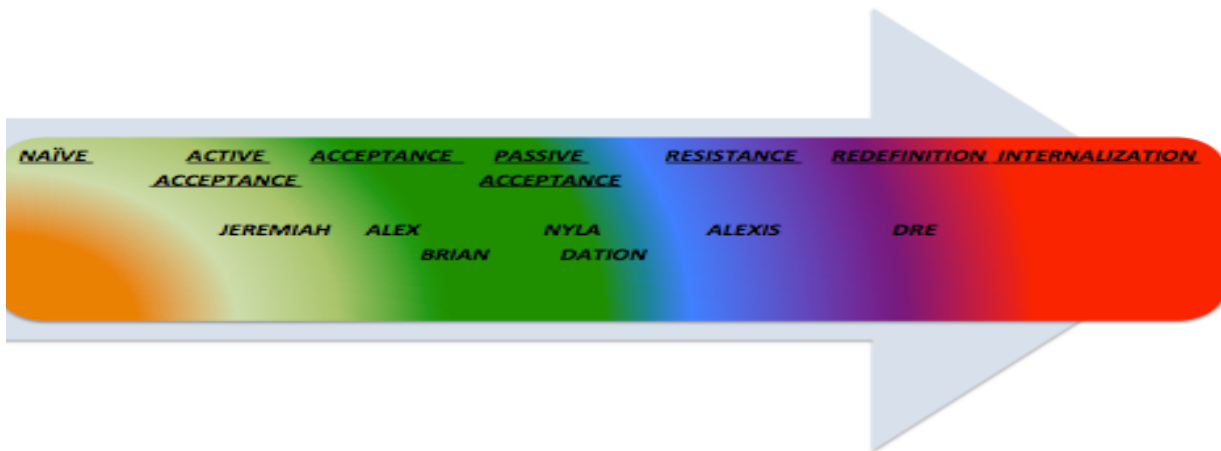


Figure 2 *Final stage in Black Identity*. An interpretation of Black identity post exposure to MO-CRiTLit

The stages represent how the child participants navigate their identity and the stages in which they are in based on Jackson's (1976a) model at the conclusion of this study. In the study, Jeremiah displayed the least racially affirmed consciousness; active acceptance and Dre exhibited the most awareness; redefinition in terms of Black identity. As illustrated, all other participants post exposure stages was situated on the continuum between stage 2; acceptance and

stage 4, redefinition. Nyla and Dation who identified further in stage 2, passive acceptance demonstrated a stronger consciousness, which indicated they would be progressing to stage 3; resistance with further dialogue and exposure to MO-CRiTlit. Additionally, while the participants racial identity may not have substantially changed throughout the duration of the study it certainly provided a safe space for the child participants to freely discuss topics and events that have influenced their Black identity development in a different and positive way while developing a consciousness to Black identity through MO-CRiTlit.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study are positioned around multicultural education, literacy, teacher pedagogy, and Black identity. Each of these areas was evident in the analysis of the findings and through examining the findings and emergent themes through the conceptual framework.

Much of the existing research on multicultural education and teacher pedagogy examines pedagogical practices and curriculum development in PK-12 classrooms (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih, 2012) where a majority of the teachers are White and an increasingly diverse student population (Horsford, 2011, 2014). The participants in this study described a curriculum that is pre-packaged and pre-determined to meet specific standards based content during the traditional school year. All the participants described an enriching learning experience during the Freedom Schools program due to the building of knowledge and cultural understandings (Nieto & Bode, 2012) introduced in the Freedom Schools curriculum.

The pedagogical practices and the culturally relevant curriculum implemented in the Freedom Schools program are inclusive of building classroom cultures that support student

achievement and influence a higher motivation to read. Though this setting is uncommon in a traditional school setting it is still one that can be achieved.

### **Multicultural Education**

There is a need for multicultural education across traditional schooling practices to ensure a more equitable education for all children but especially children of color who are faced with institutionalized racial stigmas. The use of culturally relevant pedagogy (Delpit, 1996; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994) must play a central role in classrooms. Teaching that openly addresses issues of power structures and racism in schools helps to ensure that all students are receiving an equitable education. Teachers must recognize how school climate has an effect on students and families of color. Specifically, teachers should acknowledge their own deficit-based notion of diverse students and critically think about how they implement culturally relevant pedagogies to ensure they do not reinforce prejudiced behavior (Howard, 2003). Critical pedagogical practices are a main component to ensuring a more robust education for children of color.

Moreover, teachers must also examine the content of the material that is being delivered. Due to the overarching reality of pre-packaged curriculum that is widely Eurocentric in values, teachers must be prepared to address the needs of their students of color as well as the White students (Delpit, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994). When examining the content they are expected to teach, teachers will need to consider if the perspectives and voices of people of color are present in the materials so that they can bridge the connection for the students of color and the content in the curriculum. This study illustrated how it is possible to weave MO-CRiTLit into a culturally relevant curriculum and provide students with different perspectives from their traditional schooling. Additionally, the participants worked collaboratively to complete activities learning

from each other. This process, while possibly difficult to complete in traditional schooling (because of the emphasis on standardized learning) would enhance the process of learning for students of color. For example, when teachers incorporate a wider selection of literature including those texts that allow for students of color to connect to the story there is a greater motivation for educational success.

Creating a welcoming and safe space for learning is a major component for a multicultural education. Teachers have reported more positive interactions with students of the same ethnicity than those who have a different ethnic background (Saft & Pianta, 2001), and White teachers have been shown to have more positive interactions with White students than with African American students (Casteel, 1998). In an effort to change this pattern, teachers must be supported with professional development so that their interactions with children of color are ones that are affirming to the student. Like Ms. Emily, the need for fearlessness in teaching practices will demonstrate to students that it is acceptable to question issues of power, privilege, and inequities.

## **Literacy**

Much of the existing research in the area of critical literacy for educators is focused on in-service teachers and emphasizes critically framed strategies to implement with students (Rogers, 2014). There is some research that highlights the need for pre-service teachers to be exposed to the critical literacy framework (Maloch, Mosley-Wetzel, & Hoffman, 2015). Teacher education programs should provide detailed instruction for future educators so they too develop a critical literacy consciousness. Professional development for in-service teachers would support their teaching and promote the use of critical pedagogy. Furthermore, critical literacy is an approach used to teach students to “read the word and the world” (Freire, 1970, 1972, 1985;

Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 4) and should not be confused with a strategy used by teachers. The process of critical literacy can be understood as learning to recognize issues of power, privilege, and oppression in the world and using this consciousness to address the societal injustices that exist (Freire, 1970).

Children's literature can be implemented to connect students to historical and real life events. Recognizing that while the standardized curriculum is often the foundation used in public education today children's literature should be used to enhance teachings. Specifically, using authentic MO-CRiTLit throughout the duration of the year as opposed to specific times of the year (holidays, heroic birthdays, Black History month etc.) increases a student's awareness and appreciation for literature, thus leading to a greater motivation to read. Additionally, with the use of a critical literacy framework the students will recognize and question power structures in classrooms, schools, and society as a whole. Furthermore, through the process of teaching students the mechanics of reading, self-efficacy and agency are developed encouraging them to be change agents. This study exemplified how literature not only motivates children to read but also presented the notion that the participants recognized their own self-efficacy and agency.

