

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
USING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY
TO ENGAGE BLACK BOYS IN LITERACY

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DISSERTATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey of pursuing my doctorate in educational leadership was inevitable as I consistently strive to be the best at whatever I endeavor. I was a successful teacher, who sought opportunities to teach in different contexts and grades levels. Then, I pursued and was successful in leadership positions such as instructional coach, assistant principal, and principal. In addition to my vocation, I also accepted my calling and became an ordained Baptist minister. After training in the church, I pursued my Masters in Religious Leadership and Administration. As a full-time educator, leader, and minister, so many people have supported this journey and are worthy of acknowledgement.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge God who is my savior and my redeemer. He has continuously provided time, space, and resources to complete this journey. I remember being confused about whether I would pursue a doctorate in ministry or education because I was concerned about how much time and financial resources it would require. I remember being at a church program and meeting an educational leader who shared a program with me that would combine my educational leadership experience with my seminary training. It was unheard of by me. Nevertheless, I was able to complete seminary in two years and my doctorate in three years for a total of five years as opposed to the seven I anticipated. That was God! I am so grateful for His grace and provision for my life.

As a minister, I sit under the spiritual covering of three pastors who have ordained and mentored me along my spiritual journey. Pastor William T. Bailey of the Welcome Baptist Church in Jersey City, New Jersey, licensed me to preach and teach the Bible. He mentored me in the ways of the ministry and allowed me to exercise my gifts in leadership. He has kept me in prayer and encouraged me to pursue seminary and my doctorate. Pastor Barron O. Wilson of

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I would also like to acknowledge my personal mentor, Ms. Dawn V. Reynolds, who I met as my sixth-grade teacher. Throughout my life, she has always been present offering me sound advice, supporting my goals, and celebrating my successes along the way. When I shared with her my future endeavors that included pursuing my doctorate, she wrote a check and provided the first down payment for tuition. Her love, support, and financial commitment to me have been a blessing to my life.

Additionally, throughout my educational career, I met two men, the late Dr. Michael Winds, my eighth-grade teacher, and Mr. Franklin Walker, Superintendent of Jersey City Public Schools, who stood in the gap and encouraged my educational pursuits from student to doctor. They were consistently present to cheer me on and provide guidance and support. I am eternally grateful to these gentlemen.

As a new principal, I received a mentor, Dr. Rosetta A. Wilson. I could never imagine the impact she would have on my career and my personal wellness. Dr. Wilson took a holistic approach to my leadership. We met on a weekly basis to focus on my total wellness and building my craft as a leader. She guided me on a mental, physical, and spiritual health path. She helped me develop systems and structures for the school and improved the school culture and climate.

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Since I started this journey while still working, I have to acknowledge my two assistant principals, Dr. Aleya Shoieb and Mr. Richard Stellato, who both supported this journey by stepping up when I needed to leave early for class or operating the building while I ran a PDSA cycle with teachers. They have grown tremendously on this journey, and now they are both principals and leaders at their own schools.

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Overall, I am eternally grateful to God and the many angels he has placed strategically in my life to ensure that this day would occur. Each person utilized their gifts to provide personalized support and care. That motivated me to be my best and put forth a quality study.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, the late Mary L. Barnes, who was so proud of me, her baby daughter. My mother grew up on a farm in South Carolina and she declined her opportunity to go to college on a basketball scholarship in order to move up North with my father and start a family. I watched her work in factories to provide a life for her six children, and she encouraged each of us to pursue our dreams. Education was not an option; it was a priority in our household. She was so excited that she lived to see her baby daughter become a principal and a minister. Although she transitioned before I began this doctoral journey, I know in my heart her presence was with me as I completed this journey. I can vividly hear her saying, “We got a doctor in the family now!”

I also would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Godson, Lucas Elliot Austin, a Black boy who is highly intelligent, energetic, gifted, and an avid reader. I pray that my contributions offered by this dissertation will decrease the possibility of implicit bias that he may encounter as a Black boy and eventually a man. “It does not yet appear, what he will be,” but I pray he gets the opportunity to unapologetically be it! I can’t wait to hear him say, “Doctor God Mom, I did it!”

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Abstract

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Mentor

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Research suggests that student achievement and performance in literacy become strong predictors for achievement and success in high school, college, and career. However, Black children have historically been denied equal educational opportunities. Black boys, in particular, are falling behind in reading achievement, creating a persistent and substantial performance gap. This mixed-research study used Improvement Science to understand the problem of underachieving and underperforming in literacy for middle school Black boys. Two primary drivers were identified: 1) professional development for high-quality literacy practices and 2) culturally relevant pedagogy. The study used two sequential PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) cycles: 1) a schoolwide book study of *Culturally Responsive Teaching for the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond and 2) Japanese Lesson Study. Multiple data points were collected from key stakeholders (teachers, staff, students, and parents) through literacy assessments, surveys, classroom observations, and interviews. Four primary themes emerged: 1) lack of formal teacher training to incorporate student culture into the curriculum in spite of a teacher commitment to do so; 2) misalignment of professional development provided by the district; 3) a perception of lack of knowledge to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy; and 4) a reluctance by teachers to

confront implicit bias in themselves, students, and colleagues. Multiple teacher practices proved effective in addressing the engagement, achievement, and performance of Black boys: addressing microaggressions and building relationships that foster a safe space for learning; incorporating student culture; use of mentor texts and storytelling; and distributive leadership for teachers and students.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Research suggests that student achievement and performance in literacy become strong predictors for achievement and success in high school, college, and career (Sparks et al., 2013; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). Literacy encompasses reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This caused great concern at Urban Academy (a pseudonym) in Jersey City, New Jersey, where middle school aged Black boys scored lower in literacy compared to their Hispanic, Asian, and White peers; this held true for scores on both the New Jersey State Assessments for the 2018-2019 academic year and the district reading diagnostic assessments from the two academic years from 2018-2020.

This problem is not unique to Urban Academy. Decades of research literature shows that Black boys have a significantly different learning experience in schools. In the United States, Black children have historically been denied equal educational opportunities and resources available to their White counterparts (Lawrence, 2005). Black boys, in particular, face issues of racism by a mostly White female workforce (Hussar et al., 2020). Hammond (2015) suggests Black boys have not received adequate literacy and content instruction because of disproportionate discipline and removal from class. As a result, they fall behind in reading achievement, creating a persistent and substantial performance gap. Teachers, principals, and other school and community leaders need to address this problem in new ways to disrupt this long-standing performance and achievement gap.

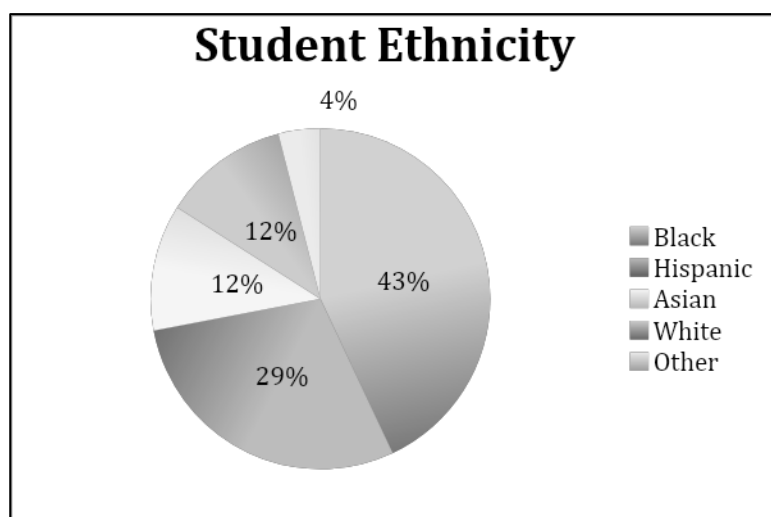
Middle school, which begins in sixth grade and ends in eighth, is a very pivotal period for all students, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity. Developmentally, students begin entering puberty, where their bodies, emotions, and social awareness change (Anderman & Mueller,

2010). They are also challenged to develop self-management skills, achieve greater independence, and complete more complex academic tasks at home and in school. Students begin to change classes when they begin sixth grade, and they become responsible for four major subject areas (i.e., English language arts, science, and social studies) and three special classes (e.g., physical education, world language – Spanish, art, music). In the context of all these changes, there is clear research data and educator consensus that these changes disproportionately and negatively impact Black boys. What remains unexplained is why the challenges of middle school impact Black boys in unique ways?

Context

Urban Academy is an urban Pre-K through Grade 8 school that, as of June 2019, served 754 students. The school is located in Jersey City, New Jersey, the second largest city in New Jersey and one of the most diverse cities in the United States (McCann, 2021). The school mirrors that racial diversity: 43% Black, 29% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 12% White, and 4% categorized as other (see Figure 1, below).

The State of New Jersey determines FOCUS status for schools needing to improve in math, English language arts, attendance, and or student discipline. Additional resources are allotted to those schools with accountability benchmarks. If FOCUS schools do not improve, the school may be closed or reconstituted. Urban Academy was on the FOCUS list but removed in 2020 based on an analysis of the New Jersey State Student Learning Assessments for literacy for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. However, the problems of underachieving and underperforming in literacy persisted for middle school Black boys.

Figure 1*Student Ethnic Breakdown*

Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

In the past, Urban Academy has focused on holistically improving the performance and achievement of all students in literacy by implementing literacy across the curriculum. In a meta-analysis examining the effects of reading, Mol and Bus (2013) suggested that as students progress from primarily to middle school, their reading stamina increases. However, our Black boys in middle school lagged behind other students, with the gap widening year over year.

Academic and Assessment Data

The district administers a Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) to determine the reading grade level of students. The assessment measures knowledge of high frequency words, word recognition, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. For example, if a student in sixth grade has a raw score of five on comprehension, that student is reading on a fifth-grade level. The company recommends administering the test two or three times a year; Urban Academy administers the DORA in the fall and spring. We utilize the fall data to inform instructional planning, develop instructional groups, and provide interventions for students who

score below grade level. The DORA data also provides one of the multiple measures required by the state to gauge student growth and progress at the school and district levels.

Table 1, below, compares the percentage of boys by racial and ethnic groups who scored on or above grade level on the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) in the 2019-2020 school year. In relation to the other three subgroups, Black boys showed the lowest percentage reading on or above grade level. Additionally, that percentage dropped as Black boys transitioned to middle school (5th to 6th grade).

Table 1

Percentage of Boys Reading On or Above Grade Level (2019-2020)

Race/ Ethnicity	Grade Level					
	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Black	50%	33%	39%	24%	19%	18%
Hispanic	29%	38%	36%	69%	50%	36%
Asian	100%	100%	100%	78%	100%	75%
White	38%	50%	60%	60%	100%	0%
Other	-	-	-	25%	100%	0%

Note. Jersey City Public Schools DORA Assessment (2020).

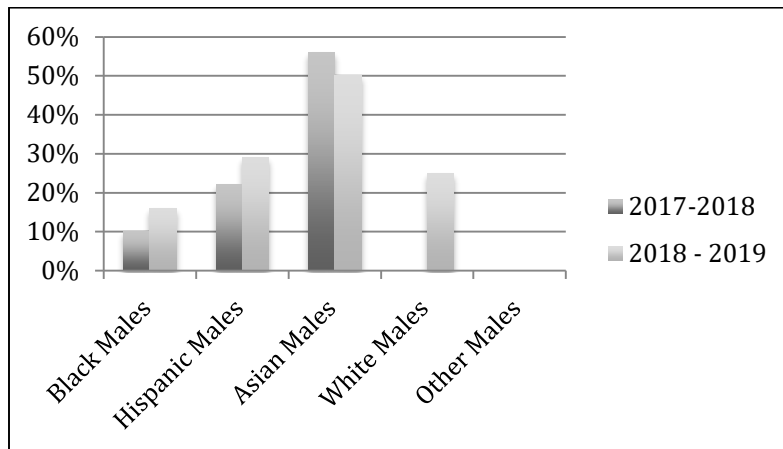
Furthermore, when the school leadership team analyzed the data for the purpose of informing instructional practices and supporting student growth and achievement, we found a huge gap in performance between the Black boys and boys in other racial and ethnic groups. For example, in 2017 in sixth grade, 10% of Black, 22% Hispanic, and 56% of Asian boys scored proficient on the New Jersey State Literacy Assessment (see Figure 2, below).

This is consistent with historical trends where the Black boys have been the lowest performing racial or ethnic group on literacy standardized state assessments (State of New Jersey, 2021). Similarly, at the district level, Black boys are underachieving and

underperforming on literacy benchmark and quarterly assessments. They lag behind their Asian, White, and Hispanic peers in performance on the literacy state assessments regardless of their grade. On the ELA assessments, Black boys performed the lowest with only 34% scoring proficient (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

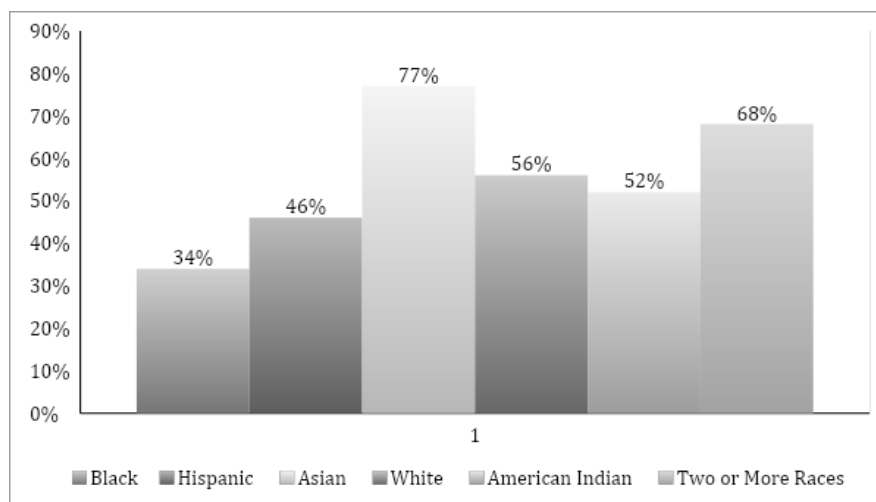
Sixth Grade Boys Proficient on New Jersey State Literacy Assessment (2017-2019)



Note. NJ State Student Assessment Report Card for Jersey City Public Schools, 2020

Figure 3

Jersey City District State ELA Proficiency by Demographic (2018-2019)



Note. New Jersey State Performance Report for Jersey City Public Schools(2020)

It is important to note that prior to the 2019- 2020 school year, the yearly assessment data available in third through eighth grade included New Jersey State Assessments for math and literacy administered in the spring of each school year, math and literacy benchmark and quarterly assessments, district level reading diagnostic assessments, and school level math and literacy common assessments. The global Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to move to remote learning; consequently, all state assessments, district benchmark and quarterly assessments, and school common assessments were suspended. This inability to fully access data impacted the breadth of data analysis in this study.

Issues Uniquely Impacting Black Boys

In relation to other sub-groups, Black boys had a uniquely different school experience that clearly impacted their achievement and performance. It is not clear whether changes in enrollment contribute to the underperformance and underachievement of Black boys in literacy; however, over-referrals to special education and for discipline suggest underlying racial bias and the use of strategies that detract from rather than enhance learning. In order to explore possible reasons for Black boys' poor performance and achievement at Urban Academy, several initial hypotheses, discussed below, were examined within the context of the school:

- a. disproportionate underachievement and underperformance of Black fifth grade boys transferring from a primary feeder school
- b. over-referral of Black boys for special education
- c. excessive disciplinary actions for Black boys, especially out-of-school suspensions

Student Transfers

One of the first issues that arose in exploring the underachievement of Black boys in middle school was the issue of students transferring in fifth grade from a local primary school. Urban Academy is uniquely situated in the Greenville section, with an unpredictable and often high mobility rate. Students transfer throughout the city regularly from September to June. Although students are zoned to attend the school from Pre-K through 8, there is a small primary school (Pre-K to Grade 4) three blocks away that serves as a feeder school. When their students complete fourth grade, they are zoned to join the students at Urban Academy. Each year Urban Academy receives 40 to 70 fifth grade transfer students who are intentionally dispersed throughout the homerooms.

Teachers and leadership in the school wondered if the shifts and variations in enrollment of boys in the grades before they enter middle school (i.e., fourth and fifth grades) might affect school culture and teacher's expectations of boys in middle school. Urban Academy students receive consistent literacy instruction resulting from the school's strong curriculum and instructional practices. The transfer students receive their foundation from a primary school and then transition to the culture, curriculum, and practices of Urban Academy. It is unclear whether changes in enrollment or the diversity in curricula or pedagogy, or both, might contribute to the disparity in performance and the underachievement and underperformance of middle school Black boys in literacy. Table 2, below, shows the changes in demographics from fourth grade to fifth grade, when students from the feeder school transfer to Urban Academy.

In addition to the shift in demographics between fourth and fifth grades that occur as a result of zoning, transitions also happen as the district offers accelerated and enrichment programs that cater to students throughout the city. In fifth grade, students have the opportunity

to apply to enter one of three accelerated and enrichment programs that begin in sixth grade. At the end of the fifth-grade year, Urban Academy loses 10 to 20 mostly Asian and White students to these accelerated and enrichment programs. For example, in the 2018-2019 school year, 14% of Urban Academy students left to attend district programs as they entered middle school. Thus, Urban Academy loses its high achievers while admitting a pool of students who arrive with a different academic background over which Urban Academy staff has no control. Figure 4 represents middle school enrollment of boys by race and ethnicity. In each year, Black boys represented the highest sub-population of boys followed by Hispanic, Asian, White, and Other.

Table 2

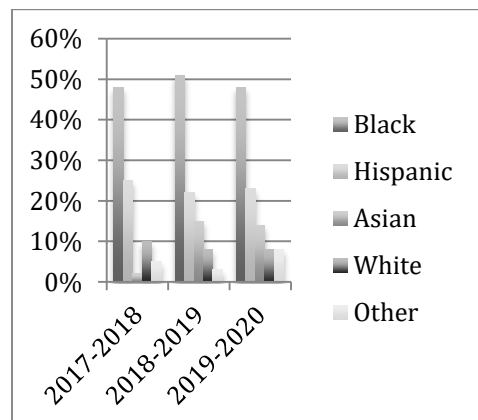
Enrollment of Fourth and Fifth Grade Boys (2018- 2020)

Race/Ethnicity	2018-2019 Grade 4	2019 - 2020 Grade 5	Change, Numbers	Change, Percent
Black	9	20	+11	+55.0%
Hispanic	7	21	+14	+66.7%
Asian	3	8	+5	+62.6%
White	2	6	+4	+66.7%
Other	1	1	0	0.0%

Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Figure 4

Three-Year Middle School Enrollment By Race and Ethnicity



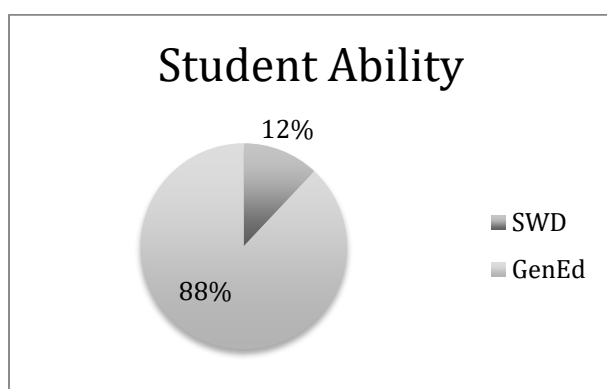
Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Referral to Special Education

The second issue that arose in exploring the underachievement of Black boys in middle school was placement in special education classes. Twelve percent of the entire student population at Urban Academy have a classification as a student with a disability (see Figure 5). Although Black students make up less than 50% of the total population but represent more than 50% of the students classified with disabilities over the last three years (see Figure 6).