### **Teacher Pedagogy**

The structure of education should not be one that simply applies a multicultural approach or perspective to the scripted standardized curriculum rather it should be conveyed through the pedagogical practices of educators. With the focus on the students, a multicultural education would teach children how to construct and deconstruct concepts with their classmates and/or teachers, learn about cultures (their own and others), and give students a strong foundation to connect their academic learning to their social development. Teachers should be prepared to engage all students in their classroom and recognize when an individual student or group of



students who share similar characteristics are disconnected. In addition, they need to know how to reengage students effectively to assure academic success (CDF, 2007). Ultimately, the idea of multicultural education should be reflected in both pedagogy and content as discussed above (Banks, 2007; Delpit, 2012; Nieto, 2010).

### **Black Identity**

Early research on Black children's racial identity used dolls to explore how growing up in a segregated society impacted children's views on stereotypical traits related to their racial group (Clark & Clark, 1939). While other researchers have duplicated this study, research related to the process of racial identity development among African American youth remains limited (Oyeshiku-Smith et al., 2009). This study examined how MO-CRiTlit influenced the Black identity of participants in a non-traditional school context. This setting is unique due to the context of the Freedom Schools program. However, the pedagogical practices and implementation of MO-CRiTlit can be combined in a traditional classroom environment with proper training and support for teachers to positively influence Black identity. Various factors influence identity development and additional research in school settings would impact the use of pedagogical strategies and curriculum development.

### **Significance of the Study and Implications for Further Research, Policy, and Practice**

This study is significant as it examined how MO-CRiTlit influenced the racial identity of Black children in the context of a Freedom Schools program. The participants provided similar descriptions of what literacy instruction looked like in their traditional schooling. Through the participants attendance in the Freedom School program they experienced an unfamiliar approach to learning about historical events through MO-CRiTlit, which ultimately transformed the way that they viewed literacy instruction and influenced their Black identity. This study has

significance and implications for further research and practice in the areas of high stakes testing, culturally relevant curriculum, and the Freedom Schools movement.

### **High Stakes Testing**

The participants' experiences in traditional schooling were important in their social and racial identity development. The study presented an emphasis on strategies that support the assessment process and high stakes testing including the practice test packets provided for students and families to increase their reading achievement. The educational policies continue to place emphasis on standardized tests that have ultimately created barriers for students of color.

Teachers have adopted a test-driven approach to increase the achievement of struggling readers (Tatum, 2000). Unfortunately, with the implementation of test-driven instruction lie lower reading achievement scores for readers (Smith, 1991), specifically for students of color who already demonstrate difficulty connecting to the Eurocentric curriculum and are then expected to meet the standards on the standardized tests. Due to the lack of achievement on these standardized tests many students will remain in the margins of society and never reach their full potential.

Educational policy must develop a process to measure teacher performance other than the use of high stakes testing as teachers are forced to focus on teaching to the test to assure that students demonstrate mastery. Again, the ongoing fact remains that students of color are faced with the inequitable education and opportunity, as they are not represented in the curriculum.

### **Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

Due to the continued focus on standardized education the need for further research in the area of teacher education programs would inform researchers of gaps that pre-service teachers face and provide an effort to ensure that teachers are being prepared to enter the diverse field of

education. Additionally, with the majority of the teaching profession being comprised of European-American, middle class, monolingual, and often lacking experience with diverse populations (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Wood, 2009; Zeichner, & Hoeft, 1996), it is crucial that further research examine the best practices that cultivate classroom-learning experiences which are culturally responsive – specifically through the use of a culturally relevant curriculum.

Teachers may recognize that their students come from various communities and cultural settings and it is vital that they understand how power structures impact their students. In traditional PK-12 public school settings the use of a Eurocentric curriculum that is aligned with the cultural experiences of White students puts children of color at a disadvantage because they can't connect to the curriculum. Furthermore, additional research on the approaches around critical pedagogical practices used to engage students in learning through a student-centered curriculum would benefit all students' not just students of color.

A wide selection of children's literature to include topics that teachers often refrain from discussing such as racism, religious beliefs, gender equity, and socioeconomic statuses supports teachers as they incorporate ideas that are relevant to children's lives today.

### **Freedom Schools**

Limited research has been conducted in the context of the Freedom School program and it is an area that would benefit from additional studies due to the critical consciousness it developed amongst the child participants in this study.

The participants all described connections to the literature, identified with characters in the stories from the IRC and related to the experiences in the stories. To date, little research has been conducted on racial identity development in children (Oyeshiku-Smith et al., 2009). The topic often elicits resistance when the focus is on race and racism (Tatum, 2003) due to possible

levels of discomfort. Additional research exploring how children navigate their identity in society today; a society where being Black is not always viewed in a positive light would be beneficial.

There was a significant difference between the traditional school setting to the Freedom School setting as described by the participants. In addition to the interaction with MO-CRiTLit Ms. Emily implemented unique strategies throughout the facilitations. The context of the study was unique in that the SLI, Ms. Emily was not a licensed teacher yet she exemplified confident and courageous behaviors as she engaged the child participants in the daily interactive read-alouds. Through the model of the Freedom School program it is not required that SLIs are in the field of education. In fact, a small percent of SLIs are education majors with a majority of the SLIs being young people committed to social activism. Ms. Emily's foundational knowledge and educational background served as an advantage. Emily described brief discussions with three other level two SLIs from Manor Elementary who were all education majors and she described their experiences as different in that they had difficulty discussing topics with the participants. Ms. Emily's pedagogical practices were so different from her peers and her teaching had positive influence on the participants racial identity development. Had the study been conducted in one of the other three level two classrooms the findings may have been different. While research as been conducted around teacher development in the Freedom Schools program (Davis, 2001; Jackson & Howard, 2014) further research in the area of training and development specific to the SLIs would be valuable. Additional research would possibly offer additional approaches for teacher educators and in-service teachers as they engage their students in the academic setting, particularly using critical pedagogical practices to deliver content.

The participants in this study were unique for this particular research but they are not unique in the larger scale of student experiences in the educational context today. The traditional school and Freedom School settings are similar in that the classrooms are diverse. Yet, students are faced with a lack of student centered pedagogical practices that are on a test-driven platform where teachers are too fearful to move away from the pre-packaged curriculum. All children would benefit from additional research in the areas discussed, as it is fundamental for teacher educators, pre-service and in-service teachers, ultimately affecting student achievement.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study relate primarily to the participants, site location, and the role of the researcher.

### **Participants**

All of the participants in the study self-identified as Black and had completed grade 3-5 during the 2014-2015 school year. For relative purposes, also exploring the interaction with MO-CRiTlit of participants from other racial backgrounds may have furthered the analysis and, possibly it's findings. For example, if this study explored the way that White and Latino students, as well as Black students interact with MO-CRiTlit, more information regarding how educators implement the use of children's literature in their classrooms, to all students, as well as to various racially specific groups might have emerged from the findings. Additionally, the focus of this study was on a group of participants of a specific age (8-12 years) and grade (3-5 grade). It may have led to different findings if the focus had been different aged students in a higher or lower leveled grade. For example, if the study considered how students in grades 9-12 interacted with MO-CRiTlit there may be additional findings on the ways that students un-pack societal issues around race.

## **Site Location of Study**

This Freedom School program could be viewed as a limitation as it doesn't focus on the traditional schooling of the participants in the nine-month school year. The design of the Freedom Schools program is much different from the traditional school setting. In Freedom Schools the participants are actively engaged in activities like Harambee and the design of the program is centered on literacy. Traditional schooling implements a complete curriculum around all subject areas including math, history, literacy, and science, although some of the subjects like history and science are limited to the allotted instruction time.

The Freedom School program is implemented in multiple regions across the United States. In designing this study, my intention for selecting this location was based on the research partnership created prior to the study. In an effort to avoid logistical concerns this specific location was best suited for this study and the timeline. This study could have been conducted at any Freedom School program site as the culturally relevant curriculum is implemented across the United States and the data collected could have presented similarities or differences in the findings. In addition to the site location, the study was conducted during the summer (a six-week period) in the context of an extra-curricular program.

## **Stage Theory**

Jackson's (1976) Black Identity Development model has five stages that the participants could move through. Identity development is not linear however Jackson's model only discusses identity as linear, which may be viewed as a limitation. The fluidity of identity development is dependent upon time, space, and context and movement can occur with critical instances. Further, it was possible for participants to move forward, backward, or within stages.

## **The Researcher**

As the researcher there were two factors that influenced this limitation. The first being the connection to the research study and the second is the racial identity of the researcher. These are described in detail as they relate to the research study. Furthermore, as the researcher I could be considered an insider due to my previous work with the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and the Freedom Schools program. However, I could also be viewed as an outsider as a new member to the Freedom Schools community in Jamestown and an outsider to the community near Manor Elementary.

**Connection to the research.** As the researcher I shared a personal connection to the program. Having worked with the Freedom School program in past years could be viewed as a limitation. However, this could also be seen as an asset due to the familiarity of the curriculum, daily expectations, and role of the servant leader intern. Additionally, as a researcher who is passionate about multicultural children's literature, it is possible that this passion could present bias in connection with the study. These connections cannot be avoided but rather identified as possible limitations.

**Racial identity of the researcher.** Upon completion of the data collection and during the analysis the researchers identity (me) being different from the participants could pose limitations. Since the study sought to understand how the interaction with MO-CRiTlit influenced participants racial identity, my identity could have limitations on how each participant was viewed during the interactive read-alouds. Due to this possible limitation, I incorporated the use of a peer reviewer with expertise in Black identity development to ensure accurate placement on Jackson's model (1976a) regarding stages in Black identity development. Although my identity was different from the participants, they were active and engaged throughout the research.

Recognizing the difference in identity between the researcher and the participants was important because as an outsider I had to gain their trust to create safe space for them to engage openly and honestly throughout the data collection process.

### **Conclusions**

Years after the landmark of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) children continue to be faced with segregation in schools and inequities in education. Minority children are failing and are situated in what is one of the most common phrases in educational literature, the achievement gap (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Black and Latino students continue to fall behind their white peers in reading and numeracy. The system has historically structured schools where the curriculum focuses on White ideals, affirming White children, and thriving on educational success for this group of students.

Pre-service and in-service teachers must be provided with a strong foundation during their teacher education programs and on-going professional development. I argue that there must be a push for teachers to become more familiar with all students and families, with their lived experiences, and focus on their potential. This study documented the impact of access to literature, the use of combined critical pedagogy employed by Ms. Emily, and the culturally relevant curriculum, which influenced the Black identity of the participants. Additionally, through opportunities to dialogue about topics, come to some understanding of historical topics, and consider Black identity, the participants developed a sense of agency in today's modern civil rights movement where being Black is not always viewed in a positive way.

Moreover, the Freedom Schools model is a national social justice movement designed to develop social activists and facilitators who are socially conscious and while education is a field that is often referred to as rewarding we cannot afford to act carelessly and must also focus on



the social justice movement. Teachers must be prepared to enter the field with a sense of fearlessness where questions of power, privilege, and injustices are received and welcomed. Our children deserve a space to openly dialogue about topics and express their feelings towards societal issues. Marian Wright Edelman shares a hope for all children of all races to learn that they have the ability to make a difference in their family, school, community, nation, and world, what will policy makers and educators do to support that hope? Can pieces from the Freedom Schools model be transferred to teacher education programs to better prepare teachers who are entering the field so that they too are fearless in their teaching?

## Appendix A: Parent Interview Protocols (Questions/Prompts)

<i>Parent Interview Questions Aligned with Conceptual Framework</i>	
<b>Framework</b>	<b>Parent Interview Questions</b>
<b>Freedom Schools</b>	<p>How long has your child been participating in this summer learning program?</p> <p>Is there anything about this summer learning program that is similar to your child's regular school experience?</p> <p>Aside from the summer time period, is there anything about this summer learning program that is different from your child's regular school experience?</p> <p>Do you notice any differences in your child's attitudes, behavior, or confidence between regular school and the summer learning program? If so, what are these differences?</p> <p>What do you think might explain these differences?</p> <p>How are the classroom activities that your child experiences in this summer learning program similar to and/or different from her/his regular school experience?</p>
<b>Racial Identity Development</b>	<p>Where did you grow up—what state/city/kind of neighborhood? Describe your family growing up—who was present in the home you grew up in?</p> <p>How would you describe yourself in terms of culture, ethnicity, and/or race? When do you remember first becoming aware of yourself/your family in cultural/ethnic/racial terms?</p> <p>What do you remember about the books used in the schools you attended growing up? Were there any books used that you remember liking more than others? If so, what do you remember liking about them?</p> <p>Did you have a favorite children's book growing up? If so, can you remember the name of it? If so, have you shared this book with your child? Why or why not?</p> <p>What, if any, role do you think your culture, ethnicity, and/or race played in your interactions with teachers or peers in school? Can you give an example that illustrates your experiences in this regard?</p> <p>What, if any, role do you think your culture, ethnicity, and/or race played in your interaction with people in society as a whole?</p> <p>How, if at all, did you discuss with your child the news of Trayvon Martin's shooting, Michael Brown's shooting, the recent shooting of many other unarmed black men by police officers, and/or the events of Ferguson, MO or Baltimore, MD?</p> <p>How, if at all, have you seen these or other current events influence your child's attitudes, behaviors, or confidence in her/his regular school? Her/his interaction with peers? With teachers? In other ways, including in the summer learning program?</p> <p>Do you watch the news on TV in your home? Do you get news or current events</p>

	<p>information from other sources? If so, what are those sources (e.g., Internet, newspaper, radio, family/friends)?</p> <p>Do you discuss news or current events in your home? If so, what kinds of events do you discuss? Can you describe a specific discussion of a current event you have had at home?</p>
<b>Critical Literacy</b>	<p>Do you have books in your home today? Why or why not? What, if any, types of reading materials (e.g., the newspaper, magazines, online materials) do you typically read?</p> <p>Do you read (any materials) with your child? If so, how often? If not, what other activities do you do with your child?</p> <p>Does your child enjoy reading? If so, what types of books or other reading materials does she/he enjoy the most? Does your child visit the library in her/his school? What about a local library near your neighborhood? Have you ever gone to the library with your child or on your own?</p> <p>Does your child ever talk to you about books she/he reads for school or for fun? If so, describe how those conversations go – Can you describe a specific conversation you have had with your child about a book or reading?</p> <p>Does your child have a favorite book? If so, do you know the title?</p>
<b>Critical Pedagogy</b>	<p>How long has your child been participating in this summer learning program?</p> <p>Is there anything about this summer learning program that is similar to your child's regular school experience?</p> <p>Aside from the summer time period, is there anything about this summer learning program that is different from your child's regular school experience?</p> <p>Do you notice any differences in your child's attitudes, behavior, or confidence between regular school and the summer learning program? If so, what are these differences? What do you think might explain these differences?</p> <p>How are the classroom activities that your child experiences in this summer learning program similar to and/or different from her/his regular school experience?</p> <p>How would you describe your child's relationship with her/his regular school teacher? How about with her/his summer learning program teacher?</p>