Figure 5

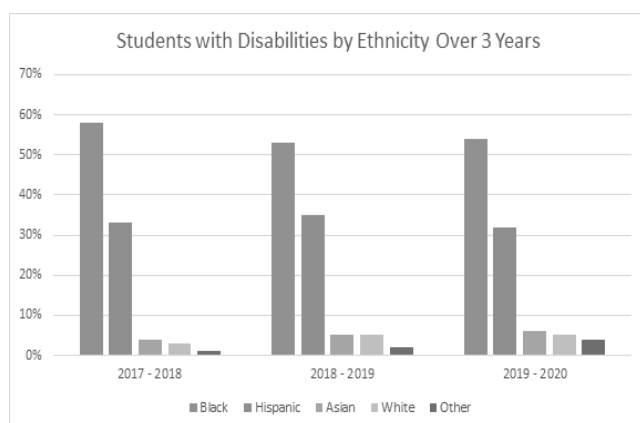
Enrollment Based on Student Ability (2019-2020)



Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Figure 6

Enrollment by Student Ability and Race/Ethnicity



Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Black boys are disproportionately represented in special education (see Figure 7, below). Over the three years preceding this research study, an average of 68.7% of the special needs population were boys; of these special needs boys, on average 61.1% were Black boys (see Table 3, below). In middle school, the disproportionality of Black boys in the special education classes continued (see Figure 8, below): 65% in the 2017-2018 school year; 55% in the 2018-2019 school year; and 76% in the 9-2020 school year. This research will explore this phenomenon and any correlations between special education classifications for middle school Black boys and their underachievement and underperformance in literacy.

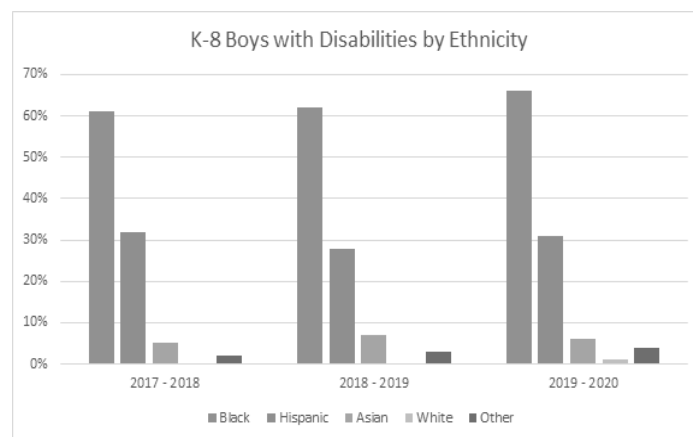
Table 3

Percentage of Special Needs Boys Who Were Black

Academic Year	Special Needs Total	Special Needs Boys	Special Needs Boys Who Were Black
2017-2018	98	66 (67.3%)	40 (60.6%)
2018-2019	98	70 (71.4%)	43 (61.4%)
2019-2020	85	57 (67.1%)	35 (61.4%)
Three Year Average	94	64 (68.7%)	39 (61.1%)

Figure 7

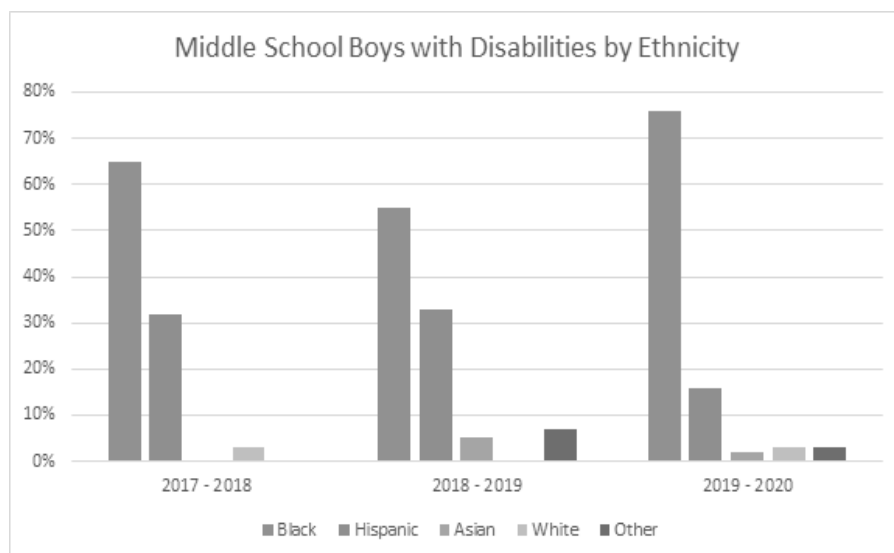
Boys in Special Education Grades K-8 by Race and Ethnicity Over Three Years



Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Figure 8

Middle School Boys by Race and Ethnicity Over Three Years



Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

Special Education Program. The process for referral of students to the special education program begins with Response to Intervention (RTI) and Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS). It is a tiered system of support for academic and behavioral intervention services that begins with teachers who may provide services in the classroom. For example, a teacher might incorporate a small group pullout as an intervention. All interventions are documented before requesting a Child Study Team (CST) evaluation for special education placement.

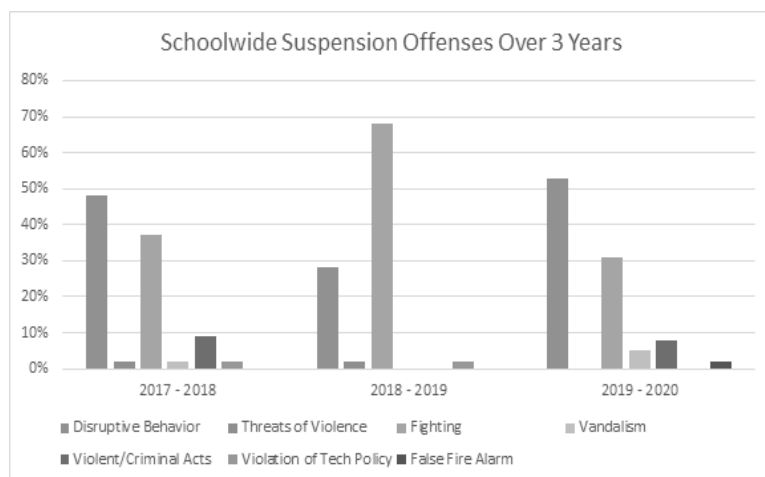
From grade level meetings and discussions with Child Study Team members, it is clear that teachers do not always follow this comprehensive, tiered system. Many of them circumvent the process and encourage parents to write letters to have their child tested based on number of retentions and behavior issues with the possible intent of removing students from their classroom.

In the last three years, the school has added two self-contained Specific Learning Disability (SLD) classes in sixth and seventh grade. Students in SLD classes have a variety of specific learning disabilities and are at least two academic years behind in literacy and math skills. The district also added a middle school (i.e., grades 6-8) Behavioral Disorder (BD) class where students are usually at or close to grade level but struggle with behavioral or emotional disorders.

In fifth through eighth grade, identified students are taken from the general setting, as per their Individual Educational Plan (IEP), for resource pull out replacement, where they receive adaptive basic skills instruction in math, literacy, or both. Finally, each grade level in middle school has two inclusion classes for students who are less than a year behind in literacy and math but require support in the general classroom setting. In these classes, there is a general education teacher and a certified special education teacher who accompanies the students to each of the four academic classes. This study will examine whether the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education classes is contributing to their underperformance and achievement in literacy.

Out-of-School Suspensions

The third issue that arose in exploring the underachievement of Black boys in middle school was out-of-school suspensions. In addition to being overrepresented in special education and lower achieving on school and state assessments, Black boys at Urban Academy disproportionately receive out-of-school suspensions for offenses they commit (see Figure 9). They account for the majority of suspensions: 63% in the 2017-2018 school year, 41% in the 2018-2019 school year, and 67% in the 2019-2020 school year. In some cases, the same students were repeatedly suspended for the same offense. The preliminary findings suggest that these persistent absences from the classroom contribute to underachievement and underperformance.

Figure 9*Three-Year Suspension Rates*

Note. Urban Academy Suspension Report (2020).

Unpacking the Problem

As the principal at Urban Academy for the last 10 years, I began the work of improving student achievement and performance by focusing on 1) school culture and climate; 2) literacy across the curriculum; and 2) developing professional learning communities that focus on data analysis to improve instruction, learning, and student achievement. Working mostly with a White female staff using a top -approach, I began to develop systems and structures to guide each area of improvement. My approach eventually evolved into a more collaborative approach, where all stakeholders became more involved in the decision-making process. The school has made great strides and improvement in culture and climate, discipline, and academics as a whole, but we have not fully examined the problem through the lens of equity.

After reviewing demographic, academic, and discipline data, I worked with the school leadership team to unpack the problem of underachieving and underperforming in literacy for middle school Black boys. We used the approach of Improvement Science (Bryk et al., 2015). My goal was to involve some of the stakeholders in the process of truly identifying if this was a

problem worth studying, and possible causes. This leadership team consisted of teachers, parents, and administrators; we engaged in small group discussions of the problem and brainstormed possible causes of the problem in September 2019, shortly before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conducting Empathy Interviews

Empathy Interviews with Teachers

Empathy interviews, one method in Improvement Science to examine the problem (Bryk et al., 2015), offered first-hand accounts from participants about how they experience the problem. In this case, we wanted to hear from some middle school literacy teachers and a few Black boys in middle school. I interviewed the three sixth, seventh, and eighth grade literacy general education teachers; two identified as Black and one identified as White. They had all been teaching for at least 10 years in the department; they were primarily responsible for creating the literacy plans, instructional activities, and the classroom environment. Prior to the interviews, teachers signed consent forms (see Appendix A).

The empathy interviews 12 questions about these teachers' experiences as middle school literacy teachers. The questions and probes covered lesson planning, instructional practices, school operational practices, students, and the demographic shifts that occur before middle school (see Appendix B). When asked about planning lessons and expectations for students, several themes emerged. Two of the three teachers believed they had high expectations for their students' literacy abilities; they did not provide examples of successful lessons that were content-rich or included high-level literacy practices to engage students. When asked specifically about culturally responsive practices, the teachers' shared strategies limited to the selection of books based on current events.

When asked about the school operational practices as they related to disciplinary practices and student referrals to special education programs, teachers expressed reluctance to reply but all of their responses aligned with the school level data. Based on their observations, all three teachers agreed that middle school Black boys made up the majority of students disciplined, assigned out-of-school suspensions, and referred to special education.

Finally, teachers indicated no awareness of the enrollment and demographic changes that occur right before middle school. Without any supporting data or evidence, two teachers offered that they believed the school loses “high-quality” students to the district’s accelerated and enrichment programs or charter schools. When probed further, one teacher expressed how she utilized higher achieving students to provide support to other students.

Overall, the teachers perceived that their lessons and expectations for students were adequate. They confidently spoke about their students and what they deemed successful literacy lessons. However, those lessons were characterized by completing test prep skills, reading and answering questions, and following the procedures of the teacher. Each teacher had a different perspective about cultural responsiveness and incorporating the culture and interests of students into the learning. Questions about school level operational procedures caused visible discomfort but they nevertheless truthfully provided answers to the questions.

Empathy Interviews with Middle School Black Boys

For the empathy interviews with Black middle school boys, I asked the eighth-grade literacy teacher to solicit parent consent to allow me to interview their boys for the study (see Appendix C). The teacher taught 24 Black boys in three literacy classes; she obtained consent from three students. Two boys were general education students, and one was identified as a student with disabilities. I developed 10 questions for the students to answer regarding their

experiences in literacy class and their relationships with their teacher and peers (see Appendix B).

When asked about their achievement and performance in literacy classes, two of the three boys agreed that they performed better in the primary grades. When probed to describe a successful lesson, the boys shared similar experiences when they followed the directions, and the teacher acknowledged their success. For example, when one student was asked to write a response to a prompt, at each paragraph he checked in with the teacher and she affirmed his success before he could move on to the next paragraph. One student conveyed that he was not always successful, but he had started paying more attention and following directions.

When asked about whether the classroom lessons included their culture or interests, one student recalled a lesson with the Walter Dean Myers book, *Monster*, when he was in seventh grade. He explained how he connected to the events of the story. In his life, he had to call 9-1-1 because someone was shot. He and his friends stayed with the injured person until help arrived.

When asked about equitable access to high-level classes or school clubs, none of the students reported enrolling in algebra, STEM club, or student government. Yet, all of the students perceived that they could have chosen to take part in these classes or activities based on their interests.

When asked how they experienced the demographic changes between fourth and sixth grade, all of the boys' responses reflected their concern about behavior and being able to build relationships with other students. The students expressed relief that they had relationships with the incoming students from community sports and activities.

Finally, when asked which students they perceived were most disciplined or assigned out-of-school suspensions, they all agreed that it was mostly Black boys. When probed further,

one boy remarked that some of his Black male peers usually played too much and got in trouble for playing. He admitted that “when I got to eighth grade, I decided to stop playing because I wanted to graduate and participate in all of my activities.”

Overall, the students struggled with articulating their thoughts about their experiences in their literacy classes. Their responses suggested that success in their literacy classes was characterized by their ability to follow the procedures of the teacher. Students in their class seemed to receive chunked, teacher-led lessons that depended on the teacher to convey their achievement; and, only when she acknowledged it, could they move on to other learning. Like the teachers, these Black boys were more frequently disciplined and received more out-of-school suspensions. Based on their responses, culturally relevant texts or activities were extremely limited. Both the teacher and student empathy interviews underscored the need for culturally responsive and high-quality teaching practices.

Synthesis

The urgency to explore solutions for the problem manifested in 1) a review of the available data on student demographics, academics, and discipline; the outcomes of the root cause analysis (fishbone diagram); and capturing the experiences of the students and staff through empathy interviews. Although this study only focused on literacy in middle school, according to the most recent available state data, it was evident that this problem persisted throughout the grade levels. This study sought to improve the achievement and performance of Black boys in order to prepare them for high school, college, and career success.

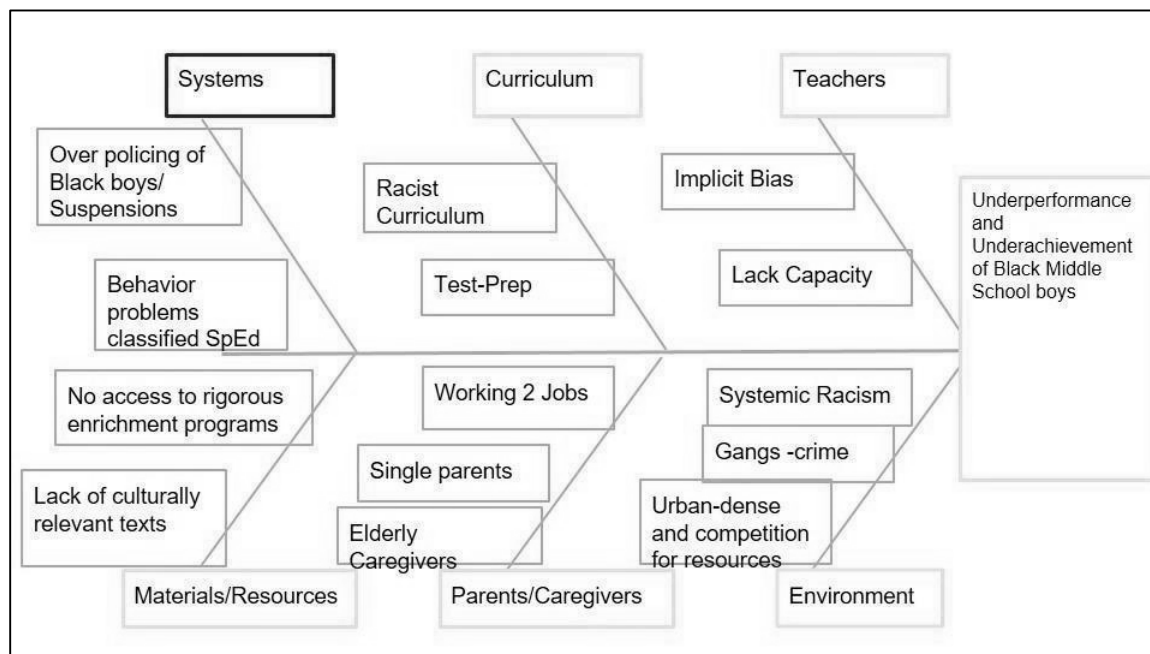
Understanding the Problem Using a Fishbone Diagram

The team utilized several protocols but settled on creating a fishbone diagram, another method used in Improvement Science (Bryk et al. 2015). The diagram is a graphic tool that helps

to identify the actual problem and possible underlying root causes. Designed in the shape of an actual fish, the head represents the proposed problem. The bones represent identified categories that may contribute to the problem; underneath each category, or bone, the team listed examples. The categories the team identified included teachers, curriculum, materials and resources, environment, parents or caregivers, and school systems. After identifying the categories, the leadership team facilitated school-wide small group meetings to complete the diagram, generating factors that might contribute to the problem by category. Then, the team compiled the information from the small group fishbones to develop a single robust fishbone diagram that encompassed perspectives from the entire school community (see Figure 10, below).

Figure 10

Fishbone Diagram



Identifying the Drivers of Change

The overarching question for our theory of action was, “How do we improve the literacy achievement and performance of middle school Black boys at Urban Academy?” This study aimed to find solutions that ensure the middle school Black boys feel seen and valued in their learning and development. In literacy, Black boys would benefit from gaining a love of literacy as they develop their identity and expand in their mastery of academic expression. Ultimately, the aim was to 1) improve the literacy performance and achievement of Black boys in middle school at Urban Academy through improved teaching, 2) provide research-based data that grounds the problem in science, and 3) add to the body of research literature on solutions for this problem of practice.

After conducting the empathy interviews and developing the fishbone diagram, the goal was to determine which categories and factors the team would address as drivers of change. The school leadership team utilized a driver diagram, the third step in an Improvement Science approach, to develop their theory of action (Bryk et al., 2015). The driver diagram is a visual representation to brainstorm possible solutions to the problem. The team identified three primary drivers that were derived from the categories (i.e., bones) on the fishbone diagram that would serve as levers to achieve the aim of the study (Bryk et al., 2015).

The school leadership team agreed some categories were in our locus of control, while others required systemic or policy changes over which we had no authority. For example, the immediate school environment is considered urban, a social construct that has many connotations. This study defines urban as a densely settled community or clustered area characterized by specific cultural norms that are informed by large populations of people of color (Barnes et al., 2019). Rothstein (2017) chronicles historical accounts of how the Federal, state,

and local governments initiated and perpetuated neighborhood segregation that led to urban environments. He suggests that there were White people who refused to live near former Black slaves or other people of color. So laws, mandates and other political were created to ensure that people of color did not benefit from governmental housing perks and initiatives (Rothstein, 2017). Thus, people of color increasingly resided in largely overpopulated urban areas. Although these communities seem to build and thrive off their rich culture, developing diverse and dynamic experiences for the residents, overpopulation creates many problems. Some of those problems include competing for resources, continued effects of systemic racism, housing disparities, and over -of Black and Brown communities (Rothstein, 2017). Although the effects of this urban environment likely contributed to the underperformance and underachievement of Black boys, the members of the school community have no agency to address systemic racism and economic disparities.

The team extensively discussed the category of parents and caregivers. We reviewed demographic data and the socio-economic status of the families of our Black boys. The families included two-parent, single-parent, and extended-family homes. Families fell into low and middle socio-economic status. The team agreed that although different family structures and socio-economic status likely contributed to the problem, the school community did not have valid ways of investigating or making correlations in this domain.

The team was more confident in using the categories of teachers, curriculum, materials, and school level systems as drivers of change. The school-level brainstorming resulted in setting goals to examine whether the problem of middle school Black boys underachieving and underperforming in literacy related to 1) implicit bias and teacher capacity, 2) the implementation of a mostly test prep focused and racist curriculum, 3) disproportionately using

out-of-school suspensions for misbehavior by Black boys, and 4) over-referring Black boys to special education.

The Three Primary Drivers

The first primary driver addressed the curriculum, including what is written, taught, and exposed. We believed that the students would benefit from an anti-racist curriculum, one that is inclusive of culturally relevant content and text, as opposed to test prep lessons. Thus, Black boys might engage more with content that involves their lived experiences.

The second primary driver addressed school systems and operation, including equitable discipline practices and academic support for students. The data showed that the school assigns out-of-school suspensions for Black boys at a higher rate than any other subgroup. Similarly, Black boys are over-referred to the Child Study Team for placement in special education programs. By developing systems that promote social emotional learning, character development, and in-class academic support, Black boys may more fully feel valued; the consequence would be that they engage with the instruction and improve in performance and achievement.

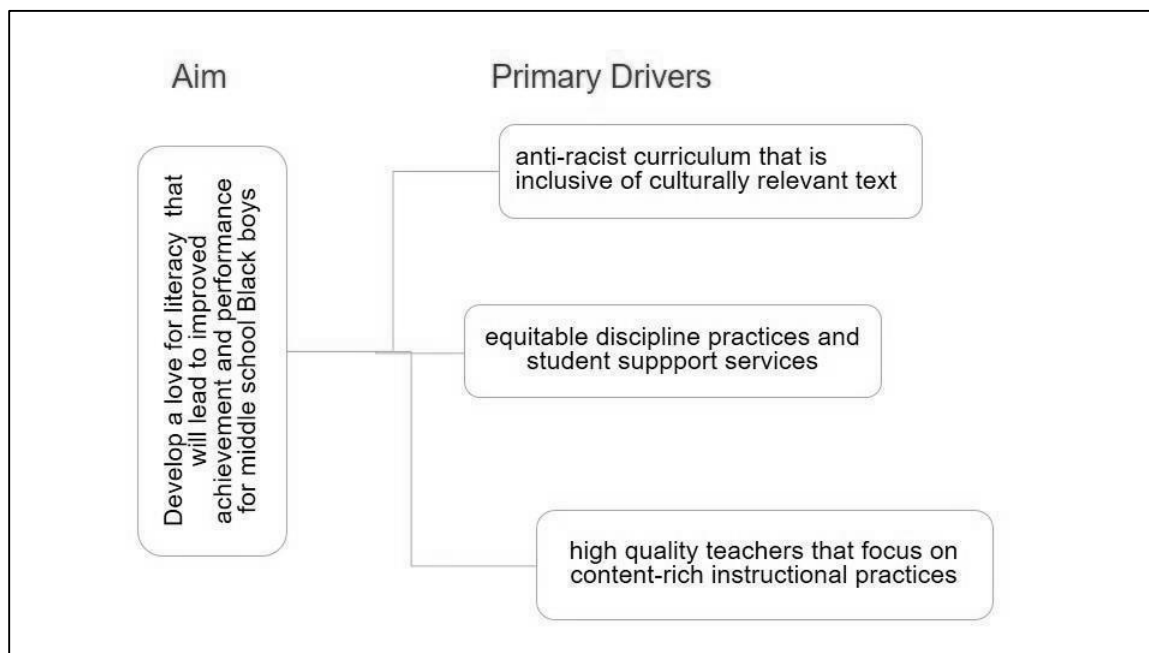
The third and final primary driver addressed strengthening the quality and relevance of teacher instructional practices. Based on the empathy interviews, the instructional decisions and pedagogical practices used at Urban Academy are not beneficial to middle school Black boys, who lag behind the other boys in achievement and performance. Again, by incorporating high-quality teaching activities and culturally responsive pedagogy, Black boys might identify with the content, engage more, and improve their performance and achievement.

The Driver Diagram

Taken together, the primary drivers are shown below (see Figure 11). The school leadership team hypothesized and developed a theory of action that encompassed the primary drivers: Black boys in middle school will feel seen and valued, improving their literacy achievement and performance, when they have access to 1) an anti-racist, culturally relevant curriculum; 2) equitable discipline and special education referral practices; and 3) high-quality teachers who focus on high-level, content rich, literacy instructional practices that engage all students.

Figure 11

Initial Driver Diagram



Thus, this study focused on the teacher-centered primary driver of developing high-quality teachers who focus on content-rich instructional practices using culturally responsive materials. The school did not have autonomy in hiring, a function managed by the district.

Furthermore, it was the experience of school leaders they could not recruit, hire, and retain high quality teachers. At times, high quality teachers got involuntarily transferred or fired due to a reduction in workforce. Therefore, it was imperative that the school develop the teachers who were already assigned and committed to Urban Academy. The team decided that to address this primary driver and reach the stated goal, the teachers needed to engage in professional learning in the areas of culturally relevant pedagogy and improving their lesson planning and instruction using the Japanese lesson study model.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the primary drivers for addressing the underachievement and underperformance in literacy of Black boys in middle school. It looks for possible approaches (i.e., secondary drivers) and specific strategies on how to achieve change. The literature offers research-based ideas to activate the primary drivers. Additionally, the review explores key concepts including confronting implicit bias, culturally relevant pedagogy, and possible ways to improve instruction.

For decades, researchers have agreed that the issues of underperformance and underachievement of Black children, in general, and Black boys, in particular, are deeply rooted in racism and systemic inequities; this is expressed in curricula, discipline, and overrepresentation in special education (Dancy, 2014). Our experiences at Urban Academy are consistent with 30 years of research literature. Underachievement and underperformance are two separate issues, but they are often used interchangeably. Underachievement measures what students can do and underperformance measures what they actually do. Thus, it is important to remember that some of the findings in these studies, discussed below, are unreliable because generalizations are made about the perceived ability of Black boys as opposed to their tested ability.

Implicit Bias

This study defines implicit bias as having attitudes or perceptions about people based on cultural stereotypes with or without conscious knowledge (Hammond, 2015). In addition to racism, Black boys also deal with the effects of being taught by teachers who are predominantly White and female. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar et al.,

2020), 80% of elementary and secondary teachers identify as White females. Some White teachers, according to experts, operate with the privilege of whiteness and cultural norms that are oppressive to Black students (Lawrence, 2005). Their implicit bias and obsession with order and discipline in the classroom is usually targeted towards Black students, particularly Black boys.

In a simulation study using an experimental approach, Jacoby-Senhor et al. (2016) examined teachers' implicit biases and their effect on teaching quality and student performance. Their hypothesis was that the greater the implicit racial bias among White teachers, the greater their anxiety when teaching Black students, leading to a diminished quality of instruction and lower performance in Black students. The findings suggest that, when controlling for explicit bias, there was a significant primary effect of learner race that was moderated by a marginally significant interaction of the instructors' implicit bias and learner race.

In a multiple case study, Carter (2019) explored whether White elementary teachers' perception of whiteness influenced their critical literacy practices. The researcher chronicled observations of a White teacher's literacy lesson for five sessions. In each of those five sessions, the teacher was observed isolating one Black boy from the group and ignoring him during instruction due to his behavior. Carter (2019) questioned whether isolating Black boys from the group and classroom instruction could risk social and intellectual disengagement. The findings suggested the implicit bias of these teachers adversely affects their execution of critical literacy practices for Black boys. While based on a small sample, these results suggest that implicit bias may play an influential role in how Black boys learn.

Confronting Implicit Bias

There is limited research on how to address implicit bias with teachers to improve student learning. The first step is to demonstrate to teachers that implicit bias exists. A simulation study

conducted by Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), showed that 57 teachers were far more likely to assign boys with stereotypically Black names more harsh punishments for the same infractions than boys with stereotypically White names.

Shields (2019) surveyed students and teachers in a middle school about racism. The predominantly White teachers served White, Black, and Indigenous students. There was evidence that racism existed as evidenced by comments and off-colored jokes made by the students; however, she found that the teachers and students were not willing to address these micro-aggressions, even when pointed out to the teachers. It appears from this study that simply documenting and reporting microaggressions does not change practice or even engage staff in making an effort to improve school climate. Shields (2019) admonished leaders to challenge knowledge frameworks like color blindness that perpetuate racism and inequalities.

Whitford and Emerson (2018) investigated offering empathy intervention as a means of addressing implicit bias. They conducted a randomized pre-test and post-test study with 34 White pre-service teachers to reduce implicit bias. All of the student-teachers had grown up in the suburbs and had plans to teach in a general setting with diverse students. The researchers split the student teachers into two groups of 17. One group received the treatment of empathy intervention (i.e., a short story point-of-view handwriting exercise) while the other did not. Both groups completed the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) to measure implicit attitudes by gauging reactions to stimulus.

For the preservice teachers who received the treatment of an empathy intervention, there was a significant reduction in the demonstration of negative implicit bias in discipline practices toward Black students compared to the control group. The results suggest that empathy interventions can help to reduce implicit bias when working with Black students (Whitford &

Emerson, 2018). Although Urban Academy did not administer the Implicit Association Test because it would not be appropriate in the workplace, the study did use the intervention of storytelling to assist with understanding the lived experiences of students.

A second strategy that was proposed, but untested, came from Zellars (2016), who made a strong case for implementing implicit bias training for teachers who work with Black students. Believing that it begins with teacher self-accountability, she asserted, “What I want to centralize. . . is the responsibility of educators to confront both the science and practice of implicit bias (IB) in their interactions and pedagogical practices with their Black students” (p. 32). In her analysis of implicit bias data and her own research as an implicit bias trainer for educators, she offered that the most effective interventions involved high degrees of self-involvement and commitment to change.

A third strategy described by Ramkellawan and Bell (2017) explored how coaching conversations can uncover implicit bias, which they termed “passive racism” toward students. The participants were from a Title I middle school in New York City. On a voluntary basis, two teachers agreed to pilot the coaching protocol. Coaches met with the two teachers over a 10-month period for 30 to 60 minutes. The coaching protocol consisted of questions and discussions categorized into six areas: setting the stage, creating buy-in, identifying the root, probing the cause, obliterating otherness, and ongoing monitoring. Going through this process of uncovering implicit bias and changing mindsets positively impacted the participants. One participant was pushed to acknowledge how her implicit biases showed up in her deficit language when referring to her students. Another participant committed to using culturally relevant texts to engage students. The researchers argued that substantive growth in addressing implicit bias that impacts change in mindsets requires trust and reflective practices. No further results were shown, but the

study offers another possible way to get teachers to begin confronting bias by creating an action plan and developing a culture of directness.

This research, while based on comparatively small sample sizes, suggests that implicit bias can be confronted in order to create a positive impact on learning for Black, indigenous, and people of color. Although it requires trust, reflective practices, and mindset changes, it benefits students and has a positive correlation on Black boys and their learning. The literature suggests that confronting implicit bias can be done through helping teachers acknowledge that it exists, offering time for learning and reflection, and providing opportunities for job-embedded coaching.

Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Researchers have explored how culturally deficient instructional practices and resources contribute to poor student engagement. Husband and Kang (2020) argued that some narratives in texts promote a deficit mindset, framing Black boys as contributing to the problem by being victims of poverty or products of their environment. Similarly, Collins (2011), in a discursive analysis, explored how a classroom teacher, during instruction, consistently referred to a Black male student as a “bad boy” during a writing lesson which led to his eventual removal from instruction.

Thus, the second area reviewed in the research literature was Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Often the terms culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive practices are used interchangeably by researchers and experts. CRP evolved from the research and implementation of multicultural education. Multicultural education emerged as an ideological approach to affirm diversity and help students of color feel proud and empowered (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). CRP became the perfect marriage of multicultural education

and sociopolitical and historical context (Banks, 2006). Ladson-Billings (1995) described CRP as a collective empowerment that consists of three propositions: 1) the students must experience academic success, 2) develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and 3) develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo or social order.

Furthermore, schools that are mostly populated by Black children continue to be underserved and under-resourced (Hussar et al, 2020). Black students who attend urban schools with mostly Black students are less likely to have access to diverse texts that offer positive images of racial or ethnic characters and have cultural relevance. They are less likely to have access to adequate technology for the purpose of application or exploration. They are less likely to have STEAM education or gifted and accelerated programs. As a result, they are less likely to view themselves as competent readers, problem solvers, or advanced in their studies (Talbert-Johnson, 2004)

In a review of how CRP relates to teaching literacy to middle school students, Moje and Hinchmin (2004, p. 322) argued that the best literacy practices for youth attend to the knowledge and discourse of the youth's home, race, ethnicity, culture, and communities to which they belong. Thus, experts argue CRP is not only a best practice for Black students but for all students. Surprisingly, there are few studies that explore the benefits of CRP.

Robinson (2019) supports this concept, suggesting there may be a lack of reader identity among Black boys. He argues that Black boys need pedagogy and culturally responsive texts that explore their lived experiences in order to engage and find success in reading. Unfortunately, “the voices, histories, and perspectives of people of color, women, and other historically marginalized groups are often missing and/or silenced in many of the texts that are used in schools” (Husband & Kang, 2020, p.7). Tatum and Muhhamad (2012) argued that the deliberate

invisibility of positive images and literacy practices of Black males robs students of a legacy that is their own.

Milner (2014) examined the academic implementation of CRP by a teacher in a qualitative study at a diverse urban middle school: 60% Black, 32% White, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% Native American. The teacher utilized cultural knowledge and competence to plan and teach culturally responsive lessons. Through semi-structured interviews, observed repeated practices, and patterns, Milner (2014) established a triangulation pattern. He saw the evidence of what the teacher expected in the teacher's and students' actions. The teacher was using a "cultural data set" to help her students be successful. He also noted over a two-year observation period that no students were sent out of the classroom for disciplinary concerns. Finally, the students took pride in themselves, their culture, and the work they produced.

In another qualitative study, Samuels (2018) examined the perspectives of K-12 -service teachers on the benefits of CRP in classrooms. The participants participated in a six-hour training split into two sessions. The first sessions was professional development building foundational knowledge on culturally responsive teaching as highlighted by Villegas and Lucas (2007). On a voluntary basis, 200 participants learned: (1) how learners construct knowledge, (2) the importance of learning about students' lives, (3) how to be socio-culturally conscious, (4) how to hold affirming views about diversity, (5) how to use diverse instructional strategies, and (6) how to advocate for all students. The second session engaged the participants in reading through literature to determine what CRP looked and sounded like in practice. They then worked in small focus groups to collaborate and determine how to incorporate in their practices.

The findings revealed perceived advantages and challenges. Although the teachers experienced anxiety about controversial topics, discomfort, and lack of background knowledge,

they regarded the facilitation of culturally responsive teaching as beneficial in relationship building, fostering cross-cultural understanding and inclusiveness, and influencing more diverse world views, particularly with marginalized students (Samuels, 2018). The study summed up by stating, “In a culturally responsive classroom, students learn by doing; thus, student engagement is enhanced. Such engagement consequently results in increased student learning and achievement.” (Samuels, 2018, p 25).

Finally, Warren (2013) examined the use of perspective taking as an empathy intervention by White female teachers in their culturally responsive interactions with Black males. Warren described this perspective taking as two-pronged: 1) the act of knowing, which is the professional approach that teachers use to get to know students and their families; and 2) the process of knowing, which is an intellectual exercise where the teacher negotiates how to use that new knowledge to address the needs of students. The qualitative study investigates four teachers with results presented as on archetypal teacher, Mrs. Johnson (a pseudonym).

Though there were variations in the four teachers’ conceptions and expressions of empathy and their interactions, there were common themes that emerged. When the teachers utilized empathy in their own way, they built trust and classroom community, acted flexibly and took risks to benefit their students, and worked proactively when developing interventions to support Black male students. Warren concluded, “Ms. Johnson’s interactions with students are substantive, each in a different way. The link between them is her attempt to partner with Black male students in such a way that they feel or perceive they have agency in their academic performance. The young men have a significant stake in their intellectual development and academic work” (p. 194).

Overall, these studies on CRP offer a strong argument for its implementation and the benefits it could potentially have for improving the achievement and performance of Black boys in literacy. The studies suggested that CRP promotes self-pride, student engagement, and learning. There also might be a reduction in disciplinary action that requires students to be removed from the classroom. Finally, it may lead to a classroom environment where students take responsibility for their own achievement in classwork. The question becomes, however, how to develop teachers' capacity to use these effectively.

Improving Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice

To confront implicit bias and encourage use of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers need support in understanding how to implement change in their classrooms. Perception must be accompanied by action to affect change in student achievement and performance. Teachers may agree that this is the work that they must engage in, but schools may not be structurally set up to do the intense work required or may not have the financial and time resources to make it happen. Thus, I reviewed research literature on strategies for teacher development to engage in improving instructional practice. Given the research literature on implicit bias training, strategies should combine coaching, reflection, and learning orientation.

Japanese Lesson Study (JLS), unlike other more formal means of professional development, is school-based, voluntary, and organized by teachers to research their own practices through iterative trial-and-error learning, reflection, and peer support (Doig & Groves, 2011). The lesson study consists of four main phases: 1) goal setting and planning, 2) teaching the lesson, 3) post lesson debrief, and 4) consolidation of learning (). Teachers in the lesson study plan a lesson together. Then, each of the teachers implements the lesson to their students while the other teachers observe and collect data. After each lesson, the teachers meet to

compare notes and provide feedback. If necessary, the lesson is re-taught to the same students to improve outcomes. The JLS approach provides teachers with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, broaden their teaching approaches, and create better learning opportunities for students. Additionally, it is an empowering approach that develops a teaching team's comfort and capacity as they learn together.

Prior research shows that JLS is an effective means of improving teacher practice. In a study to test its impact on the quality of teaching, Vermunt et al. (2019) used a methodological triangulation study to identify components of teacher discussions that support teacher learning and the influence that JLS has on teacher learning. The focus was on teacher learning processes (i.e., the activities teachers use to learn new material) and learning patterns (i.e., beliefs, motivations, and their personal characteristics). He tested three patterns of teacher learning: meaning oriented, application oriented, and problematic learning. The two-year lesson study involved 161 primary and secondary math ; the study aimed to improve teacher's mathematical knowledge and pedagogy on difficult math concepts. Vermunt et al. (2019) found that the quality of teacher learning (i.e., content knowledge, analyzing student learning, misunderstandings) improved over time when teachers participated in JLS.

Similarly, in a randomized, experimental trial with 39 educator teams across the United States, Lewis and Perry (2017) examined the effectiveness of JLS for a math lesson. The researchers created three random groups: 1) one group received the treatment of just the lesson study; 2) one group received the treatment of the lesson study and research-based knowledge of using a resource kit; and 3) the control group did not receive any treatment. The researchers reviewed written reflections, teacher assessments of their knowledge base about fractions, student assessments, videos of teacher meetings, and other artifacts. The results of the study were

categorized by educators' knowledge of fractions, students' knowledge of fractions, contributions of the resource kit, and perceived quality of professional development. The findings suggest that educators' knowledge improved for teachers in both treatment groups. For students' knowledge, there was a significant positive effect on Group 2 where teachers used lesson study and a researched-based kit. Finally, for perceived quality of professional learning, the two experimental groups rated the experience significantly higher in quality than the control group which did not participate in JLS. The results of this study support the effectiveness of JLS for building the capacity of teachers.