## Appendix B: Student Interview Protocols (Questions/Prompts)

<i>Student Interview Questions Aligned with Conceptual Framework</i>	
<b>Framework</b>	<b>Student Initial Interview Questions</b>
<b>Freedom Schools</b>	<p>Do you notice anything that is different about the instructors in this summer learning program from your teachers in your regular school?</p> <p>How would you describe your relationship with (feelings about) your summer learning program instructor?</p> <p>Is your relationship with (feelings about) your summer learning program instructor different from your relationship with your regular school teacher? If so, how?</p> <p>Are there things that your instructors in this summer learning program have done to help you as a student? If so, what are they or can you describe something specific that your summer learning program instructor has done to help you? Are these alike or different from the things your regular school teachers have done?</p> <p>Describe your current summer learning program instructor in three words.</p> <p>How do you feel when you are here in this summer learning program? How do you feel in the morning when you are getting ready to come to this program? Are these feelings alike or different from what you feel when you are in your regular school or getting ready to go to your regular school in the morning?</p>
<b>Racial Identity Development</b>	<p>If I did not know you and we were going to meet for the first time, how would you describe yourself to me so that I could recognize you? How would you describe your personality? What makes you special/different from everyone else?</p> <p>If I did not know your classmates in your regular school, how would you describe them to me? Do you think they mostly look like you, mostly look like me, or mostly look different from both you and me?</p> <p>If I did not know your teachers in your regular school, how would you describe them to me? Do you think they mostly look like you, mostly look like me, or mostly look different from both you and me?</p> <p>Can you name a book that you've read where the characters in it mostly look like you?</p> <p>Can you name a book that you've read where the things that happen in the story are similar to things that have happened to you?</p> <p>Do you remember any time when anyone treated you differently because of the color of your skin? If so, can you describe that situation to me? Do you remember how you felt what that happened? Will you share those feelings with me?</p> <p>Do you watch the news or about current events on TV in your home? Do you read about the news or current from the newspaper or other sources in your home (e.g., Internet, newspaper, radio, family/friends)?</p>

	<p>Do you discuss news or current events in your home? If so, what kinds of events do you discuss?</p> <p>Do you discuss news or current events in your regular school? If so, what kinds of events do you discuss?</p> <p>Do your teachers talk about the news or current events that are taking place in your community? In other parts of your city or state? In other parts of the United States or the world?</p> <p>Do your teachers talk about news or current events that involve people who mostly look like you, mostly look like me, or mostly look different from both you and me?</p> <p>Does your family talk about news or current events that involve people who mostly look like you, mostly look like me, or mostly look different from both you and me?</p>
<b>Critical Literacy</b>	<p>Does your regular school teacher read stories aloud in class? How often?</p> <p>What is your favorite book/story from regular school?</p> <p>Do you know how to read? How well do you think you read? In what grade did you first learn to read?</p> <p>Does your regular school classroom have a library? If so, what kinds of books are in your classroom library?</p> <p>Does your regular school building have a library? If so, what kinds of books are in your school library?</p> <p>Do you remember any characters in the books in your regular school library that look like you? If so, what else do you remember about those books (e.g., title, character names, story details, etc.)?</p> <p>Do you have books at home that belong to you?</p> <p>Do you take books home from the school?</p> <p>Do you ever go to a library? If so, where is that library located (classroom, school, neighborhood, etc.)? Do you check books out of the library? If so, what kinds of books do you like to check out?</p> <p>Is there anyone in your home who reads to you? If so, who? How often? What do they read?</p> <p>Is there anyone in your home that you read to? If so, who? How often? What do you read?</p> <p>Does anyone in your home encourage you to read on your own? If so, who? How often do they encourage you?</p> <p>What are your favorite books to read for fun?</p> <p>How would you feel if you received a book for a present?</p>

	<p>Do your teachers talk about the news or current events that are taking place in your community? In other parts of your city or state? In other parts of the United States or the world?</p>
<b>Critical Pedagogy</b>	<p>What is your favorite memory from the school year that just finished?</p> <p>Are there things that your past regular school teachers (from any grade) have done to help you as a student? If so, what are they?</p> <p>How would you describe your relationship with (feelings about) your past regular school teachers (from any grade)?</p> <p>Which grade in school has been your favorite thus far? Why?</p> <p>Describe your most recent regular school teacher using three words.</p> <p>Has there ever been a time in your regular school experiences when you felt your teacher or principal treated you differently from another student or a group of other students? If so, how?</p> <p>Has there ever been a time in your regular school experiences when you felt your teacher or principal treated another student differently from you or a group of other students? If so, how?</p>

## **Appendix C: Student Follow Up Interview Protocol**

### **Individual Child Information – Follow Up**

1. How would you describe your experience in the summer programming?
2. What did you enjoy most about the days you spent at school?
3. Is there anything about the program that you would like to see at your own school?
4. Is there anything about your school that you would like to see in the summer program?
5. What do you want to be when you grow up?

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

1. What is your favorite memory you have from the summer programming?
2. What thing does your teacher at the summer program do that is similar to that of your regular teachers?
3. What things are different from the summer program compared to your regular school year classes?
4. Describe your summer program teacher using three words.
5. How would you describe the way you feel when you're at the summer program?

### **Literacy Experiences in the Summer Programming**

1. What was your favorite book you read this summer? Why?
2. If you could choose any book that you read this summer or that was read to you to share with your family which one would it be? Why?
3. Describe how the books used this summer are different from the books used in your classrooms.
4. What types of questions or topics did the books talk about that were similar or different from what you discussed in your regular classroom?

5. Could you see yourself in the books? Do you have similar experiences?
6. How did you relate to the characters in the stories?
7. Are there any topics in the books that you felt uncomfortable talking about? Explain.
8. Were there any books that made you feel sad, mad, frustrated, happy, excited? Which texts were they?
9. How did you feel when the teacher asked you to work with your friends in class to complete the activities?
10. How did you feel about reading in class? What makes a good reader? Are you a good reader?

#### **Literacy in the Home – During Summer Programming**

1. How many times did you visit the library this summer to check out books?
2. Who reads with you at home now? How often?
3. Did you share the stories you read in class with your family? Which book did you share with them first?
4. Are there any questions that you asked your parents after you read a story at school this summer?
5. What kinds of books do you like to take home to read with your family?

#### **Racial Identity**

1. How do you describe yourself? What makes you unique?
2. Did you notice that you share similar characteristics with your classmates this summer?
3. What similarities did you share with your teacher this summer?
4. Can you tell me the title of the book that you read where the characters or the topic was something you could relate to?



5. How did you relate the stories that you read this summer? Were there any topics that were difficult to discuss in your classrooms?
6. What types of conversations does your family have with you about being Black and growing up in the United States?
7. How do you feel about being a young Black girl/boy?