The findings from research on Japanese Lesson Study show strong instructional improvement benefits when teachers lead their own professional development, using a structured protocol-driven process. When teachers are fully engaged, it provides opportunities for them to improve their individual practices and the capacity of the group. They also see the value in doing the work. When using the lesson study as a change idea at Urban Academy, we will be focused and intentional about allowing the teachers to lead in their development so that they may own the work and continue to build the quality of their teaching.

Updating the Driver Diagram

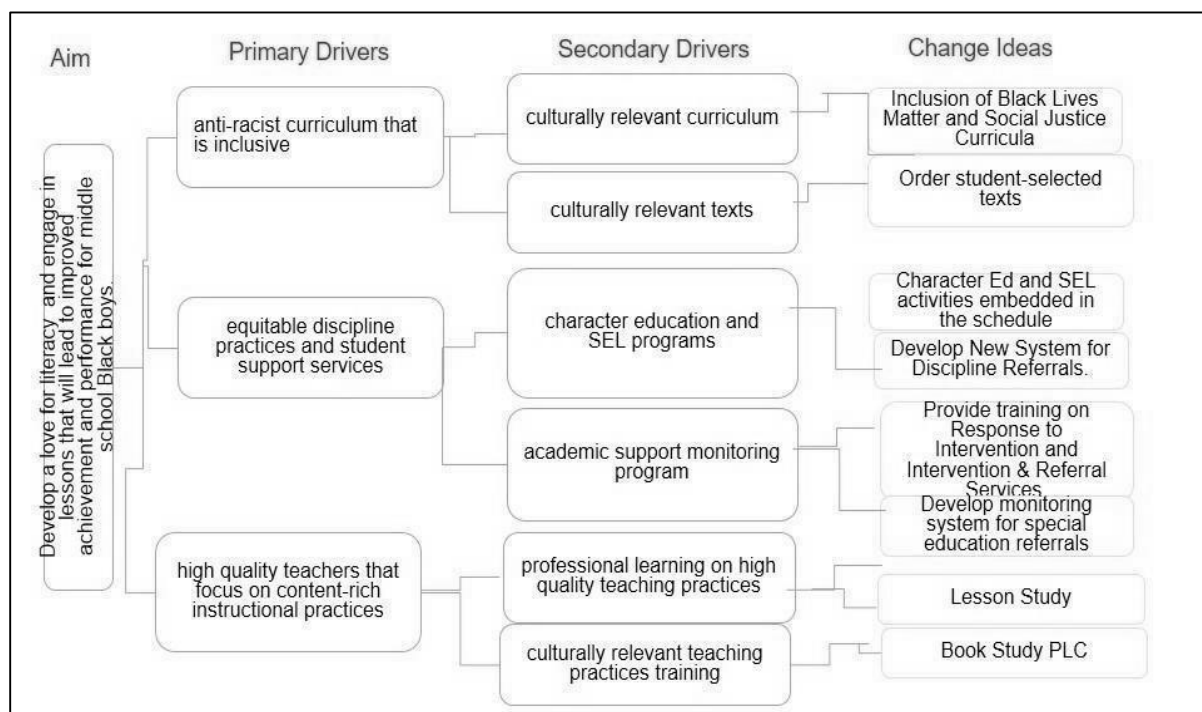
This literature review highlights possible causes for the underachievement and underperformance of Black boys in literacy. The literature suggests the problem is rooted in racism, implicit bias, and culturally deficient resources. The research literature suggests that it is imperative that the problem of underachievement and underperformance of Black boys in literacy be addressed using a culturally responsive approach and effective reading instruction practices. The research literature suggests that providing culturally responsive pedagogy, high-level literacy instruction and improving teacher quality through collaborative professional

learning experiences would improve the performance and achievement of middle school Black boys at Urban Academy in Jersey City. This underscored the need to explore changes in teacher practices, the curriculum, and the school-level systems that contribute to the problem.

After reviewing the literature on possible solutions to the problem, I refined the driver diagram to articulate the aim of increasing Black boys' love for literacy, engage in the lessons and the long-term benefit of improving their literacy achievement and performance (see Figure 12). The literature supports ways to achieve and measure the aim. Although there are three primary drivers, with two secondary drivers for each and several possible research-based change ideas, for the purpose of the study, the focus will be on one primary driver to test interventions.

Figure 12

Update Driver Diagram

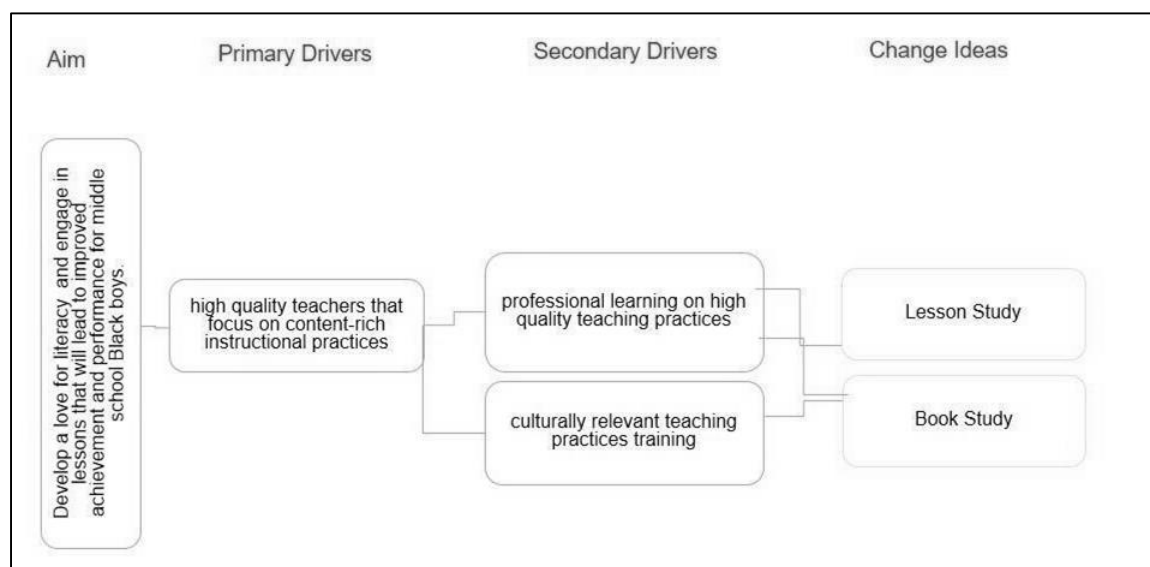


One of the hallmarks of Improvement Science is focusing on a single, narrowly defined area for change (Bryk et al., 2015). Furthermore, it would not have been feasible to attempt to

take on implementing change for every driver in the revised driver diagram, especially given the constraints inherent to remote and hybrid teaching during the global pandemic. Thus, the study focused on the third primary driver of developing high quality English Language Arts teachers who focus on content-rich instructional practices in order to engage all students, with a particular focus on Black boys (see Figure 13). Teachers must execute culturally relevant pedagogy in order to engage all students. The literature on culturally responsive pedagogy provides strong evidence for achieving significant positive impact on student engagement that may ultimately improve student performance and achievement for Black boys.

Figure 13

Driver Diagram for Improving ELA Teaching



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study used an experimental mixed methods approach to examine whether and how a multi-pronged intervention could increase engagement and the literacy performance and achievement of Black boys in middle school. The two-part intervention focused on professional development for high-quality literacy practices (secondary driver) and culturally relevant pedagogy (secondary driver). Qualitative evidence documented the intervention and teacher participation. The intervention's impact was demonstrated using quantitative evidence (i.e., literacy diagnostic assessments) combined with qualitative evidence on student engagement, teacher perceptions, and teacher feedback.

The purpose of this study was to take a deeper look in the factors that improve the literacy achievement and performance of Black boys in middle school by involving teachers, , and their experiences in the experiment (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This chapter describes the professional development change ideas and how they will be implemented. It discusses the overall PDSA cycle to test the change ideas as well as two discrete PDSA cycles: a book study and a Japanese lesson study. Ethical considerations and the researcher's role are defined. The context of the study, the participants and how they contributed to the study, the instrumentation, measures of efficacy, data collection processes, and data analysis strategy are also presented.

Description of the Action

The leadership team utilized the improvement Science inquiry protocol of Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles to test the intervention. The PDSA is a rigorous protocol used by Improvement Science researchers to learn quickly and at low cost by systematically using evidence from practice to improve practice (Bryk et al., 2015). The intervention combines two

change ideas which will be implemented concurrently: a school-wide book study PDSA cycle and a Japanese Lesson Study PDSA cycle. The study took place in the middle school English Language Arts department.

Change Idea 1: Training in Culturally Responsive Teaching

The first research-based change idea was utilizing book study to increase teacher knowledge and pedagogy by reading and engaging in activities with fellow educators (Ping et al., 2018). This school has successfully participated in book studies in the past to increase their knowledge on a particular concept or practice. Teachers were given opportunities before school and during school hours to read, take notes, discuss, and demonstrate their learning. They worked in small groups and selected their own facilitators. The school leadership committee researched several books and agreed on *Culturally Responsive Teaching for the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). The book was purchased for every staff member and distributed prior to summer vacation to allow the opportunity for teachers to read the text ahead of the study implementation period.

Beginning in October 2020, all teachers were required to engage in an eight-week school-wide book study and PDSA Cycle on culturally responsive pedagogy (see Figure 14, below). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the teachers met via Zoom with a goal of developing their knowledge and participating in learning activities that promote authentic student engagement and rigor. The school leadership team selected eight facilitators who had facilitated groups in the past.

Initially, the facilitators met with the administrative team to review the readings, set the focus for the book study, plan discussions, develop , and decide on the deliverables over the eight weeks. The facilitators then set their meeting times, agendas, small group weekly meetings

and activities. The small group sessions usually met Wednesdays and Thursdays for 30 to 60 minutes. The 64 teachers meet, discussed chapters of the text, modeled how to use culturally responsive texts or content, shared their deliverables, and gave and received feedback.

Figure 14

Book Study PDSA Cycle

<p>Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any revisions to the tools. • Purchase more culturally relevant books. • Develop the second round of interventions. • Make an adjustments if the school moves to hybrid or full in-person instruction. 	<p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase and distribute books for staff all staff members. • Provide culturally relevant books. • Develop schedule for meetings and reflections. • Solicit volunteers to facilitate • Develop key understandings, deliverables, and reflection surveys.
<p>Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review lesson plans for culturally relevant pedagogy. • Examine deliverables for evidence of culturally relevant pedagogy. • Review and chart survey results. • Review student book orders. 	<p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview chapters with facilitators. • Facilitate weekly discussions, activities, and deliverables. • Complete surveys after each session.

Each Tuesday, the facilitators met with the administrators to reflect on the process, discuss any adjustments that needed to be made, and discussed upcoming chapters and deliverables. At least three times over the course of the eight-week period, a whole group session was planned to check in, allow cross-group discussion, and enable whole group modeling for using culturally relevant text and content.

As a related activity and using the cultures represented by the students, the library media specialist bought eight to ten culturally relevant texts for each homeroom teacher to be used as mentor text when teaching literacy. During a whole group session, I modeled culturally responsive teaching using four of those texts to plan lessons that were relevant to the students in

Pre-K to Grade 8. Opportunities to discuss how to adapt the mentor text to particular grade levels were also provided.

Change Idea 2: Japanese Lesson Study

The second research-based change idea was the Japanese Lesson Study (JLS) as a tool for professional development (Doig & Groves, 2011). I posited that using this in the English Language Arts department would be beneficial because the school already had a structure, culture, and norms for professional learning committees. The teachers were accustomed to meeting during common planning times to plan lessons, discuss data, and look at student work.

We had already piloted this model with great success when the fifth-grade math participated in lesson study during the 2018- 2019 school year. The team consisted of two classes, three teachers, two instructional coaches, two administrators, and a district supervisor. After a year, students improved in engagement, daily formative assessments, and school-level common assessments. The teachers built their knowledge and capacity in math instruction. Additionally, the teachers continued their inquiry cycles with different strands in math. It was always the school's goal to scale up this lesson study in different grades and for different academic content areas.

Concurrently, seven of the middle school English Language Arts teachers, who also participated in the book study, engage in two PDSA cycles of a three-week JLS (see Figure 15, below). Our lesson study consisted of three parts. During Week 1, the team of educators planned a lesson together with objectives, activities, and assessments. The team was guided by the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for middle school literacy. We intentionally sought mentor texts and activities to engage Black boys as it relates to images, student interests, community activities, and social issues. During Week 2, the lesson was delivered and observed in similar

settings while data was collected. Finally, during Week 3, the entire team debriefed the observations and the findings during the lesson. Prior to and following the lesson study intervention, teachers and students completed pre/post surveys and the teachers completed interviews.

Figure 15

Lesson Study PDSA Cycle

<p>Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any revisions or adjustments • Scale up to another set of classes. 	<p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select focus NJSLs (literacy). • Plan lesson aligned to standard that is culturally relevant and engages all students w/particular focus on Black boys. • Develop classroom observation tool. • Select classes target classes for the first round.
<p>Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize and analyze the assessment. • Organize and analyze the observation data. • View and listen to lesson. • View and discuss artifacts. 	<p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute 45-minute lesson. • Record lesson (Audio and Visual). • Observers collect data using the tool. • Collect artifacts: drafts, visuals, assessments.

The combination of the two PDSA cycles occurred over the course of approximately 16-weeks during the 2020-2021 (see Figure 16, below). During the Plan portion, the school leadership committee developed the prerequisite school-wide book study and protocols for data collection. Additionally, the pre/post surveys for the students and the teachers and the semi structured interviews for the teachers were created. To implement the intervention of the JLS, a schedule for planning, executing, and debriefing the lesson study was developed. Finally, the team developed a lesson study aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for literacy that was culturally relevant and engaging for all students, with a particular focus on Black boys.

Figure 16*Overall PDSA Cycle*

Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any revisions to the tools. • Develop the second round of interventions. • Make an adjustments if the school moves to hybrid or full in-person instruction. 	Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop pre/post surveys and semi-structured interviews. • Plan Book study on Culturally Responsive Teaching. • Develop schedule for planning, executing, and debriefing the lesson study. • Develop lesson study lesson aligned to the NJSLS for literacy that is culturally relevant.
Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize and analyze survey data w/ pre/post comparisons. • Code interviews and determine common themes. • Analyze assessment data collected from lesson study. 	Do <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate school-wide book study. • Administer pre-post surveys and interviews. • Facilitate 2 rounds of lesson study • Administer post surveys and interviews.

During the Do portion, the school launched the school-wide book study on *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015) and the pre-surveys will be administered. Based on the results of the surveys, semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of teachers were conducted. Additionally, the mini-cycle of the lesson study was implemented. After the mini-PDSA cycle, the post-survey was administered, and interviews were conducted. The same process of collecting the data was followed.

After the data collection, I facilitated the Study portion. During this time, the quantitative data was organized for analysis, interview transcripts were coded for common themes, and the observation data and artifacts collected during the lesson study were analyzed. This study used what Bryk et al. (2015) call lagging and leading measures. Lagging measures describe the impact or change that occurred after the invention; leading measures describe the near-term effects and provide valuable information during the actual change or PDSA cycles.

Finally, the Act portion provided an opportunity to reflect and revise the process, as necessary. At the time of this study, Urban Academy was following a fully remote schedule. If the school shifted to hybrid or full in-person instruction, the researcher would have needed to make adjustments. If there were other needs for revision to the tools or the process, they would have been conducted during this portion of the cycle. Once revisions were considered, the researcher had the opportunity to complete another cycle and scale up the intervention.

Setting and Sample

The study was conducted in the middle school of Urban Academy, a Pre- K through Grade 8 school in Jersey City, New Jersey. At the time of this study, all students and staff were working remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The students were operating at a 1-1 access utilizing the Google platform for learning. At some point, based on the state's guidelines, the students were predicted to return to school on a 30% or 50% hybrid schedule, where they rotated in-person learning.

During the current 2020-2021 school year, there were a total of 16 homerooms for the middle school, grades six through eight. Each ELA teacher was responsible for teaching three-sections of ELA homerooms per day. Each general education homeroom has 21 to 28 students in the classroom with the exception of the three self-contained SPED (i.e., special education) homerooms (see Table 4). The two learning disabilities SPED homerooms in Grades 7 and Grade 8 had 15 and 10 students, respectively. The behavioral disorder homeroom had four students. Additionally, the ESL teacher creates three distinct literacy homerooms for the ESL students, who she pulled from their homerooms and taught for 90-minutes. For the purpose of the study, each section was considered a homeroom.

Table 4*ELA Home Rooms (2020-2021)*

Room	Grade	Students			
		Total	Boys	Girls	Sped
309	8	26	9	17	7
312		28	15	13	10
305*		27	17	10	0
308	8	26	7	19	0
317*	7	19	8	11	0
311	7	21	15	6	0
314	7	25	17	8	7
313	7	21	8	13	1
306*	7	21	10	11	0
315*	6	25	16	9	0
303	6	24	11	13	0
301	6	24	13	11	3
304	6	23	14	9	6
307*	8	10	9	1	10
310*	7	15	12	3	15
302-8	6-8	3	1	2	3
308	8	8	3	5	0
311*	7	11	8	3	0
303	6	4	2	2	0

Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

* = Participated in JLS

Although all of the students participated in the survey, sample data of the Black boys who completed the pre/post surveys was collected and analyzed. At the time of this study, there were 182 boys in the middle school, 65 (35.6%) of whom identified as Black. The study aimed to include all 65 of those Black boys in the sample, including those in SPED and ESL (see Table 5, below).

There were 14 teachers, all of whom were female, who taught middle school English Language Arts. Some teachers planned for a full 90-minute block of instruction for three different home rooms, some planned for a 45-minute intervention for SPED or ELL students, and others followed a project-based model in a self-contained setting. For example, Teacher 5 is an

ELA teacher who teaches using a 90-minute block period for English Language Arts to three different homerooms of students. Teacher 14 teaches pullout for special education students who need resource replacement for 45 minutes, after which the students resume instruction with Teacher 1. Teacher 10 taught 12 middle school special education students for literacy, math, science, and social studies in the same setting all day. For the purpose of this study, all 14 teachers participated in the school-wide culturally responsive teaching book study. Seven of the 14 teachers were selected to participate in the JLS based on their race, ethnicity, years of experience, and the student populations they serve (see Table 6, below).

Table 5

Participants in the Book Study and Japanese Lesson Study Groups

	Book Study Only	Book Study Plus JLS
Teachers ($N = 21$)	14 (66.7%)	7 (33.3%)
All Students ($N = 346$)	224 (64.7%)	122 (35.3%)
Black Boys ($N = 65$)	18 (27.7%)	47 (72.3%)

Based on pre-surveys, a smaller sample of three to five teachers were selected based on their responses. Teacher(s) who scored high, medium, and low on the self-perception efficacy scale for culturally responsive pedagogy were asked to participate in the pre/post semi-structured interviews.

Research Questions

The overarching question for our theory of action was, “How do we improve the literacy achievement and performance of middle school Black boys at Urban Academy?” In response to this question, the aim of the study was to 1) improve the literacy performance and achievement of Black boys in middle school at Urban Academy through improved teaching, 2)

provide research-based data that grounds the problem in science, and 3) add to the body of research literature on solutions for this problem of practice. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How were the two interventions implemented and what were teachers' reactions to them, particularly the literacy teachers?
2. What did teachers learn and do as a result of their participation in the book study and Japanese lesson study?
3. What benefits or impact are middle school Black boys experiencing as a result of teachers' instructional improvement?

Table 6

Middle School ELA Teachers (2020-2021)

Teacher	Grade	Certification	Years Teaching	Race/Ethnicity
Teacher 1*	6	ELA	20	Black
Teacher 2	6	Sped/Inclusion	20	White
Teacher 3	6	ELA	15	Black
Teacher 4*	7-8	ELA	19	Black
Teacher 5*	7	ELA	18	White
Teacher 6*	7	Sped	15	White
Teacher 7*	8	ELA	19	Black
Teacher 8	8	Sped	7	White
Teacher 9*	6-8	ESL	22	White
Teacher 10*	8	Sped	24	Hispanic
Teacher 11	8	Sped/Inclusion	8	White
Teacher 12	7	Sped/Inclusion	17	Black
Teacher 13	7-8	BD Sped	13	Asian
Teacher 14	5-8	Sped	10	Asian

Note. Unpublished data from Jersey City Public Schools Student Infinite Campus (2020).

* = Participated in JLS

Ethical Considerations

Before the initiation of this research project, all appropriate permissions were obtained from the Fordham University Internal Review Board (see Appendix D). At the time of this research study, I was both the primary researcher and the principal at Urban Academy, with direct supervisory responsibilities for the teachers who took part in this study. In order to minimize any ethical issues or perceived pressure on the teachers to participate, I conveyed to the teachers in writing and words that their participation would in no way be evaluative. Participation was voluntary and teachers had the option to opt-out at any time. The purpose of the study was communicated clearly and in writing. Every effort was made to encourage teachers and students to participate from free will, for the purpose of knowledge, to support success at the school, and to contribute to the educational research literature.

The Role of the Researcher

I am a Black woman principal, serving this school for the last 10 years. In this study, I was considered the lead researcher and the coordinator of the professional development intervention. I came with experience implementing Japanese Lesson Study in math, so I will facilitate the training and discussions about the format and procedures. For the culturally responsive book study, I had read the book and guided the study by providing the teachers with time during the instructional day and resources. The leadership team selected the eight facilitators who set the agenda, took attendance, and collected the reflections at the end of each session. During the Japanese Lesson Study, the team selected a facilitator, a timekeeper, and a note taker. I collected and secured the data at the close of each cycle.

Instruments and Data Collection

The quantitative data collected during this study included pre- and post-surveys, an observation tool, and reading diagnostic assessments that had been administered in September and were administered again after the intervention was complete. The qualitative data included empathy interviews of students and staff and pre- and post-interviews with a small sample of teachers to understand their experiences. Additionally, the observation notes, agendas, and reflection exit tickets were collected during the mini-PDSA cycles of the Japanese Lesson Study.

Pre- and Post-Surveys for Students and Teachers

Student Survey

An anonymous electronic survey was given to all middle school students during the first 25-minutes of their first period block. The survey was a modified version of the Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcome Expectancy Scale (CRTOE) which was constructed using the culturally responsive teaching competencies (Siwatu, 2007) and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy construct (see Appendix E). The new survey, the Culturally Responsive Student Learning Perception Scale (CRSLP) consists of 25 Likert-type questions rated from 0 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). (See Appendix F) The instrument explores student perceptions of and experiences with literacy instruction; it relates to expectations, engagement activities, and cultural responsiveness. I also added two open-ended questions to allow the students to share a book and a reading assignment they liked with an explanation of why they answered like they did. Administering this scale before and after the Japanese Lesson Study allowed me to measure changes in student perceptions about their literacy instruction and culturally relevant experiences in their literacy class.

Teachers Surveys

Two anonymous electronic surveys were given to seven of the 14 middle school ELA teachers. The first survey was the Culturally Responsive Teaching Efficacy Scale (CRTES) which was also constructed using the culturally responsive teaching competencies (Siwatu, 2007) and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy construct (See Appendix G). This CRTSE scale consists of 40 Likert-type questions with ratings from 0 (not confident at all) to 5 (completely confident). Teachers rated their confidence in their ability to engage in specific culturally responsive teaching practices.

The second survey was the Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcome Expectancy Scale (CRTOE), also constructed using the competencies of Siwatu (2007) and Bandura's definition of outcome expectancies (see Appendix E). This CRTOE scale consists of 26 Likert-type questions rated from 0 (entirely uncertain) to 5 (extremely certain). Teachers rated the probability that engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices would have a positive impact on their classroom and student outcomes. Teachers who believed that positive outcomes were linked to culturally responsive teaching would have higher scores. Administering these scales before and after the interventions of the book study and the lesson study, the leadership team was able to measure any changes in teacher confidence in actually engaging in culturally responsive practices and their preparedness to create positive learning outcomes for their students.

Observation Data Tool

During the Japanese Lesson Study, the observers of the lesson completed an observation checklist (see Appendix H). Using an adapted version of Freebody and Luke's (1990) four resources model for literacy, the observers tallied the literacy instructional moves made by the teacher during the observation. This tool is effective because it offered real-time opportunities to

assess what we expect from the Japanese Lesson Study. The original model includes four process categories to teach literacy to English language learners (Firkins, 2015; Freebody & Luke, 1990): 1) code-breaking, where the teacher encourages the students to understand the relationship between spoken words and writing symbols; 2) text participation, when the teacher encourages students to make intellectual meaning of the texts; 3) text user, which involves the social aspect of reading and how the readers use the texts for social interactions; and 4) text analyst, which involves the students learning the author's purpose and motives for writing texts. For this study, the observers made Tally marks for the presence of high-level literacy questions and discussions, culturally relevant texts and content, connections made to specific experiences of students, and practices of literary analysis.

Diagnostic Reading Assessment

The district adopted the Let's Go Learn Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA). It measures six areas of early literacy including high frequency words, word recognition, phonics, spelling, vocabulary meaning, and comprehension. It is a web-based assessment that is engaging and adaptable to address the individual skills that students need. The online assessment was administered in September and again after the intervention ended in the spring of 2021. The fall and spring scores of the sample students will be analyzed and compared for changes in proficiency and growth.

Interviews

During the beginning stages of defining the problem, the researcher conducted empathy interviews (see Appendix B) with the three middle school ELA teachers and three eighth grade Black boys whose parents gave consent. The goal was to capture how the students and teachers experienced the problem. The interviews were conducted individually on a scheduled Google

video meeting. The teachers answered 12 open-ended questions about their teaching practices, expectations, resources, student discipline and SPED populations. The students answered 10 open-ended questions about their experiences in literacy classes, relevant texts, student discipline, and opportunities for advanced classes and programs.

After the pre-surveys, three to five teachers were randomly selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol was reviewed with each teacher and they were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A) that outlined the study and gave permission for participation and to be recorded. Each teacher participated in two interviews, one before and one after the intervention. The interview questions (see Appendix I) entailed a deeper inquiry into how teachers perceived professional development, their experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy, and the strategies they utilize to engage students.

After the first cycle of the PDSA cycle, this data was utilized to make any necessary decisions and adjustments to the process of the book study and the lesson study cycle. Additionally, if changes were observed in the post interviews, the team would be ready to scale up and test the intervention with another class. The interviews were recorded using the Dedoose App, which transcribes and codes data for common themes in the interviews. Although Dedoose has been successfully utilized in the past, it was still manually checked for accuracy.

Lesson Study Planning Notes and Reflections

In preparation for the lesson study, the team met to plan the lesson, questions, activities and assessments. The agendas, sign-in sheets, and meeting notes were collected and examined. Additionally, at the end of each cycle, team members wrote reflections about the process, implications for their work, and next steps. Those reflections (i.e., exit tickets) were also collected for analysis. This information provided data and feedback on the process. The team

looked to see if culturally relevant texts, resources, and activities were included and discussed. The team reviewed the reflections and exit tickets to determine the reactions of the participants in the lesson study. Based on this collected data, the team made decisions and any necessary adjustments to the process.

Observation Data and Artifacts

During classroom observations, the observers collected artifacts including notes, images, lesson resources, and student work. The team identified cultural connections between the artifacts, lesson aides, and the student products. During the debrief portion of the lesson study, opportunities were provided to discuss the artifacts and the extent to which they demonstrated cultural relevance and engaged students in the learning. Student work samples were collected to determine if students were able to demonstrate their learning and master the content after the lesson.

Data Analysis

The aim of both change ideas was to determine a change in the participation, engagement, and learning in literacy classes for middle school Black boys. With the utilization of the book study and Japanese Lesson Study PDSA cycles, the study examined any changes in teacher participation, reaction to the discussions, and feedback on the survey about the book study. The study measured the impact of increased teacher knowledge regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. It also measured the confidence teachers had in incorporating culturally responsive practices as measured by the results of the survey and interviews. Finally, it measured to what degree teachers were actually incorporating the culturally responsive pedagogy into their practices and how much they expected students to learn, as evidenced by survey results, interviews, and lesson plan activities.

In order to determine the impact of the interventions, the student pre- and post-surveys were compared and analyzed looking for any changes in student perceptions about their experiences with literacy and how they engaged in the learning. The scores from the pre-survey were summed; the mean, standard deviation, and factor loadings were calculated and compared. In the same manner, the post-survey scores were calculated and compared to look for any changes as a result of the interventions.

The teacher pre- and post-survey scales compared changes in teachers' efficacy to execute specific culturally responsive teaching practices and their beliefs that their actions would lead to a change in learning for middle school Black boys. The scores from the pre-survey were summed; the mean, standard deviation, and factor loadings were calculated and compared. In the same manner, the post-survey scores were calculated and compared to look for any changes as a result of the interventions.

The teacher interview transcripts were coded to determine common themes and compare the experiences of the teachers before and after the intervention. Those themes were compared to the survey data to triangulate and uncover any correlations. Finally, the observation data, meeting agendas, notes, and reflection exit tickets were analyzed to inform the process. The information collected throughout the cycles provided data for revisions to strengthen the reliability and validity of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to develop teachers' capacity to implement high quality, culturally relevant pedagogy in order to improve student engagement, performance, and achievement of middle school Black boys. This study used quantitative and qualitative methods to measure whether the school-wide book study on culturally responsive pedagogy and the Japanese lesson study 1) reduced implicit bias, 2) increased teacher knowledge and pedagogy, 3) developed the capacity of teachers as a whole, and 4) positively affected the engagement and performance of students, with a particular focus on improving the achievement and performance of Black boys in middle school literacy. Over a 20-week period, pre- and post-intervention survey scales for the staff and students were utilized. They measured the changes in the staff's efficacy and beliefs about implementing high-level, culturally relevant practices; they measured students' perceptions of culturally relevant practice, interests in , and engagement in literacy tasks.

Additionally, data from pre- and post-intervention semi-structured teacher interviews was used to identify themes of how teachers viewed their responsibility in creating a culturally responsive environment where all students feel safe to engage in literacy class. For the schoolwide culturally responsive book study, data from reflection surveys assessed the knowledge teachers learned and the strategies they planned to apply to their teaching practices. Data collected from the Culturally Responsive Observation Tool, developed with staff and utilized during the lesson study, enabled measurement of teachers' use of culturally relevant, high-level literacy practices. Additional discussion notes, lesson plans, and reflections were used to triangulate the learning and implementation of teachers.

For students' performance and achievement, pre-and post-intervention data from the DORA reading assessment was used to document changes in growth. Additionally, data from the survey scale for students highlighted changes in reading interests and engagement in tasks. Finally, demonstrations of learning (DOL) from each lesson were examined to measure proficiency of students with the skills.

The design of the PDSA cycle for professional development activated two mini-PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) cycles that ran consecutively. The overall PDSA cycle focused on improving the engagement, performance, and achievement of Black boys in literacy. The first mini-PDSA cycles focused on developing the teachers' knowledge and pedagogy around culturally relevant practices; the second focused on teachers developing high-level practices by participating in the Japanese Lesson Study (JLS).

Professional Development PDSA Cycle Implementation and Analysis

The focus of the professional development PDSA cycle was to implement a multi-pronged professional development cycle for 16 weeks to improve student engagement, performance, and achievement. At the close of the prior year, *Culturally Relevant Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hamond (2015) was distributed to all staff members before summer break. All staff were encouraged to read the text prior to the start of the school year.

Since the school district remained in full remote learning through the current 2020-2021 school year, we took advantage of the half-day live teaching schedule that ended at 12:45pm for afternoon for professional development. We were able to meet regularly, as needed, to fully implement the book study. We began with the mini-PDSA of the culturally responsive book study in order to support teachers in confronting implicit bias, developing knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, and incorporating that learning and pedagogy into their practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Book Study

Plan Phase

The school leadership team consisted of two administrators, one parent, the library media specialist, a teacher assistant, an instructional coach, and a sixth-grade teacher. In the plan phase we met at our September monthly meeting to select 8 facilitators to lead the meetings, facilitate discussions and activities, and collect data. Participating in the book study was mandatory for all instructional and support staff (child study team, guidance, crisis intervention teacher, paraprofessionals and educational coaches). As a result, a total of 67 staff members participated in the book study. Each facilitator had 7 to 8 teachers and support staff members in their group. In each group, the facilitator planned discussions, activities, and tasks for the weekly readings. Initially, the groups were scheduled to discuss two chapters per week, but the facilitators reported that groups requested more time to discuss each chapter, so we decreased the readings to one chapter per week.

Based on the district schedule for remote learning, a meeting schedule was devised where facilitators met every Tuesday morning with administrators for 30 minutes, and each facilitator worked with their group one hour a week to discuss content, complete activities, and plan sample lessons for implementation. Some groups met two times a week in the morning from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.; other groups decided to meet after school for the full hour without interruption. In all, the small groups met for 10 one-hour sessions or 20 half-hour sessions. Additionally, we planned for two whole-group staff meetings that lasted for 90 minutes, dedicated to book study.

Do Phase

In the Do phase, the facilitators took meeting attendance daily, and all participants were present with the exception of child study team members who had to attend a district meeting. It

should be noted that this attendance was not typical. When we were on-site and would have morning professional development presented by vendors, district supervisors, or administrators, attendance would average 50% to 60% due to late arrivals, scheduling conflicts, and parent meetings.

In addition, according to the facilitators, when we met weekly, most participants were engaged in the sessions. This study defines “engaged” as actively participating in discussions, completing activities, and demonstrating their learning to peers. At times, there were meeting conflicts that support staff members were required to attend, but those participants requested the notes and still completed the assignments. For engagement, the facilitators measured participation in discussions, completing activities, and presenting.

As shown in Table 7, below, three facilitators reported that they each had two members who were present but did not engage as often as the other five to six members; the other five facilitators all reported high levels of engagement. The facilitators reported that more time was requested by the participants to engage in the discussions or to present to the group. As a consequence of these modifications, the book study was extended to 10-weeks, an increase of two weeks from the original eight weeks we had planned for.

In a typical session, the facilitators used a PowerPoint presentation with the group to review the agreed upon norms: Be present; Be engaged; Be prepared; Respect all voices and opinions; and Push each other’s thinking. Using discussion prompts provided by the text or created by the facilitator, the groups discussed each book chapter. Each week there was an “exit ticket” completed by each group member that was developed by the facilitator. The twelve weekly topics discussed were:

1. Supporting Dependent Learners & What's Culture Got to Do with It
2. How Culture Programs the Brain
3. 3-Levels of Culture: Surface, Shallow and Deep
4. Emotional Intelligence and Implicit Bias
5. Whole Group Session
6. Building Relationship
7. Becoming an Ally to Help Build Students' Independence
8. Building Students' Confidence as Learners
9. Building Students' Brain Power
10. Culturally Relevant Environment
11. Cultural Stories & Reflections
12. Whole Group Session

Table 7*CRP Book Study Attendance and Engagement*

Facilitator	Position	Group Size	Average Attendance	Average Engagement
Teacher 15	District Coach	7	99%	75%
Teacher 16	5th Gr Teacher	8	100%	80%
Teacher 17	Library Media	7	99%	100%
Teacher 19	8th Gr. Teacher	8	99%	80%
Teacher 20	K-2 ESL Teacher	8	99%	100%
Teacher 21	3rd Gr. Teacher	7	100%	75%
Teacher 22	7th Gr. Teacher	7	100%	100%
Teacher 23	Instructional Coach	7	100%	75%
Total/Mean		59	99.75%	85.6%

Dependent and Independent Learners. In the first session of the book study, the staff discussed whether our students were considered dependent or independent learners. The facilitators reported that most of the participants agreed that the majority of the students from Pre-K to Grade 8, particularly the Black and Hispanic students, were dependent learners. In her book, Hammond (2015) suggests that dependent learners are not able to do complex, school-oriented tasks that require them to use higher order skills like analysis or synthesis. She explains that all students enter school as dependent learners; the school's responsibility is to help students become independent learners, with cognitive processes and structures that allow them to do complex thinking and independent learning. However, the participants agreed that most of our students, even those in the middle school, remain dependent learners.

Discussing Implicit Bias. After the fourth session, Emotional Intelligence and Implicit Bias, during the Tuesday facilitators' meeting, the facilitators reported a reluctance among some group members to engage in the conversations. Some members claimed to be "color blind" and insisted they treated all students the same. One facilitator expressed how uncomfortable she felt about her colleagues' comments and microaggressions towards students. Another facilitator added that he pushed his group to accept the perspectives of all, but to challenge their thinking about how "color blindness affects our culturally and linguistically diverse students."

As a result, the facilitators and the team brainstormed ideas to better support the participants. Hammond (2015) explains the value of building relationships through oral and written tradition, offering that oral traditions develop the brain's memory, while written traditions help communities document their lived experiences. Although her comments and techniques were offered in the context of children, I recalled storytelling being utilized in a previous study as an empathy intervention when working with students of diverse backgrounds

to confront and reduce implicit bias (Whitford & Emerson, 2018). So, the team decided that this might be a solution to facilitate conversations about implicit bias, with teachers creating their cultural stories and presenting them to the staff.

Cultural Storytelling. A “cultural story” is defined by this study as a presentation of one’s family history, values, and cultural beliefs. In the small group sessions, each group discussed and decided how they would incorporate the three levels of culture discussed in Hammond’s (2015) book in their cultural story to help others understand who they are and their values, beliefs, and worldviews. Over the remaining weeks, participants volunteered to present to their small group. After each presentation, other participants reflected and provided feedback to their peers about the presentations.

After a few small group presentations, the facilitators were “in awe” of the presentations and the reception by peers. They reported how staff members encouraged their peers and some were in tears as they were allowed to witness the lived experiences of their colleagues. The facilitators suggested that some participants present to the whole staff during Session 5. We all agreed, and the facilitators asked their group members to share in our whole group sessions. Those who agreed were scheduled to present in Session 5 and Session 12.

In those two sessions, a total of twelve stories were presented. Teachers and staff shared their family history in the United States, holiday customs, and family values of respect for leadership, community, and education. During the presentations, you could see the physical shaking and tears of presenters as they shared their personal histories, lived experiences, and even trauma.

For example, Teacher 25 presented her cultural story in the form of a multimedia animation about home life. She shared how her family grew up in poverty, and how she

remembered family gatherings with her favorite meals, relatives visiting, storytelling, and dancing. She shared how she saw an episode of “The Cosby Show” on television and a character had natural hair like hers, and the pride she felt. She continued to share how she decided to wear her hair in a similar style for school; her teacher and some students made disparaging comments. She powerfully recounted another experience when her second-grade teacher refused to pronounce her name correctly and how that made her feel like something was wrong with her name. She expressed to the whole staff how those experiences in her life shaped her and made her very self-conscious of how she interacts and builds relationships with all of her students.

Although most of the participants shared their cultural stories in small groups, four of the 67 completed the task but declined to share with the group. One teacher called the researcher (i.e., the principal) personally and shared, “I just can’t share my story with my colleagues. It is not a pretty picture.”

Mentor Texts. In addition to sharing their cultural stories in the whole group sessions, at the request of teachers and the facilitators, the principal modeled how to utilize culturally relevant texts in the learning experience, with a particular focus on incorporating the shallow and deep levels of culture. The principal selected four picture books to demonstrate how to use them as mentor text in a lesson for grades Pre-K through Grade 8 (see Appendix J).