### **Current Events of Society**

1. Did you watch the news at all this summer?
2. What types of conversations do your parents have with you about the news stories in your city?
3. This summer what did you get to do to participate in activities that made you feel good about your community?
4. What types of incidents did you talk about in class that made you think about how people of color are treated?
5. How are people of color treated now compared to the days during the civil rights movement?

## Appendix D: Table of Black Identity Stages

Table 3 Black Identity Stages Pre-Exposure and Post Exposure to MO-CRiTlit

Case	Pre-Exposure Stage	Reason for Placement	Post Exposure Stage	Reason for Placement
Dre	Resistance	During the initial interview Dre displayed an awareness of his Black identity and recognized racism in a larger context	Redefinition	During video recordings Dre was active in the discussion often questioning the text. The follow up interview showed how he viewed his Black identity.
Dation	Acceptance	Dation exhibited ideas of what it meant to be Black and how it related to him as a young man in his social setting	Passive Acceptance	While Dation's active behavior at times interfered with the video recordings – the follow up interview indicated that Dation had been influenced through MO-CRiTlit.
Alexis	Passive Acceptance	Alexis recognized how her Black identity was prevalent through current events seen on news and discussed in the IRC	Resistance	Alexis was very active in the dialogue around MO-CRiTlit and during the analysis she used critical literacy and connected her own identity to the characters in the stories.
Alex	Acceptance	Alex recognized he was Black but did not necessarily understand that it was an indicator of how he identified	Acceptance	Alex remained in the same stage as his recognition of Black identity was influenced some through MO-CRiTlit as he engaged in discussion.
Nyla	Acceptance	Nyla had personal experiences in her traditional school year that influenced her racial identity. Nyla knew she was Black and identified as being part of that racial group.	Passive Acceptance	Nyla was quiet but actively listening during most of the discussions around MO-CRiTlit. During the follow up interview she described having connections to the literature.
Brian	Acceptance	Brian recognized he was Black and he related racial identity	Acceptance	Brian related racial identity to skin tone

		<p>simply to skin tone even referring to light skin Black people as White because he was basing race solely off of skin tone</p>		<p>even during the follow up interview. He recognized that racism existed but still saw race solely on skin tone.</p>
Jeremiah	Active Acceptance	<p>Jeremiah made it very clear that he was in this stage as he expressed a strong disconnection with his racial identity.</p>	Active Acceptance	<p>Jeremiah was influenced through MO-CRiTLit but did not change the way that he viewed his racial identity.</p>

## Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter



### UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB - Expedited Review Approval Notice

**DATE:** May 4, 2015

**TO:** Christine Clark, Ed.D.  
**FROM:** UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** [735376-3] Multicultural Education in Action: A Multiple Case Study of Black Elementary Aged Children's Identity Development through Engagement with Civil Rights Literature

**SUBMISSION TYPE:** Revision

**ACTION:** APPROVED  
**APPROVAL DATE:** May 2, 2015  
**EXPIRATION DATE:** May 1, 2016  
**REVIEW TYPE:** Expedited Review

Thank you for submission of Revision materials for this protocol. The UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a protocol design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved.

ALL UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risk to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NONCOMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this protocol must be reported promptly to this office.

This protocol has been determined to be a Minimal Risk protocol. Based on the risks, this protocol requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Submission of the **Continuing Review Request Form** must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 1, 2016.

## **Appendix F: Parent Narratives**

### **The Hardens**

The Harden family is comprised of Alicia; a 34-year old mother who grew up in a metropolitan area in the southern United States and her three elementary aged children. Alicia's older sister raised her as their mother passed when she was five years old. Alicia explained not having a stable relationship with her father but described a close-knit tie with several other family members (cousins, aunts, and uncles) while growing up. Alicia has a daughter who recently completed first grade, a son who recently completed second grade, and her oldest son Dre (a participant in the study discussed further below) who just completed fifth grade. Most recently, she prefers to keep to herself, however she has developed a close relationship with a few of her friends. She demonstrated some difficulty when recalling information about her educational experiences. Ormrod (2008) describes time as a major factor in regards to the deterioration of memories, even the most intimate ones. She stated that math was her favorite subject while attending k-12 school. Interestingly, she did not have a favorite book as a child. However, recognizing that literacy is an important part of development Alicia stated:

this might seem kind of bad, but I don't really read a lot like most people.

Alicia encourages her children to read at home but said she herself is not an avid reader and prefers to read magazines, as opposed to other reading material, while at work. After graduating high school Alicia completed some college; however she opted to return to the workforce because of some life challenges,. She did not appear comfortable discussing the details surrounding her return to work, so I did not pry, and we continued the discussion in a different direction.

Alicia described Dre as “the man of the house,” and more particularly as her “bodyguard”. I asked her to tell me more about Dre, specifically in regards to his role in the family structure, she responded with:

He’s a great child you know from the beginning I think you know when he was little he caught on and learned how to do things when he was like a young age . . . he was using the microwave at three years old and he would take things apart and put them back together.

She stated that because Dre was the oldest, she depended on him to do the bulk of the housework. The children were taking adult roles in the home; so Alicia often took her children to the park as a way to relax. She describes her children as busy bodies who enjoy playing basketball and video games in their free time.

### **The Games**

The Games family consists of Delores, a 35 year-old mother, a 36 year-old father, Delores’ 53 year-old grandmother, and two elementary aged children; a daughter who completed first grade and a son Dation (a participant discussed further below) who completed fourth grade. Delores grew up in a metropolitan area in the southern United States. Delores described growing up in a single-family home with her mother, grandmother, and younger sister, her father did not have an active role in her life. She described having numerous complications growing up, mostly related to her physical appearance. She added that her family did not have much financially and she was often teased about her weight and attire. Delores described a strong relationship amongst her family that included annual family reunions. According to Dation, when the entire family gathers, it makes his ‘granny’ happy, and in turn, he is happy. Delores stated that as a young

child she was aware that she was Black and in her opinion, she grew up in a positive environment, as she further details:

You know it wasn't a racial issue going on. It wasn't never spoke. When I learned about it it was spoke to me in school. . . Now as I got older I learned that they White or I'm Black. . . You know, it was a problem then but you know me and myself I didn't have a problem with it. Cause I didn't have/not being funny the Whites picking on me. I didn't have them doing the things that my own culture did to me.

Delores described very positive experiences with peers during her k-12 education. Even though her experiences were positive she did recognize that she was left behind in regards to her academic achievement, she explained:

When I grew up my teachers didn't teach me the way I was supposed to be taught. Delores described experiencing difficulty with basic academic skills, which has affected her occupational opportunities as an adult. These experiences have shaped the expectations she has for her two children. Delores began to discuss the challenges associated with Dation's educational experiences and the lack of support from school administrators and teachers. According to Delores, the school administration is very familiar with Dation because he has incurred several disciplinary referrals. Although Dation has been labeled as Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADD/ADHD (and is being medicated for it) he is school has not provided an individual education plan or a behavior plan for reasons unknown. Once referred to the office, Delores explained that the school administrators required her to pick him up immediately or he may receive further discipline. Additionally, Delores added that she had been dismissed from a previous job because of the schools strict requirements and the frequency of these instances. Furthermore, not only has Dation been dismissed for the day

several times, but he was suspended more than ten times during the 2014-2015 (public) school year.