At the conclusion of the book study, an open-ended reflection survey was presented to all staff to capture the learning experiences and how they intended to apply the learning to their planning, teaching, and implementation of lessons as a culturally responsive teacher.

Study Phase

The focus of the study phase of this PDSA cycle was to determine whether the teachers gained knowledge about culturally responsive teaching and whether they felt confident in

implementing the practices to benefit their students. Based on the data collected and reported by the facilitators, attendance was nearly perfect ($M = 99.8\%$). Engagement averaged 85.6% for weekly discussions and tasks, which the leadership and facilitators team believed was “good.” The project completion was close to perfect ($M = 95.0\%$), with most staff members completing the cultural story and just four declining to present to their peers. Finally, the quality of discussions were “great,” based on facilitator weekly feedback, as the facilitators and group participants pushed the thinking of their peers.

Dependent Learners. In a discussion during Week 1, most participants agreed that our students were dependent learners and discussed actionable ways to help students become more independent learners. One teacher remarked, “I feel convicted, when I think about the ways I have been perpetuating my students being totally dependent on me.” Others admitted to consistently assigning low-level work to students who they felt could not handle more rigorous content.

Teacher and Staff Confidence. Midway through the book study, during Session 5, we administered a survey that 51 staff members completed. Nearly all (98%) reported they felt confident that the knowledge they learned about implicit bias, student learning, and levels of culture thus far would help them become a more culturally responsive teacher. Teachers were unanimous (100%) in feeling confident that they would be able to apply what they had learned to improve student learning.

Shallow and Deep Culture. However, barely half (53%) were confident in incorporating shallow and deep levels of culture into planning and lesson activities. “Shallow culture” includes cultural norms for social interactions in order to build rapport and relationships, while “deep culture” is made up of tacit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern people’s

worldviews (Hammond, 2015). In the open-ended response, when asked what they would like to see more of in professional development, a teacher wrote, “ Focus more on building lessons that reach the deep levels of culture and diving into the cultures that are in our school.” Regarding the process, 76% of teachers and staff valued the opportunity to work in small groups to plan and discuss lessons with colleagues. Based on the feedback, the facilitators met to discuss more opportunities for the groups to work on deeper levels of culture and opportunities for the participants to work in small groups.

Book Study Takeaways for Middle School Teachers. At the end of book study we conducted another survey, this one open-ended and anonymous. Forty-two of the 67 staff members from Pre-K -8 and various content areas (63%) responded. For purposes of this study, only the responses of middle school teachers who taught literacy were analyzed. Six teachers responded to the six questions; their answers were analyzed, and key themes identified in relation to reducing implicit bias, incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices, and helping students build intellectual capacity. Table 8 and Table 9, below, capture the responses of the teachers.

As shown in Table 8, below, the six teachers identified several different takeaways from the book study that they planned to incorporate in their instructional practices and classes. The six literacy teachers primarily valued the learning and activities about culture: the three levels of culture, how important it is to be mindful of culture, and the need to incorporate the culture of their students in the learning. Teacher 5 and Teacher 6 committed to the strategy of surveying students to learn about their culture and incorporating that into the lessons. Teacher 1 acknowledged that they committed microaggressions and committed to be more mindful in the classroom. Being more mindful demonstrated that they understood how microaggressions are a

form of implicit bias, as Hammond (2015) discussed, and could create an unsafe environment where students may not feel safe to learn. As one teacher reflected, “I think at times I had a hard time with the pronunciation of names and would then tell a student I will call you ‘Nee’ or ‘Zy’ instead of figuring out and practicing over and over the correct pronunciation. I will never do that again.”

Table 8

CPR Reflection Survey Part 1, Questions 1 to 3

Teacher	Q1 - Takeaways to incorporate	Q2 - Safe Classroom Environment	Q3 - Confronting Biases
T1	Be mindful of microaggressions	Modeling and sharing my own story	Calling out bias and developing lessons that address bias
T2	My culture influences how I teach	Being vulnerable and open with my students	Making it part of the learning and having open-ended dialogue
T3	Incorporate Deep levels of culture into lessons	Make personal connections with the students	selecting books that address bias and having honest discussions in class
T4	Awareness of my cultural lens	Establish authentic connections	Review and discuss school practices that are motivated by bias. Make changes in policies and practices
T5	Surveying students about their culture	Build trust and respect	Research why biases exist in our school environment
T6	Survey students to understand their culture.	Sharing my beliefs and respecting privacy	Participate in workshops to help with bias.

The six teachers identified different ways in which they planned to build and promote a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their beliefs and cultural practices (see Table 8, above). They planned to be vulnerable and share stories about themselves.

Some want to build relationships with their students based on mutual respect and trust. Teacher 1 committed to model sharing history, lived experiences, and values through a cultural story, similar to the staff activity of cultural stories.

As shown in Table 8, above, the teachers planned on confronting implicit bias by calling out microaggressions and biases when they happen, making implicit bias part of the learning for students and staff. They committed to reviewing and revising any school-level procedures that were rooted in implicit bias. A major proposed outcome from the book study was to gain tools and strategies to confront implicit bias. Part of the work was acknowledging that all people have implicit bias and, then, understanding how those biases affect the learning environment, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The teachers gained a variety of strategies and tools they could use to address it.

As shown in Table 9, below, the teachers planned to apply the learned principles to creating a safe classroom environment for students, so they didn't feel threatened or shut down as it relates to learning. Hammond (2015) referenced three ways in which an understanding of how the brain functions can influence teaching and learning. First, the brain works to minimize threats and maximize well-being. Second, it is hardwired to connect with others. Third, neuroplasticity allows it to grow intellectually. Some of the teachers demonstrated their knowledge of these principles by stating the theory and the negative effects on student learning. All of them express a desire to be mindful and the potential need to explore further how to make actionable changes in their lesson planning activities and their approach to teaching.

Participants offered different ways that they would use to incorporate these strategies to build students' intellectual capacity. Only Teacher 5 was not able to recall the strategies and specific examples of how they could be incorporated. The others gave examples of creating an

anticipatory set of strategies to engage all students, developing discussion protocols that require students to engage in critical conversations, expand vocabulary, and assert their voices with confidence. All of the responses demonstrate high-level practices that would engage students, which was an aim of the book study. It was evident that book study provided a plethora of strategies that allowed the participants to choose examples that would benefit their individual classes.

Table 9

CPR Reflection Survey Part 2, Questions 4 to 6

Teacher	Q4 - Neuroscience influence on teaching	Q5 - Strategies to build intellectual capacity	Q6 - Cognitive routines to process higher order thinking
T1	Fight or flight when ppl fear and learning can't occur	We use the hook and workshop model to chunk the learning for students.	Singing Catch Rap songs Note Taking Using scratch art
T2	Making students feel comfortable and safe can yield success	We use the Arc of instruction and it is important to create an anticipatory setting.	Whole brain teaching Note taking
T3	Awareness of how microaggressions affect students	Make real world connections through an anticipatory set. Differentiate instruction	Implementing Champions' Techniques of No Opt-Out and Stretch It
T4	Brains are wired for safety-threat detection. Students need to feel safe and comfortable to learn.	Create discussion protocols Promote student voice	Graphic Organizers Visuals
T5	Stay aware of my actions so students feel safe, loved and happy.	I do not remember	Teach conceptually
T6	We need to give our students a positive push	Build student vocabulary so they feel confident sharing	Provide real world task Free writes for expression

Also shown in Table 9, above, all of the teachers were able to provide myriad routines and techniques for students to process higher-order thinking discussed in the book study, and no two teachers gave the same response. The variety of choices demonstrate that the activities and offerings of the small groups in the book study were rich and provided opportunities for the teachers to personalize their selections to meet the needs of their students.

Mentor Texts. When the principal presented sample lessons using culturally relevant texts, topics, and high-level practices, the teachers expressed interest in using the picture books to hook students of all grade levels across content areas to create an anticipatory set for learning. Teachers requested copies of *Liam's First Cut* by Taye Jones. One teacher stated that she ordered her own book to utilize with her special education students in middle school. The principal ordered 100 copies for staff and student use. Teachers were encouraged to check with the Library Media Specialists to review the culturally relevant class titles that were ordered for each teacher; they were offered the opportunity to survey their students and purchase additional titles with support from the Library Media Specialists.

Classroom Observations. Additionally, after the book study, the principal observed eight classrooms that were scheduled for formal observations; 100% of the teachers were incorporating elements of the culturally responsive book study. All of the teachers utilized culturally relevant texts, strategies to build intellectual capacity, and routines to process higher order thinking. During a math lesson observation, Teacher 25 utilized music to start the class and greeted the class using a Haitian greeting. The teacher called out, "Tim Tim" and the students responded "Bwa Sech." During the lesson, a student smiled and said, "This is how we greet each other at home." During the post conference, Teacher 25 shared that each week she selected a different language or dialect of the students represented in her class; it excited her students to be

seen and validated. Throughout the observations, teachers were able to articulate how they were incorporating the concepts and strategies gained in the culturally responsive teaching book study.

Act Phase

In studying this mini-PDSA cycle, teachers gained knowledge about culturally relevant pedagogy. Working in a structured format with ample time and flexibility in the small group proved valuable as they engaged in honest discussions, storytelling, empathy-building, and planning with their colleagues. Based on the survey results, some teachers walked away with actionable steps and practices that they committed to implementing to be culturally responsive and promote high quality literacy practices.

It should be noted that the researcher (i.e., the principal) worked with the school leadership team to provide the text, schedule, and share out sessions; the teacher facilitators developed their agendas, activities, and collected attendance and engagement data. As the process unfolded, the facilitators made suggestions and decisions about how to improve the learning. In those small group settings, the norms allowed teachers and staff members to take ownership of their learning and make choices about how they would demonstrate their learning. Therefore, the use of small group learning in the form of a book study, with the support of the school leadership team in providing time and space during the learning day, was successful in improving teacher capacity.

As the principal, I learned how valuable it is to allow teacher voice and autonomy in the decision-making process about their professional development. Although the leadership team developed a plan, at times the teachers needed adjustments or had suggestions; it was imperative that their input was respected. As a result, they took more ownership of the work and the process. Therefore, we have concluded that the school should continue to do the critical work around

culturally responsive pedagogy by utilizing book study in this format of dedicated time for small group learning with opportunities for whole group discussions, share outs, and application of the learning.

Japanese Lesson Study (JLS)

Plan Phase

The middle school literacy team consists of 14 content, special education, and English as a second language teachers. Seven of the 14 teachers, the instructional coach, and principal participated in the lesson study, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Participants for Lesson Study

Teacher	Race	Grade/ Cert	Years Teaching	# Students	# Boys	# Black Boys
Teacher 1	Black	6/ ELA	20	23	16	5
Teacher 4	Black	7ELA	19	18	8	4
Teacher 5	White	7/ELA	18	20	9	2
Teacher 6	White	7 Sped	15	14	11	7
Teacher 7	Black	8 ELA	19	26	9	6
Teacher 9	White	6-8 ESL	22	9	6	4
Teacher 10	Hispanic	8 Sped	24	9	8	7
Total				119	67	35
Percent					56.3%	52.2%

Initially, the team planned to implement the Plan Phase within a week, but due to the global pandemic and schools being fully remote, the schedule was adjusted. During remote learning, the district schedule provided a professional development period every Wednesday from 2:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. The team agreed to utilize this sacred time to plan the lesson study. Over five Wednesdays, the team agreed upon professional learning norms. As team members they agreed to 1) Be fully present; 2) Be prepared and do the work; 3) Respect the voices, opinions and suggestions of all; 4) Push the thinking of the team members; and 5) Commit to

growth individually and as a department. During the planning sessions the team reviewed the components of lesson study and sample lessons. We had 100% attendance and adherence to the five norms agreed upon by the team as they worked on the items in the below schedule (see Table 11, below).

After 5 weeks of planning, the teachers began scheduling their lessons virtually. In all there were three literacy lessons planned for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades; two to three teachers in a grade level taught the same lesson to their students while the other members of the team observed with the Culturally Responsive Observation Tool (CRO Tool) (See Appendix H). I also provided adjustments to the schedule so that all members of the team were available to observe the lesson and participate in the debrief immediately following each 45-minute lesson.

Do Phase

During Week 1, Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 volunteered to present their lessons to their classes (see Table 12, below). Prior to our visit, both teachers explained to their students that teachers would be joining the virtual class to learn from their teacher and improve their teaching practices. We visited Teacher 1's sixth grade classroom using Google Meets and we kept our sound and cameras off as requested by the teacher. Each observer had a copy of the CRO Tool in hand as we observed the lesson. During the course of the lesson, observers made tally marks each time Teacher 1 engaged in CRP practices.

Teacher 1 and Lessons on Dialect. Teacher 1 began the lesson by providing three picture prompts of footwear, a beverage, and a sandwich. She asked the students to take a poll with three choices on what they called each item. After the students completed the polls, Teacher 1 shared the results, which revealed a range of student responses. Some called the footwear

sneakers while others used tennis shoes or gym shoes. Some called the beverage pop while others called it soda.

Table 11

Schedule of Activities and Reflection Notes by Week

Week	Topic (s)	Activities	Reflections & Notes
1	Components of lesson study Sample Lessons	Presentation Video Clips Discussion	Benefits of this approach Opportunities to plan, observe, and give feedback to peers. Must be collaborative and be able to give and receive feedback
2	Unpacking Reading Learning Standards 9 and 10	work in small groups create a chart of skills, context, and student learning	Benefit of looking at the standards across the grade levels 6-8. Focus on the shifts in skills, contexts and student learning Team members had different definitions of analysis
3	Defining Analysis Review unpacked Standards Review Danielson Rubric for DOMAIN 1	Whole group discussion	Reading provides a variety of outcomes for students. Select a standard that will engage Black boys
4	Domain1: Knowledge of Students, Selecting Outcomes, and Lesson Design	Presentation w/samples Working with grade level partners Whole group share out	Student interests as it relates to the content Incorporating the deeper levels of culture in the lesson Outcomes are student learning Lesson plan template to include cultural relevance
5	Observation Tool Lesson topics Objectives Cultural Relevance Assessment	Review Lesson Design Review Observation Tool Each grade level presents Feedback provided based on observation tool	All 3 groups selected Standard 10 which focuses on students reading and comprehending on grade level or above. Cultural relevance included: community ties, dialects, making meaning, life skills and lessons, analyzing community symbols. 2- groups are using the same text but focusing on different outcomes.

Table 12*Week 1 Lesson Schedule*

Day/Time	Teacher/ Grade	Objective	Debrief
Tues - 9:30am	Teacher 1/6	SWL: read and comprehend grade level text by analyzing how understanding dialect adds meaning and building relationships within a community and the world.	10:30am - 11:30am
Wed - 9:00am	Teacher 1/6	Re-teach SWL: read and comprehend grade level text by analyzing how understanding dialect adds meaning and building relationships within a community and the world.	12:00pm - 12:30pm
Wed - 10:00am	Teacher 4/7	SWL: read and comprehend grade level text by analyzing character motivations to make judgments about character traits that benefit them personally or their community.	11:00am -12:00pm

Some called the sandwich a hoagie while others used sub or hero. Then, Teacher 1 showed a video with people of different races from different parts of the United States and how they identified those same items, plus a few others. The narrator of the video stated that there are over 10 different dialects that are used around the United States. Teacher 1 explained that dialect is a form of language that is utilized in certain areas or by certain groups of people. She asked, “What words do you use in your culture that may sound different to others because they are not accustomed to it?”

After a brief discussion, Teacher 1 explained that they would be reading the short story *Thank You Ma'am* by African American author Langston Hughes. She shared that Langston Hughes wrote during the Harlem Renaissance (1919-1930), a period where artists were known for their creative expression of pride in racial identity. She also mentioned the historical event of

the Great Migration where African Americans moved from the southern states to northern states for better opportunities to live and thrive economically. Teacher 1 stated that students would be analyzing dialog in the story as they read a portion of it.

Teacher 1 read a portion of the story displayed on a PDF file. After reading the text, she conducted a “think aloud,” where she asked herself questions about the text. She asked herself, “I am not familiar with this word, I wonder what she is talking about? Can I figure out what this means?” Teacher 1 annotated the text by highlighting directly on the text and making notes next to phrases. Then, she pulled up a Frayer map graphic organizer to help her determine the meaning of the phrase. The Frayer map consists of an oval with the phrase and four boxes: context clues, use it in a sentence, illustration, and interpretation of the phrase. She modeled for the students how to use the graphic organizer and the context clues in the text to figure out the meaning, a strategy that was provided in the culturally responsive book study to help students learn complex concepts (Hammond, 2015).

After her modeling, she assigned the students and the observers to two groups of six students in breakout rooms and assigned them a different phrase from the text that utilized dialect. With their assigned student facilitator, their task was to work as a group to figure out the meaning of the phrase by completing the Frayer map. For the observers, they continued to make tally marks for culturally responsive practices, paying close attention to student engagement through discussions with their peers and the completion of the task.

In one group, Student K, a Black boy, facilitated by leading the discussion and activities with the group. Ms. F, an observer, reported how Student K made sure that all voices and opinions were heard. The students were discussing the phrase and completing the task. In the other group, Student KB, another Black boy, was the facilitator, but neither he nor did the other

students spoke. Thus, the task was not worked on or completed in that group. Teacher 1 visited both groups during the 10-minute time frame and then decided to close out the breakout rooms and the lesson for the day.

The next day, Teacher 1 revisited the lesson with the same students. Prior to the arrival of the observers, she explained to the students that the teachers learned a great deal and wanted to continue with the class in order to get better at teaching this concept of analyzing dialect. At the start of the lesson, Teacher 1 reviewed the objective with the students. She also defined the word analyze, which she did not do the day before. She explained, “When we analyze a text or a phrase, we read it and based on our schema, or knowledge background, we make meaning for ourselves.” She gave a few examples and checked for understanding by asking students to raise their virtual hands or type in the chat box that they understood. Teacher 1 also revisited her “No” response to Student D, a Black boy, who asked if dialect could be from other languages. Teacher 1 affirmed that she was mistaken the day before, admitting dialect could be from languages other than English. Student D explained that he was talking about a dialect from his family and how they spoke in Jamaica.

After the discussion, Teacher 1 modeled another example of dialect that was used in the text. She utilized the Frayer map graphic organizer, analyzing and developing her meaning of the phrase for the students. Then she asked if they agreed. The students typed their responses in the chat and the students all agreed with her. Then, Teacher 1 assigned all of the students the same phrase to complete a Frayer map graphic organizer. After five minutes, Teacher 1 asked for volunteers to share their graphic organizer and responses. Two Black boys, one Hispanic boy, and one Hispanic girl shared their Frayer maps. The other students discussed their responses and verbally shared whether they agreed or disagreed with their peers. Teacher 1 reviewed the

objective again and assigned the students the task of finding phrases from their own culture to share with the class. They were given time to ask their families to assist with the assignment.

Teacher 4 and Character Motives. Later in the week, we visited Teacher 4 and her seventh grade Google classroom; again we kept our cameras and microphones off, as requested. Each observer had a copy of the CRO tool. Teacher 4 began her lesson by reviewing the same short story, *Thank you Ma'am* by Langston Hughes. Additionally, she posted the African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child.” The students engaged in a discussion about what the proverb meant to them. Then, Teacher 4 stated that they would be analyzing character motives to determine whether they were internal or external, and to make assessments about character traits. Teacher 4 stated that she wanted the students to pay particular attention to the actions, words, and thoughts of Roger and Ms. Jones, the main characters in the story.

Teacher 4 began by reading a passage from the text which she posted on a PDF file for all the students to see and follow along. Then she modeled how she analyzed the main character, Roger, using a character analysis chart. The chart listed the character’s name and with columns for Action/Thought/ Feelings, Motivation (i.e., internal or external), and Traits (i.e., What does it reveal about the character?). Teacher 4 did a “think aloud” where she asked herself questions in order to fill out each box in the columns.

After her modeling, Teacher 4 put all of her students and observers in small group breakout rooms. In the breakout room, their task was to analyze the character of Ms. Jones. They used a shared document, so each group could write their responses on the same document. The observers in the group continued to fill out their CRO tool, paying close attention to student engagement with the task and discussions with their peers. In the small group, the observers reported that the students worked as a group to complete the task. Students affirmed or

challenged the responses of their peers. After 10 minutes, Teacher 4 closed the breakout rooms and brought the students and observers back together. A representative from each group shared their responses. When one group was missing a character trait, Teacher 4 solicited assistance from other groups. Finally, Teacher 4 recapped the learning about analyzing character motivations to understand their traits. She ended the lesson by providing a demonstration of learning assessment. The students were given three choices that Teacher 4 posted in the Google classroom and reviewed each before closing out the lesson.

During Week 2, we visited the sixth and seventh grade classes of Teacher 9 and Teacher 6 (see Table 13, below). We viewed the same lessons that we had viewed the previous week in Teacher 1's and Teacher 4's classes, modified for the special education and ESL homerooms.

Teacher 6 and Character Motives in a Special Education Class. We visited Teacher 6, keeping our cameras and microphones off, as requested by the teacher. Each observer had a copy of the CRO tool. Teacher 6 reviewed the discussions and activities that the students engaged in the day before. She asked them a series of questions and four boys responded and answered most of her questions. Teacher 6 asked, "What does the proverb, 'it takes a village to raise a child mean?'" Student J, a Black boy said, "It means that more than your parents raise you, like your grandparents or aunts."

When Teacher 6 reviewed what it meant to analyze, she explained, "It's when you examine the text and ask yourself questions so you can understand it." When Teacher 6 asked for a definition of character motivation, Student C, a Black boy, said, "It's why someone does something." Then, Student K, a Black boy, gave an example from the story, "Roger stole the purse because he wanted blue suede shoes." Teacher 6 continued to ask the students to define

internal and external motivations. When the students did not offer a response to distinguish the two, she provided the response.

Table 13

Week 2 Lesson Schedule

Day/Time	Teacher/ Grade	Objective	Debrief
Wed - 9:30am	Teacher6 /7	SWL: read and comprehend grade level text by analyzing character motivations to make judgments about character traits that benefit them personally or their community.	12:45-1:15pm
Wed - 11:50am	Teacher 9/6 ESL	SWL: read and comprehend grade level text by analyzing how understanding dialect adds meaning and building relationships within a community and the world. Character traits that benefit them personally or their community.	1:15pm - 1:45pm

Similar to Teacher 4 in the previous week, Teacher 6 modeled using the text to identify actions or feelings of the main character in the story, determine if their motivation was internal or external, and choose a character trait to describe the character. Teacher 6 asked a series of questions, and Student C, a Black boy, answered most of the questions. At one point, Student C asked, “What is the external and internal motivation? I don’t get that.” Teacher 6 explained and continued to fill out the chart. She completed three entries in the chart and Student C assisted with his suggestion.

Teacher 6 asked the students a series of higher-order questions including: 1) “What would you do if that were you?” 2) “Do you know anyone in your family or community like the woman in the story” and 3) “Why do you think Roger decided to stay?” Student C and Student J,

both Black boys, offered their responses. As Teacher 6 encouraged the other students to participate, most of them remained silent with their microphones off. Teacher 6 asked, “Why do you think she trusts him?” Student J, a White boy said, “In my opinion, she shouldn’t trust him. If it were me, I couldn’t trust him.” When Teacher 6 called on G, a Hispanic boy, he tried to answer her, then replied, “I don’t know how to say it.” Teacher 6 thanked him for trying.

Once Teacher 6 completed her model and the chart, she assigned the students work in a breakout room to complete the character analysis chart about the other main character, Roger. Once again, Teacher 6 used a shared document so that each group had access to the same document on the Google drive. The observers were also assigned to observe the breakout rooms using the CRO tool. Student C and Student K, both Black boys, served as facilitators for the groups. In group one, Student C tried to complete the entries for the chart on his own. He said, “Come on, we have to complete this and you have to talk.” He scrolled up and down the shared document and became frustrated that the other group was typing in entries and his group was not. When Teacher 6 entered the group, she encouraged the group to participate, but they did not. She also instructed Student C to stop scrolling to the other group and do his best. Student C stated again that he did not understand external and internal motivation.

Teacher 23, an observer in the other group, shared that her group struggled to get started and only the facilitator was filling out the chart. After seven minutes, Teacher 6 closed the breakout rooms and the students returned to the main room for review. Teacher 6 asked the students to share but they did not speak. After prompting, she decided to read the chart responses and give feedback to the students. She told the students that they would continue to work on the chart next week.

Teacher 9 and Dialect in an ESL Class. Visiting Teacher 9, observers kept their cameras and mics off and used the CRO tool. Teacher 9 began, “Today, we are going to be analyzing how understanding dialect adds meaning and builds relationships within a community and the world.” She explained that the students were going to view some images and she wanted them to complete a poll on what they called the item. She showed them pasta, footwear, a beverage, and a sandwich. The students selected their responses in each poll and Teacher 9 shared the results after each response. The students were smiling at the responses when Teacher 9 revealed the results. Teacher 9 said, “I wonder why some of you called this picture spaghetti while others called it noodles.”

Then, Teacher 9 shared a video clip of people in the Philippines using different greetings to say, “Hello, how are you today?” She asked, “What did you notice in the video about how they were talking?” Student I, a girl from Asia, responded using the word “different. Teacher 9 asked, “How is it different?” The same student, Student I, replied, “It is the same language, but they are using different words to greet each other.” Other students typed similar statements in the chat box. Teacher 9 explained, “We are going to watch another video to help us understand dialect.” She showed the same video Teacher 1’s class had used with people from all over the United States identifying the items in the picture based on how they say it in their part of the country or their community. After the video clip, Student M, a Black boy, said, “Dialect depends on where you come from.”

Then, Teacher 9 engaged the students in a discussion about the short story *Thank You Ma’am* by Langston Hughes. When she revealed that the story had taken place in Harlem, Student J, a Black boy, explained that he knew Harlem was in New York. Based on Teacher 9’s prompts, the students discussed freely why they thought the Blacks migrated to the North during

the Harlem Renaissance. They offered answers verbally or in the chat. When Student R, a boy from Egypt, stated that he thought they were moving to get more rights to live freely, other students agreed with him.

After the background discussion, Teacher 9 continued with a discussion on the objective for the day. She asked, “Why would we be analyzing dialect in a story?” The students offered responses like “to understand the story,” “to get a deeper meaning,” and “to know that different words may have the same meaning to different groups of people.” After that discussion, Ms. L read a portion of the story and conducted a think aloud where she asked herself questions about what she thought the author was saying in the text. She analyzed the dialect by annotating the text with highlights and writing her thoughts on the text.

After her modeling, she posted a color-coded chart, to analyze dialect from the text. In the first column there were quotes from the text; the second column provided space for clue words; and the third column provided space for an illustration. She modeled an example for completing the chart. Then she sent the students into breakout rooms with an assigned facilitator to complete two quotes in the chart. Each group had their two quotes labeled and color coded. The observers were also assigned a group to observe using the CRO tool.

In group one, Student I, a girl from Asia, was the facilitator and Student J, a Black boy, was the recorder. In group two, Student A was the facilitator and Student M was the recorder; both were Black boys. In each group the students discussed the quotes and completed the chart. All students offered their responses and commented on the response of their peers. One student responded, “I agree with Student I. Maybe supper is related to home because she mentioned that she was heading home to cook.” During the discussions, Teacher 9 entered each room and observed. After reading one response in group one, she prompted the students to look closer at a

quote to determine the meaning. After seven minutes, the students and the observers returned to the main room to discuss the chart. Then, Teacher 9 assigned a DOL, which students were to complete on their own. They had a choice in how they presented their response. Teacher 9 displayed an exemplar of each type, including a short video of her using dialect and analyzing the meaning.

Study Phase

The purpose of this study phase was to investigate whether the teachers applied the knowledge and strategies learned in the book study and Japanese lesson study into the lesson planning activities. Additionally, we examined if students, particularly Black boys, engaged in high-quality literacy tasks. During the planning stage, a few unintended consequences occurred. First, during their group reflection, many teachers remarked how the time to actually plan a lesson together, observe, and provide feedback was missing from their professional development. Being remote allowed us the opportunity to be flexible and recognize the value in providing time, space, and resources for teachers to co-plan, develop lessons together, give and receive feedback, implement a lesson, and observe the practices of their peers. Additionally, when planning, Teacher 23, instructional coach, suggested that a section be added to the lesson plan template to identify cultural relevance in the lesson. The others agreed that it would serve as a self-check to ensure that cultural relevance would be incorporated in every lesson.

Debriefing Observations of Teacher 1 During the debrief of Teacher 1's lesson, the team discussed the elements of the lesson and student engagement. Teacher 23 noted that during the anticipatory set, Student B, a Black boy, wrote in the chat, "Oh this is getting fun!" as they were discussing the different dialects utilized within the United States. Throughout the course of debrief discussion, Teacher 1 realized that she never discussed the objective for the day, nor did

she model or explain the skill of analyzing that the students would use for the lesson. Finally, when a student asked a question about dialect, Teacher 1 did not give a correct response. In fact, Teacher 1 stated that dialect only pertained to communications only in the United States.

Additionally, the observers reported on the events that occurred in the two small group sessions. In one group, Student K, a Black boy, served as the facilitator and led the students in the discussion, ensured they responded to the responses of their peers, and worked to complete the task. In group two, Student KB, a Black boy, was the facilitator but he never spoke, nor did the group members complete the task. It was not clear why the students in group two did not engage in the discussion or the task.

Consequently, the team decided to revamp the lesson and Teacher 1 taught it again the next day addressing all of the issues that were discussed during the debrief. During the next day's debrief, Teacher 1 felt more confident that the students learned the skill of analyzing dialect. She stated, "I felt better because more students engaged in the discussions verbally and in the chat." Teacher 1 also disclosed in the session that she really didn't know the correct answer to the question the student asked on the first day. Teacher 5 encouraged and reminded her that although it may be difficult, the book study recommended that teachers be vulnerable with students in order to build relationships and create a safe environment for learning (Hammond, 2015).

Debriefing Observations of Teacher 4 During the debrief of Teacher 4's lesson, the team discussed the elements of the lesson and student engagement. Teacher 5 asked Teacher 4 to clarify the objective. She stated, "The outcome was not clear." Teacher 4 responded that she wanted the students to walk away understanding character traits and Teacher 5 followed up, asking, "But why and for what purpose?" Teacher 4 began to think about it and said, "Honestly, I

don't know. I just wanted them to learn character traits and it's part of the curriculum." So, the team began to brainstorm why students would need to understand character traits. Each member freely engaged in the discussion, while Teacher 23. took notes. Some of the suggestions offered included:

- "Students will learn character traits in order to make assessments about desired qualities in relationships."
- "Students will learn character traits in order to apply those skills when reading other texts to understand the characters and events of a story."
- "Students will learn character traits in order to make decisions about leadership and representation in politics."
- "Students will learn character traits in order to understand that people's actions do not always dictate their traits forever."

After the brainstorm, Teacher 4 said, "To be honest, I have never thought about it that deeply." Teacher 5 continued to express the importance of requiring the students to engage in critical thinking, analysis, and high-level literacy practices. Throughout this debrief and discussion, higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) like evaluation, decision-making, and application were illustrated.

Debriefing Observations of Teacher 6 During the debrief of Teacher 6's lesson, the team discussed the elements of the lesson and student engagement. The researcher (i.e. principal) asked, "According to their individual educational plans (IEP), what are the preferred learning styles of your classified students?" Teacher 6 stated that her students were a blend of kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learners. As a follow up question, the researcher asked, "Did you include any practices for your kinesthetic and visual learners?" Teacher 6 became defensive and started

to discuss why she was verbally reviewing the events from the day before. She stated, “I know I spent a lot of time reviewing, but my students are reading on a second-grade level.”

The other special education teacher on the team interjected, “I understand that because my students forget, and I have to repeat and take my time.” The researcher asked permission to restate her question. When granted, she acknowledged, “I am aware that the students require a daily review and the pace may be slower, but my question is, do you think your students would benefit from having those reviews in their preferred learning style?” Teacher 6 agreed that they would.

Teacher 1 asked, “With so many Black boys in your class, I’m wondering why you did not talk about Langston Hughes and culture during your lesson presentation. Teacher 6 was visibly uncomfortable with the question and responded, “I did that yesterday.” The other team members did not volunteer feedback during the debrief, so the researcher asked the other team members to review their notes and called on each of them to provide feedback. All of the remaining team members spoke about the student participation and how verbal and smart Student C, the Black boy seemed as he expressed himself and led during the lesson. Others gave specific examples of what that same student said. At the close of the debrief, Teacher 6 and the team agreed that she would re-teach the lesson keeping in mind the following:

- Decreasing the pace to ensure that all students have the opportunity to process the information.
- Reteaching internal and external motivation as the verbal and written evidence support that students were not clear on the distinction.
- Working with the team to include visuals and kinesthetic activities to engage the other learners.

- Utilizing “Cold Call,” a technique that gives every student an opportunity to have an answer and engage in the discussions.

Debriefing Observations of Teacher 9 During the debrief of Teacher 9’s lesson, the team discussed the elements of the lesson and student engagement. Teacher 10 started, “Your kids were great for ESL kids.” Teacher 1 asked, “Is that a microaggression? What do you mean for ESL kids?” The researcher asked Teacher 10 to say more about what she meant. Teacher 10 said she was impressed with the class and how engaged they were for ESL students. Teacher 1 reasserted, “It does not matter that they are ESL students. They did well because their teacher has high expectations for their work, and they meet her expectations.” Teacher 10 apologized and said she didn’t mean it in a bad way.

Teacher 7 offered had noticed and loved the scaffolding that was done at the beginning of the lesson. She said, “You could tell that the students felt safe and comfortable in this learning environment.” Teacher 5 commented on how every activity was modeled by the teacher and exemplars were provided.

Teacher 1 complimented Teacher 9 on the color coding, visuals, and annotations. The researcher asked Teacher 9 to explain why she does that. Teacher 9 explained that her students speak different languages, and it is necessary for them to have a common visual for meaning; she annotates to ensure that the students have mechanisms to help them be successful as they process the information. She further explained that she did this prior to virtual learning and currently she had to find programs to help her do it in the virtual classroom.

A critical part of the study phase was the analysis of the teacher’s use of culturally responsive practices during the observation. This study utilized the CRO tool to identify culturally responsive practices, adapted from Freebody and Luke’s (1990) four resources model

for literacy (See Appendix H). During the debrief, Ms. W. posted a blank CRO tool, and each teacher reported their tallies for each class observed. Additionally, they offered a quote or a piece of evidence for the tallies in the section. Table 14 includes the total tallies and the average tallies recorded by the different observers in each section. The total tallies are the total observations of a behavior by all observers; the averages are mean scores of the eight observers.

Table 14

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Observation Tally Scores and Means

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	T1	T4	T6	T9
High-level Questioning and Discussion Techniques	65 <i>M</i> = 8	71 <i>M</i> = 9	65 <i>M</i> = 8	72 <i>M</i> = 9
Culturally Relevant Text/Content	49 <i>M</i> = 6	25 <i>M</i> = 3	15 <i>M</i> = 2	76 <i>M</i> = 10
Connection to Specific Experiences of Students	42 <i>M</i> = 5	36 <i>M</i> = 5	29 <i>M</i> = 4	66 <i>M</i> = 8
Literary Analysis	37 <i>M</i> = 5	41 <i>M</i> = 5	25 <i>M</i> = 3	39 <i>M</i> = 5

All of the teachers consistently implemented high-level questioning and discussion techniques throughout the lesson. All of the teachers created an anticipatory set that immediately engaged the students in discussion at the start of the lesson. The sixth-grade lesson used video clips and polls, while the seventh-grade lesson used an African proverb for the students to discuss. The types of questions asked during the lessons required students to think critically about the content. For example, in the sixth-grade lesson, the teachers posed questions like, “What would you do if you were Roger? What do you think Ms. Jones meant when she said, “Kick you in the. . . sitter?” Additionally, each teacher provided opportunities for the students to engage in discussions without teacher mediation. The observers noted instances that during the

discussions, students used sentence stems to comment on the responses of their peers. A student would start with, “I agree with...” or “I would like to expand on what. . . said.”

Additionally, the teachers who implemented the sixth-grade lesson had a higher average of using culturally relevant texts or content during the lesson. Those teachers created background with the students about Langston Hughes, as a Black author, and discussed the great migration of Black people to the North for economic and social justice reasons. They consistently explored the possible motives of the author in using dialogue to connect to the people community during that time. During the seventh-grade lesson, the teachers had a lower average in this section. During the debrief, both teachers spoke freely about their goal to be more intentional and responsive as it relates to cultural relevance.

There was great variation in how the teachers connected to the experiences of the students. Across the board, each teacher provided a DOL with a choice where students connected the learning to themselves or someone in their community. Some examples included students interviewing their family about phrases used in their language dialect and determining the meaning for others. Students also had the choice of creating an award for someone in their community who possessed character traits worthy of honor. The learning products and outcomes were differentiated as well. The students were able to design posters, write a paragraph, make an audio recording, or create a video to demonstrate their learning.

However, some teachers missed those opportunities during the lesson to make connections with the students and their individual experiences. Teacher 1 re-taught her lesson after the first debrief, so she was very intentional about connecting to the students by pausing for discussion with questions like “What if it were you or your community? What would you do?” Also, some of the students made their own connections to the story or characters and their

responses were welcomed. Both Teacher 4 and Teacher 6 focused heavily on all of the students completing the lesson's activities.

Finally, all of the teachers engaged in literary analysis. Teacher 4, Teacher 9, and Teacher 6 explicitly read and discussed the objective with the students; they then defined and modeled how to analyze. During the first lesson, Teacher 1 did not discuss or define the concept of "analyze," though she modeled it for students. When she re-taught the lesson, she began with reviewing the objective, defining the concept, and then modeling how to analyze. Additionally, the teachers engaged students in discussions to determine the author's purpose for using dialect. Both were high-level literacy practices that required the students to utilize their schema to make meaning and inferences about the text.

Act Phase

In studying this mini-PDSA cycle, it was important to consider the multiple levels of learning that occurred. First, when given time and opportunity, teachers worked collaboratively to understand the learning standards and chose grade level appropriate outcomes for students based on those standards. The practice of providing time to unpack the state learning standards to ensure that all teachers had the same expectations for all student learning was beneficial for teachers and students alike. Additionally, when given an observation tool in advance, the teachers intentionally planned lessons for their students that included culturally relevant practices that allowed the students to engage in discussions, make connections to texts or content based on their personal experiences, and utilize high-level literary analysis to read and comprehend. If teachers did not fully reach their goals for the lesson, they were willing to plan with their colleagues to re-teach the lesson. This was the result of the team developing a safe environment where teachers were comfortable giving and receiving feedback. As both the researcher and the

principal, I was reminded how valuable it is to create sacred time for teacher learning in a safe space. Also, joining the team as a learner and committing to the norms proved beneficial; the teachers openly expressed their vulnerabilities once they realized there were no judgements or repercussions. We were all learning and growing together.