Delores stated that she understood the importance of a print rich environment, and further explained owning a variety of books for her children to read at home. She reads aloud with and to her children and also encourages them to read nightly because she understands the importance of comprehension and fluency. As someone who has experienced challenges herself, she understands that being a fluent reader is essential in achieving academic success. Furthermore, Delores valued the opportunity to discuss current events with her children and described these conversations as necessary:

I know this is a hard conversation to speak with but I'm gonna speak with him right on it. Cause he gonna hear what he gonna hear [positive or negative] even if it's not here with me. . . Even today when we looked on the news . . . I said Little Man I want you to grow up and be positive [about your outlook on life regardless of what others think] and think [for yourself] first.

Delores demonstrated concern for her children's academic and social development, although she often felt the school staff viewed her, and other parents of color, as being minimally involved with their children's educational development.

### **The Threets**

The Threet family is comprised of a 44 year-old father, Myah, a 39 year-old mother, a 19 year-old daughter (sophomore in college), and nine year-old twins; daughter; Alexis (a participant discussed further below) and son; Alex (a participant discussed further below). Myah agreed to be a participant in the study however, the children's father did not consent to participate He was active in their daily activities and volunteered on a field trip with his children.



Myah grew up in a metropolitan area of the southern United States. Her mother lived in the same apartment complex as her grandparents and they had a hand in raising her. Myah told me that her father was in her life but was not in the home. She described her relationship with him in this way:

[It was a] weekend type of thing or whenever he came around.

Today, Myah lives on the other side of town from her mother. She stated that now she sees her father quite often as he comes to her home to visit and see the her children. I asked Myah when she first became aware of being Black and she provided insightful detail of her childhood:

Ohhhhhh! Long time ago. . . When I was little, growing up in the projects. Like I said it was the projects and we all it was just like you didn't see other cultures . . . I knew back a long time ago that I was Black.

Myah was comfortable in her job at a local community center for 16 years and credits her housing situation residing in the 'projects' for the placement of her children in their local elementary school. In an effort to make a difference for her family Myah recounted her decision to seek a better employment opportunity stating:

. . . just woke up one day and decided I wanted to make a little bit more money . . . I guess now seeing my kids grow up I wanted to make a change for em. . . I went and got a job with the transportation company. I make a little bit more money. . . And we moved out of the neighborhood. But I left my kids here at this school.

Even though Myah has to provide transportation to the school, she still chose to leave her children at Manor Elementary due to the after school and summer enrichment programs which have been beneficial for her family.

Myah recalled positive experiences from her k-12 education. Her mother was active in her social development but didn't stress the importance of education towards Myah as a child. She described her high school as being in a more affluent neighborhood and stated:

. . . You know the rich school, that's where I went.

Just as the scholars are bussed into Manor Elementary, Myah was bussed into her school and considered it a privilege to have the opportunity to interact with other people and a diverse student population. She described this as being different to what is happening now with her oldest daughter also having attended and graduated from the same high school. She recalled her daughter coming home and noted that she would tell her of the racial tension that existed in the school. She expressed concern that things today are much different and suggested that her children are not being treated fairly. She mentioned that when her daughter informed her of the situations at the school she was prepared to contact the school but was asked not to by her daughter. She described the school conditions as being segregated, similar the conditions prior to the *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (1954, 1955) decision. These educational conditions led to students internalizing negative messages about their own culture (Kohli, 2008). Myah also described Alexis and Alex's school as being labeled as the "Black school" and described in detail how the community views Manor Elementary:

. . . [it is] a low performing Black school, not a good school . . . This area right here where the school is located is considered in a nice White area. But where the children are coming from [they] are coming out of the projects.

Myah described having difficulty supporting her children academically due to her inconsistent work schedule. However she assured me that when she is home she reads with her children and pushes them to be their best. She described having a print rich environment and described

purchasing books that her children enjoy by the set. Additionally, Myah detailed helping her children with their end of grade (EOG) test packet; sets of literacy activities aimed at helping students increase their comprehension and fluency. The school provided this packet in an effort to improve test scores.

Having moved out of the neighborhood, Myah describes having a more stable setting for the family. I asked how media was used in their home, if at all, to discuss current events and she described having conversations about the events with the children's father, but added that she did not necessarily have these conversations with the children themselves:

. . . what I did discuss with them about this was having guns and knowing right from wrong . . . As long as he knows it's wrong that's what I wanna know. But as far as having a long out conversation with them about it – no, honestly, no . . . If they would ask me I would but they don't' ask me so I don't.

She then began to describe the killing of nine Black church members by a White male in South Carolina, which was a recent story in the news prior to the interview (Cable News Network, 2015). She expressed that her main concern was whether or not her children knew right from wrong when it came to gun violence. Throughout the interview processes Myah expressed providing Alex with more reassurance than Alexis. She added that she doesn't worry as much about Alexis and her older college aged daughter because they are women and less likely to be subjected to the same dangers as a Black male might.

Myah stated that her oldest daughter has motivated her to go back to school and pursue a degree. She also said it was important for her to be able to enhance her reading and writing skills because she would be better prepared for the questions that her children ask her as they continue their own education. Myah went on to discuss how Alexis and Alex are helpful to each other at

home and care greatly for one another; yet remain very competitive in their studies. Myah also discussed the many sacrifices she has made for her children and family. Although she works often, her most cherished moments are when she is with her children, especially during game nights when they would play Connect Four™ and Uno™.

### **The Smiths**

The Smith family is comprised of Ann, a 33-year-old mother, Nyla (a participant discussed further below) a nine year-old daughter, a newborn daughter, and Ann's 62 year-old mother. Ann was born in a metropolitan area of the southern part of the United States; however, she grew up in the Midwest during the primary years of her elementary education, but later returned to the southern part of the United States for the remainder of her k-12 education. Ann's mother was a single parent, who as Ann described it, had the highest expectations for her and her sister. She stated that her father was not involved in the parenting duties until she entered high school stating he was:

one of them drive by dads. . . I lost all respect [for him]. So um when he died it didn't even bother me.

The absence of her father helped create a stronger relationship with her mother that she maintains today. Ann's mother has also been very supportive in raising Nyla and her sister as well. They enjoy family traditions that include large reunions and gatherings during the holiday season.

Ann was a shy student growing up and stated she experienced some social anxiety but learned to be herself and open up to others, as she got older. She described mostly positive experiences during her k-12 education and said she has always maintained straight A's. She enjoyed reading books and described most of the books she read in school as now being made

into movies such as *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 2007) and *Charlotte's Web* (White, 2006). She described having mostly Black teachers who were strict, had high expectations, and went above and beyond to keep them on track academically. I asked her if she experienced being treated differently because of her race while in school and she responded:

They would divide us and put the Black kids in one class and the White kids in the other . . . at that age you're not thinking about the color of your skin. You're thinking about why did they separate me from my peers or whatever. Once they did that I realized oh, I'm Black.

African American students have been disproportionately filtered into lower educational tracks when compared to whites, which often leads to their mis-education because teachers project low expectations for their abilities (Saddler, 2005; Woodson, 1990). That experience has shaped Ann's views towards Manor Elementary. She acknowledged that the demographics of the school are majority Latino and Black and was aware that the children are bussed to school daily from underserved neighborhoods and into an affluent one. She went on to describe her most recent negative experience with the school administration and Nyla's most recent teacher. Ann expressed concern regarding the disconnect between Nyla and her teacher and requested a meeting with administration to discuss it as she explained:

. . . the principal had the whole nonchalant attitude like I really don't care, I don't even know why I'm here. It's not my issue.

Ann described being frustrated with the system because her daughter was ultimately experiencing the negative effects of mis-education. Because Ann had high expectations set for her children she said she wanted to make sure that she continued to hold Nyla to the same expectations her mother set for herself as a child. She agrees with the idea that the partnership

between families and schools has increased student achievement (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Ann advocated for her daughter and because of this negative experience with the principal she went further with her dispute and contacted the school superintendents office to express her concerns. After months of correspondence, in April of the most recent school year (2015), Nyla was moved to a different class with a new teacher. Ann ultimately decided to move her daughter to a charter school for the remainder of her elementary schooling because the experience was so bad; she felt that Nyla could be further impacted by the schools lack of accommodation.

The negative experiences Ann had as a child were obviously salient, and she ensured that Nyla would not experience the same circumstances by the actions she demonstrated. I wondered if these negative experiences were exacerbated by exposure to media outlets, so I asked Ann if she watched the news and discussed current events with Nyla. Due to the recent news stories she described Nyla as being more interested in the news than ever before and said she told Nyla:

. . . you know you need to pay attention to the news. There might be something important that you need to know.

Now it is common that Nyla will watch the news with her family in addition to reading the newspaper with her grandmother. Ann said that their home environment is very open regarding various topics and how she discussed them with Nyla:

She understands everything and anything that goes wrong . . . you know we just talk to her about it.

She went on to describe Nyla's curiosity around the Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and related shootings and that they often viewed the news coverage as a family unit as an educational opportunity. Nyla described the news coverage around these issues in this way:

. . . yea it wasn't right, but there's not much people can do about it but stay positive you know? Don't let it discourage you.

Ann is committed to assuring her children have positive educational and social experiences. She enjoys reading to her children nightly and describes weekly trips to the library, museums, and engaging in outdoor activities as well.

### **The Boones**

The Boone family (is a blend of two separate families bonded by marriage) that consists of Tony, a 37 year-old father, Amanda, a 33-year-old mother, and five school- aged children. Tony is the father of a teenage daughter and a nine-year-old son, Brian (a participant in the study who will be discussed further below). Amanda is the mother of a ten-year-old son, a nine-year-old son, Jeremiah (a participant in the study who will be discussed further below), and a seven-year-old son. The parents of this family were interviewed together at their request at the onset of the study because they considered themselves as a single-family unit.

Together Tony and Amanda work together to provide a strong foundation for their children and believe that they are responsible for everyone. They said they raise their children to respect and care for one another. Tony and Amanda expressed concern not only regarding their children's academic wellbeing but also their social and emotional development.

#### **Tony**

Tony, the only father who participated in the study, described his initial hesitant behavior as being nervous to participate because he did not want to be video recorded. Once I communicated to him that he would not be video recorded and only audio recorded he agreed to participate and expressed great interest in the study. Tony grew up in a metropolitan area in the southern part of the United States. He described having a normal family life, growing up with

both of his parents and both being actively involved at home and in school. His parents are still alive, but do not play an active role in his children's life because they are constantly working. He expressed having high expectations from his parents growing up as they expected him to do well in school and encouraged him to read often. Tony described avoiding reading as a child, explaining that he would cry or simply go to bed just to get out of reading because he didn't enjoy it. Eventually, his parents caught on to his behavior and made efforts to change his habits. Additionally, with the help of his teachers, he became more motivated to read, although he was unable to recall why this change occurred. Today he enjoys reading even though he claims his imagination does not work in the same way it did as a child.

Growing up Tony enjoyed visiting the library and said his favorite book was *Mouse and His Motorcycle* (Redfern, 1994). He had difficulty recalling books that he read in school, so I asked him if he had read books where he could relate to the characters and Tony replied:

No! No! No I didn't! No I didn't at all. I can't remember but I never read a book in school back then . . . [about] someone I could relate to. If it was someone I could relate to it was a character like an animal but never a person that like, he look[ed] like me.

Tony believes he would have been more encouraged to read if he had encountered texts that he could relate to, especially considering the multicultural literature used in the Freedom Schools program. Tony described his elementary school as being diverse but described the teaching class as being mostly White females with the exception of a few male teachers.

I asked Tony to describe when he first became aware of his race. He detailed being in his 20s and having an interaction at a retail store explaining:

. . . I was going about one of those external hard drives / I asked a Caucasian employee do you have a key to the case? [he said] "I'm busy!" I went and asked somebody else and



they got the key and got the thing . . . Before I could get back to the case and wait for the other person a Caucasian male asked that same lady something. She dropped what she was doing and walked him over to what he needed. I was like wow . . .Wow! It weakened me out so bad cause I was like wow I was just asking how to get this thing . . . You know I was hurt about it. It wasn't a big deal / but it was a big deal . . . But I don't appreciate that.

This instance had impact on Tony's interaction with society and still influences his actions today. I continued to question how his race played a role in society, today he said he doesn't like the way that things are today he added:

The world now all they see is race. I don't' know why that's just all they see and that's all you hear. . . I don't like the world now. It's just I don't know everybody wanna play the victim.

In raising his own children, he encourages them to read and makes learning engaging and fun. He described doing activities as a family like watching a movie and then giving his children a set of questions with a goal of seeing who can get the most correct as sort of a game night. He described the children as being competitive and smart. Noting that in previous years his children attended a different school that challenged them and advanced them in their learning, but the current school did no such thing. In the most recent experience with the schools Tony had a negative experience with the district and decided to pull his children out of school and enroll them in an online public school. He explained that he is fed up with the school district, specifically in how funds are distributed, and expressed that teachers are not paid well, further explaining:

even when I was in school the teachers was always complaining about their

pay . .

He expressed that he feels teachers are not valued for their work and they do not have the opportunity to focus on the students. Tony advocates for his children and recognized when they needed additional support. Parents who build a relationship with their children's teachers often see better results in regards to their children's academic progress (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Tony believed that being involved in his children's academic journey can change their educational performance.

### **Amanda**

Amanda was born and raised in a rural town in the southern part of the United States. In 2002, she relocated to a metropolitan area in the same region. A single father who she described as being strict when it came to schooling raised her. She knew her mother, but stated that she did not play an active role in her development. Her mother is still alive, but remains uninvolved. She informed me her father passed away when she completed high school. Once she graduated high school she attended college for a short time, but did not complete her degree. After gaining some insight on her development I asked Amanda how she describes herself and she responded:

I guess different. Some people look at us very different. I mean like sometimes when we go places by our age or whatever sometimes we get a little discriminated cause some people think we younger than what we are.

Amanda continued to discuss the stereotypes that are placed on young Black families describing how people may portray her due to her age. How?

Amanda discussed a positive k-12 schooling experience. She described reading books that had a movie to accompany the story. She gave the example of reading the texts *Charlotte's Web* (White, 2006) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988) and soon after watching the movie to

compare and contrast the two. She said that *Charlotte's Web* (White, 2006) was her favorite book. She described her teachers as being mixed in gender and race describing having both male and female teachers as well as Black and White teachers.

While interviewing Amanda I asked her to describe how she views the interaction with people in society today and if her race had any influence on how she interacted with others. She responded implying that society has shifted explaining:

. . . it's way different from when I was growing up. I mean the toleration / the toleration of everything is just / to me it's ridiculous. Um, I have a White . . . I ain't gonna lie, I have White friends. I mean I communicate with them just like I would with a Black person. But um I don't see why we have to always feel like it's always gotta be a racial thing . . . I don't see why we always have to say this is the Black way and this is the White way. No! Everybody is equal!

This statement led to a further discussion of the media coverage in the most recent current events. Amanda told me that her children enjoy watching the daily news as a family. She and Tony believe that they are responsible for having conversations with their children regarding the news stories and the media influence. Tony describes the media as having heavy influence on many of the racial issues and believes that it may desensitize how people view the stories. Amanda detailed the conversations around the news stories and said that she encourages her children to make the right choice, but also recognizes that as parents they are not with their children every hour of the day. She explained that children today deal with peer pressure that is different from when she was growing up, further describing the conversations she and Tony have with all their children:

. . . you're growing up so it's like we can't walk with you, we can't hold your hand while

you're at school. So we tell you somethin' either you're gonna listen and understand what we sayin' or you gonna go that other route and you're gonna see what happens. Additionally, she went on to describe how these conversations although necessary are often very hard to have. Amanda believes she is active in the children's lives and she has high expectations for all of the children, even though they all are not biologically related to her. She and Tony have concerns regarding their children's attendance at Manor Elementary and agreed that placing their five children in an online public school program is best for their academic success at this time. However, both Amanda and Tony expressed a need for additional parent involvement in schools. Often times minority parents are more likely to be involved in the educational process of their children when they are invited to schools, feel their perspectives are valued, and are encouraged to become volunteers, all with a critical multicultural perspective in mind (Auerbach, 2008; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Tillman, 2004). She believes that by encouraging them and taking part in the learning process they will be successful.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Education

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| 2015 | Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Curriculum and Instruction<br>Literacy Emphasis & Cultural Studies Cognate<br>University of Nevada, Las Vegas<br><b>Dissertation Title:</b> <i>Multicultural Education in Action: A Multiple Case Study of Black Elementary Aged Children's Identity Development and Engagement with Civil Rights Literature</i> |
| 2009 | M.Ed., Curriculum and Instruction: Literacy<br>University of Nevada, Las Vegas   |
| 2007 | B.S., Elementary Education (K-6)<br>University of Nevada, Las Vegas  |

### Employment Background

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|----------------|--|
| 2013 – 2015    | <i>Visiting Faculty</i> , Department of Teaching and Learning, University of Nevada, Las Vegas   |
| 2012 – 2013    | <i>Graduate Assistant</i> , Department of Teaching and Learning, University of Nevada, Las Vegas |
| 2012 – Present | <i>Ready to Learn Trainer</i> , Vegas PBS (KLVX)   |
| 2010 – 2011    | <i>Adjunct Faculty</i> , Department of Teaching and Learning, University of Nevada, Las Vegas    |
| 2010 – 2014    | <i>Project Director</i> , Las Vegas Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools                      |
| 2009 – 2010    | <i>Site Coordinator</i> , Las Vegas Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools                      |
| 2007 – 2012    | <i>Elementary Teacher</i> , Clark County School District   |
| 2005 – 2007    | <i>Customer Service Specialist</i> , Villa Reale, Caesars Forum Shops                            |

### Research Concentration

- Early literacy development

- Pre-service teacher education and development
- Curriculum development (specifically culturally relevant curricula)
- Influences of literature on children's literacy development

## **Higher Education Teaching**

### ***Spring 2015***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction I, EDRL 442

### ***Fall 2014***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Children's Literature in Elementary School, EDRL 401

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction I, EDRL 442

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction II, EDRL 443

### ***Spring 2014***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction I, EDRL 442

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction II, EDRL 443

### ***Fall 2013***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Assessment in Literacy, CIL 621

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction I, EDRL 442

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Literacy Instruction II, EDRL 443

### ***Spring 2013***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Multicultural Children's Literature, CIL 684

### ***Fall 2012***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Assessment in Literacy, CIL 621

### ***Fall 2011***



University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Assessment in Literacy, CIL 621

***Fall 2010***

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Teaching and Learning  
Assessment in Literacy, CIL 621

**K-12 Teaching Experience**

2008 – 2012	Rainbow Dreams Academy Charter School, Las Vegas, NV
2006 – 2008	Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy, Las Vegas, NV

**Service**

***International***

2014 – Present	Member, American Educational Research Association (AERA)
2012 – Present	Member, International Reading Association (IRA)

***National***

2014 – Present	Member, National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)
2012 – Present	Member, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
2011 – 2012	Local Affiliate Treasurer for NCTE Annual Conference

***Local***

2013 – Present	Member, Southern Nevada Council of Teachers of English (SNCTE)
2012 – 2015	Treasurer, Southern Nevada Council of Teachers of English
2009 – 2014	Tutor, West Las Vegas Children's Library
2010 – 2012	Volunteer, Doolittle Community Center
2010 – 2012	Volunteer, Pearson Community Center

**Consultancies**

2010 – Present	Children's Defense Fund (CDF), Washington, DC
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**Curriculum Development**

2009 – 2015	<i>Curriculum Writer</i> , Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools
2013 – 2015	<i>Site Coordinator Track Lead</i> , Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools

**Presentations**

**Piper, R.** (2015). Impact of Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools. The Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute 20<sup>th</sup>. Annual Meeting.

- Piper, R. & Haddad, Z.** (2014). Thinking, critically in order to promote critical thinking: An interdisciplinary approach to teaching social studies and literacy in the primary grades. *National Association for Multicultural Education* (NAME)
- Crosthwaite, J. & Piper, R.** (2013). The Power of Questions: Picture Books and Responding about the World. *National Council for Teachers of English* (NCTE).
- Piper, R.** (2012). Outside Interest and Literacy Practices as Contexts for Increasing Engagement and Critical Reading for Adolescent Boys. Presentation at Literacy Research Association 61<sup>st</sup>. Annual Conference. San Diego, CA.
- Piper, R.** (2012). Parental Involvement. Today. Tomorrow. Together. National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE)
- Piper, R.** (2012). The Role of Parental Involvement with Early Literacy Learners. *Western Social Science Association* (WSSA).
- Piper, R.** (2010). Singing and Moving for Success. *I Teach K! Texas*.
- Piper, R.** (2010). Delivering the Integrated Reading Curriculum. *Ella Baker Training Institute*.
- Piper, R.** (2009). SIGN Your Way to Success: American Sign Language in the Kindergarten Classroom. *I Teach K! National*

## **Professional Development**

*STAR Reading – Accelerated Reader*

Support teachers with implementing *Accelerated Reader* at Rainbow Dreams Academy.

*Introduction to Common Core State Standards*

Support teachers through the transition of Nevada State Standards to Common Core State Standards.

*Effective Parent Communication*

Support teachers with best practices for effectively communicating with student families.

## **Grants**

2008 – 2012 Reading is Fundamental (RIF) – Coordinator for Rainbow Dreams Academy

## **Professional References**

Dr. Christine Clark

Professor & Senior Scholar in Multicultural Education

Founding Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion

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Department of Teacher Education  
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