I also learned to be extremely clear about the expectations of a lesson by providing the observation tool in advance. I watched the teachers use it as a checklist during their planning. It was recommended by the team that the Japanese lesson study cycle continue to allow the eighth-grade teachers to present their lessons to their students and collect data. The opportunity for teachers to work together to develop lessons, implement them, and gain immediate feedback from their peers proved beneficial for the teachers, the department, and Black boys, whose engagement and performance improved, as evidenced by DOLs.

Overall Professional Development PDSA Cycle

Plan Phase

The overall PDSA cycle was designed to test the combined effect of the two mini-PDSA cycles on teacher capacity and student learning. The study planned and measured how professional development impacted 1) teacher practice; 2) student engagement, achievement, and performance of Black boys; and 3) other processes of professional development at the school.

During this stage, I adapted a survey scale (Siwatu, 2007) to measure teacher efficacy and beliefs about culturally relevant practices (see Appendix E). Additionally, referencing the teacher scale, I created a survey scale to measure students' perception about their literacy classes (see Appendix F). I initially planned to administer the surveys before the book study but, due to IRB delays and scheduling, I administered these surveys after the book study and before the lesson study.

The teacher survey was created in Qualtrics and the link was emailed to the seven teachers participating in the study. Based on their rankings on the scale, I planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with three teachers who had the highest, lowest, and mid-range score on the scale (see Appendix I).

With the students, I originally planned to do a paper and pencil survey with parental consent. However, since the students were remote, and time constraints prevented me from mailing the consent and receiving them back in a timely manner, I decided to have the teachers email the consent form to the parents and have them reply to the email with their permission for their child to participate in the survey. During their first period block, the teachers planned to utilize the first 10 minutes to administer the survey by providing the Qualtrics link to all students who had their parents' consent. After the two mini-PDSA cycles, we planned to administer the post-intervention surveys and post-intervention interviews to measure any changes in the teachers' efficacy and beliefs in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Surveys were also intended to measure changes in Black boys' perceptions of the literacy classes and their interests in books or tasks.

Additionally, the study planned to look at a pre- and post-intervention DORA diagnostic reading assessment that students took in Fall 2020 and April 2021, after the lesson study. We planned to measure any growth or positive impact on Black boys in the multiple skills measured by the assessment.

Finally, the school leadership team met to plan out the two mini-PDSA cycles, book study and lesson study. Originally, we planned to conduct the Culturally Responsive Teaching book study and the Japanese lesson study concurrently but, due to delays in IRB approval and remote learning, we made the decision to focus on the book study first. After the book study, we

planned and facilitated the Japanese lesson study for eight weeks. With one week in the beginning for planning and one week at the end for reflection, the overall professional development PDSA cycle ran for 20 weeks instead of the originally planned 16 weeks.

Do Phase

During the Do phase, we facilitated the surveys, conducted the semi-structured interviews, and ran the two mini-PDSA cycles. The seven teachers completed the pre-survey scale online and 12 of 65 (18.5%) Black boys who had their parents' permission completed their pre-survey. Based on the analysis of the teacher survey, I invited Teacher 1, sixth-grade general education teacher; Teacher 6, seventh-grade special education teacher; and Teacher 9, sixth-grade English as Second Language teacher; they scored the lowest, middle, and highest, respectively.

Their interviews were held on Google Meets and recorded with the Otter App on my cell phone. Those transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose for assistance with coding. After developing the preliminary codes, I used the framework approach (to analyze the data from the interviews Smith & Firth, 2011). This approach allowed me to manage the data and systematically move from codes to categories to themes that reflect the totality of the interviews (Smith & Firth, 2011).

At the end of the Japanese lesson study PDSA cycle, the -intervention surveys were administered to the teachers; we decided, due to the short time frame, we would not administer a post-intervention survey to the students. The post- intervention interviews were conducted with the teachers onsite and in-person using the same interview protocol (see Appendix I), but I added a few questions about the book and lesson studies to capture how the teachers planned to implement the strategies or practices learned.

Study Phase

The purpose of the overall professional development study phase was to measure the combined effects of the book study and lesson study on teachers, students, and the learning process. Based on the pre- and post-intervention surveys, interviews, and student diagnostic assessments, we analyzed the following research questions:

1. How and where the two interventions implemented and what were teachers' reactions to them, particularly the literacy teachers?
2. What did teachers learn and do as a result of their participation in the book study and Japanese lesson study?
3. What benefits or impact are middle school Black boys experiencing as a result of teachers' instructional improvement?

Student Survey Data. Survey data from 12 of the 65 Black boys (18.5%) in middle school whose parents consented to their participation is shown in Table 15, below. Based on their responses, these Black boys had a positive perception of their relationships with their teacher and peers. Teachers encourage students to use their schema and comfortable language to learn and express themselves in class. Finally, the data shows that the students believed that the teachers encouraged them to use their voices to lead, advocate for social justice, and express themselves during literacy classes.

Black boys had moderately positive perceptions that teachers valued relationships with their families and home life. Based on their responses, teachers may or may not treat them differently because of race, immigration status or socioeconomic differences in their home life and school. The students also had a moderately positive perception that the teachers viewed their parents as an important part of the classroom.

Table 15*Middle School Black Boys Response to CRP Perception Survey*

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
(1) I trust my teacher and have a positive relationship.	12	3	5	4.17	.937
(2) My teacher uses a variety of teaching methods to help me be successful.	12	2	5	3.83	1.193
(3) My teacher changes the lessons if I need it to be successful.	12	1	5	3.92	1.240
(4) My teacher encourages us to have positive interactions with students from different backgrounds.	12	1	5	4.33	1.371
(5) My teacher demonstrates that she knows that my home life is different from my school life and does not hold that against me.	12	1	5	3.33	1.371
(6) My teacher allows me to use language that I am comfortable using to communicate.	12	1	5	4.17	1.337
(7) I am encouraged to use what I already know to connect to the new information I learn.	12	2	5	4.08	.996
(8) My teacher teaches the way I prefer to learn.	12	1	5	3.33	1.497
(9) My teacher uses instructional material that includes my culture which makes me feel good about myself.	12	1	5	3.67	1.231

Table 15, continued

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
(10) My teacher provides visual aids to help students who are ESL.	12	1	5	3.42	1.443
(11) I appreciate my own culture because my teacher teaches about the contributions of my culture made over time.	12	2	5	3.50	1.168
(12) My teacher expresses that my parents are an important part of the classroom.	12	2	5	3.58	1.240
(13) I feel like my teacher understands my cultural background and the manner in which I behave.	12	1	5	3.50	1.624
(14) My teacher is willing to change the physical structure of the class to benefit and motivate the students.	12	1	5	3.58	1.311
(15) My teacher has a positive relationship with my family.	12	1	5	3.50	1.567
(16) I want to come to school every day because I have a good relationship with my teacher and peers.	12	1	5	4.08	1.240
(17) I get to choose how I will demonstrate mastery of my learning.	12	1	5	3.33	1.723
(18) My teacher includes my interests in the daily lessons and activities.	12	1	5	3.67	1.303

Table 15, continued

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
(19) My teacher encourages students to use their native language in school.	12	1	5	3.33	1.231
(20) When I see people that look like me used in the books we use in literacy, it helps me develop a positive self-identity.	12	1	5	3.00	1.477
(21) If my teacher uses culturally familiar examples, it makes learning new concepts easier.	12	1	5	3.25	1.422
(22) When I see myself in the pictures that are displayed in the classroom, I feel valued.	12	1	3	3.58	1.443
(23) My teacher encourages me to strive for A+ work.	12	2	5	4.17	1.115
(24) My teacher encourages us to take a stand against racism.	12	2	5	4.17	1.030
(25) My teacher encourages me to take the lead in discussions.	12	1	5	3.92	1.621

As it relates to culture, Black boys' perceptions ranged from moderately positive to fairly negative. The boys perceived the teachers' use of culturally relevant materials and content as moderately positive, but negatively perceived the teachers' attempts to include images and text with which they could identify. Questions 20 to 23, related to culture and showed such variance in response that the questions may need to be revised for focus and clarity. Finally, Black boys

had a fairly negative perception of instructional strategies geared to their learning styles, such as using visual aides to assist learners or providing choice to the students.

The student surveys also included two open-ended questions that asked students to record their favorite literacy task and text assigned in literacy class. Eight of the 12 Black boys (75.0%) provided a response for their favorite grade-level book. Five of the eight students who responded (62.5%) provided culturally relevant texts where they could relate to the character, issue, or content. Two students favored the book *Harbor Me* by Black author Jacqueline Woodson; the characters in this book are diverse middle school students who deal with issues of family, community and immigration in New York City. Two other students chose books related to their interests, football and comedy.

In response to the question about their favorite literacy tasks, only three of the 12 students (25.0%) provided a response. They enjoyed completing a photo essay for Black History Month; serving as the lead prosecutor in a mock trial for Jack and the Beanstalk; and writing an essay entitled “A Special Lady in My Life” for Women’s History Month.

Teacher Survey Data. Pre-Survey data from the seven teachers who completed the survey is shown in Table 16. The survey consists of two parts. Part one, which includes 40 Likert-type statements, measured the teacher's efficacy or confidence in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Part two, which includes 25 Likert-type statements, measured the teacher's beliefs about culturally responsive outcomes for students. The average mean total was determined for each question under confidence and belief. Then the teachers were ranked from high to low based on their confidence. As shown in Table 16, Teacher 9 had the highest confidence in being able to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and Teacher 1 had the

lowest. Confidence did not correlate with collective belief; for example, Teacher 1 had the least collective confidence score but the highest collective belief score.

Table 16

Teacher Pre- Survey Results for CRP Confidence and Belief

Teacher	Collective Confidence	Collective Belief
Teacher 9	4.20	4.44
Teacher 7	4.18	3.84
Teacher 4	4.03	4.64
Teacher 6	3.75	3.72
Teacher 5	3.72	3.60
Teacher 10	3.33	4.08
Teacher 1	3.28	4.85

Post-intervention survey data from six of the seven teachers (85.7%) is shown in Table 17, below. These six teachers took the same survey after the intervention, but Teacher 10 was not able to complete the survey due a family emergency. Once again, the average mean total was determined for each question under confidence and belief. Table 17 shows the changes in confidence or beliefs after the intervention for each teacher. Three teachers—Teacher 4, Teacher 6, and Teacher 1,—had the most significant changes in their efficacy in implementing culturally responsive practices. A different subset of three teachers— Teacher 7, Teacher 6 and Teacher 5—had the largest positive shifts in their beliefs that culturally relevant practices would produce positive outcomes for students. Teacher 6 was in both subsets of teachers.

Table 17*Teacher Pre -and Post-Intervention Survey Comparison for Confidence and Belief*

Teacher	Pre- Collective Confidence	Post - Collective Confidence	Change	Pre- Collective Belief	Post - Collective Belief	Change
Teacher 9	4.20	4.10	-.10	4.44	4.32	-.12
Teacher 7	4.18	4.15	-.03	3.84	4.67	+.83
Teacher 4	4.03	4.28	+.25	4.64	4.40	-.24
Teacher 6	3.75	4.45	+.70	3.72	5.00	+1.28
Teacher 5	3.72	3.70	-.02	3.60	5.00	+1.4
Teacher 10	3.33	-	-	4.08	-	-
Teacher 1	3.28	4.43	+1.15	4.85	4.00	-.85

Pre- and Post-Intervention Interviews. After calculating the results of the pre-intervention teacher survey, three teachers were chosen for interviews: Teacher 1, sixth grade literacy; Teacher 9, middle school ESL literacy; and Teacher 6, seventh-grade special education literacy. The transcribed interviews were coded using the framework approach, which provides a systematic means of managing and analyzing qualitative data (Smith & Firth, 2011). The results of the initial codes are shown in Table 18, below. Based on the information provided in the table, initial thoughts, categories, and themes were developed (see Table 19, below).

To ensure that the lived experiences of the teachers were accurately reflected, and that misinterpretation was minimized, I worked closely with the original data, transcripts, codes, and categories until a total view of their perspectives emerged. Based on the preliminary interviews, three main themes emerged.

Table 18*Pre-Intervention Interviews: Preliminary Code Occurrences*

Initial Codes	T1	T6	T9
District PD is mostly Content	2		
District PD was not personalized		2	
Feels confident to implement a strategy	1		1
Get to know students' culture through conversations	4	5	4
In house PD, allowed for discussion, modeling and practice	1		1
Research to learn about cultures			3
Teachers not prepared to teach CRP	1	1	
Learned how to teach culture from parent or teacher	1	2	1
Not Prepared to teach high-level practices	1	2	1
Not fully aware of culture	2		
Not sure how to get students to share	1		
Fear of being perceived as a racist	1	1	

First, the teachers did not have formal training in how to learn about their students' cultures and incorporate them into the lesson planning and activities. They did not mention coursework, district professional development or school level training that addressed learning about students' cultures. Although they were willing to incorporate culture by learning about the students in unintentional conversations or trying to research about their students, there was no formal mechanism for this. At least two teachers feared being perceived as a racist for lack of knowledge or misrepresentation of information.

Table 19*Example of How Initial Codes Lead to Themes of the Interviews*

Code	Initial Thoughts	Categories	Themes
“Get to know students’ culture through conversations”	knowing about kids based on what they tell you	Discussions	Learning about students’ culture happens mostly through discussions
“In house PD allowed for discussions, modeling and practice”	PD provided by the school offered time and opportunity for teachers to implement	Beneficial Professional Development	Teachers find benefits in being able to engage in the professional development offered.

Second, the professional development provided by the district and the school is not aligned. The district professional development was not personalized to meet the needs of individual teachers as it relates to pedagogy. The offerings include program reviews where supervisors review the components of a literacy, math, science or social studies program; however, little time is spent on modeling how to teach a particular skill that addresses the standards. Teacher 6 described how frustrated she was when she went to a math workshop and they spent most of the time focusing on team-building activities, rushing through the presentation of the content. Teacher 9 explained how she has surpassed the district offerings available to her, so she researches online and learns through webinars and courses.

At the school level, the teachers reported that professional development is more intentional to the needs of the school. Teacher 1 recalled when the state monitoring data showed that the students were not engaged in discussions and learning; this led to a schoolwide book study on Doug LeMov’s *Teach Like a Champion*, where teachers were able to learn, model, and practice four techniques to engage the students. Teacher 1 and Teacher 9 noted how valuable

those experiences were because they had the time to try out new techniques and students became more engaged. All of the teachers reported that they would benefit from more opportunities to learn, practice, and improve their practices.

Finally, the third theme that emerged was the belief that teaching staff as a whole were not currently equipped to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy. Although they may want to, there was a perceived lack of knowledge about how to do it and a fear of doing it wrong. Teacher 6 explained, “In the midst of Black Lives Matter, the killing of George Floyd, and the Insurrection, I don’t want to get it wrong or be perceived as a racist.” Teacher 1 was visibly uncomfortable when she stated, “I just don’t know how to get the students to share. I thought a Mexican student would have chimed in when we were talking about immigration, but she did not. I didn’t know what to do.”

During the post-intervention interviews, the same teachers were interviewed with a few added questions about the book and lesson studies. The initial codes are displayed in Table 20, below. Following the same procedures from the pre-intervention interviews, I worked closely with the original data, transcripts, codes, and categories until a total view of their perspectives emerged. Based on the post-intervention interviews, another three main themes emerged.

First, although we learned in the pre-interviews that there were no systems in place to learn about students' culture, in the post- intervention interviews all three teachers expressed how important it was to take the time to know the students’ cultures, interests, and learning styles. Doing so made the students feel more comfortable and safer to share about themselves and their culture. Teacher 6 gave the example of Student C, who identifies as a Black boy and shared with the class that his father identifies as White and Irish. This sharing resulted from reading a culturally relevant book, *What Lane* by Torrey Maldonado. The book addresses the experiences

of a middle school bi-racial sixth grader as he navigates through racism and stereotypes in Brooklyn, New York. During the interview, Teacher 6 expressed, “I have known his family prior to this year of having him and I never knew his father was White Irish like me.” Teacher 1 expressed how by having more open dialogue in class about race, dialects, and culture, more of her Black boys freely engaged in discussions and took the lead in class. Teacher 9 stated, “I think it's important to learn the students' learning styles and be sure to incorporate them in the learning activities to make sure that more students participate and engage in the lesson's activities.”

Table 20

Post-Intervention Interviews: Preliminary Code Occurrences

Initial Codes	T1	T6	T9
Be intentional in lesson planning	3		1
Confront Colleagues about Implicit Bias		1	2
Discussions and Lessons on Implicit Bias	2		1
Examine your own implicit bias	1	1	
Knowledge of Students	1	5	1
Plan for different learning styles		1	1
Provide Choice			1
Select text and content with students in mind	1	4	
Students Feel comfortable and safe		2	
Understand Learning Modalities			1

Second, based on the knowledge of students, the teachers expressed the importance of intentional planning. In pre-intervention interviews, the teachers spoke about random discussions or conversations that they may or may not have included in the lesson. However, in the post-

intervention interviews, there were several instances where different teachers spoke about developing the learning outcomes in advance and not leaving it to chance. Based on the culturally responsive book study and the Japanese lesson study, they intended to 1) plan for the different learning styles of their students, 2) provide choice for how students complete tasks, and 3) select and offer texts based on students' cultures and interests. Teacher 6 expressed, "I have to teach to the standard, but I don't have to use the prescribed text or content." Similarly, Teacher 9 committed to continuing to provide student choice on the process of learning and student learning products.

Finally, the third theme that emerged involved teachers confronting implicit bias in themselves, students, and colleagues. There was an important variance in responses for the interviews. Teacher 1 clearly articulated that she would intentionally check her own assumptions and even check in with a peer for the things that she may not be able to recognize. For her students, she would continue to provide open dialogue and make it part of the learning process. She gave an example of her own granddaughter using a microaggression toward an Asian student and how she confronted her granddaughter by asking questions and encouraging her to get more information before making an assumption. Teacher 1 was visibly uncomfortable, during the interview, when asked about confronting a colleague. She openly expressed her concern about being labeled an "angry Black woman" if she confronted colleagues about implicit bias.

Teacher 9 became uncomfortable about my probing of her own implicit biases. She stumbled as she conveyed that she does not have implicit bias about her students or other people. Teacher 9 stated, "When I see negative behavior, I do not attribute it a whole race or believe that all Black or all poor people behave that way." When asked about her students and colleagues,

she said she would confront implicit bias in her class through discussions and teaching. For colleagues, she stated, “ I would address it with a colleague if I felt it would harm students.”

Finally, Teacher 6 uncomfortably expressed that everyone has implicit biases and began to restate the question. She simply offered, “We have to confront implicit bias.” When I probed if and how she would address it within herself, her students, or her colleagues, she gave an example of her confronting her personal friend about a microaggression. She completed her responses with, “It takes time and I think we will all get there.”

Pre- and Post-Intervention Reading Diagnostic Scores. The reading diagnostic assessment measured six reading skills for middle school Black boys. We compared the fall and spring mean scores for each sub-test and the weighted score in Table 21. Using ANOVA, we found the significance value of change for each subtest. Although there was a positive change in mean scores from fall to spring in every subtest but high frequency, there was a significant change in vocabulary, spelling and the weighted score where $p < .05$.

Act Phase

Studying the impact of the multi-pronged professional development intervention confirmed that the culturally responsive book study and the Japanese lesson study had a positive impact on improving teacher capacity, student engagement, academic performance, and achievement for Black Boys. Teachers had positive reactions to being part of the book and lesson study. For those teachers who only participated in the school wide book study, questions arose about next steps in other professional learning communities and were asked specifically of the principal. Other departments expressed interests in being part of a lesson study. Providing teachers with sacred, structured opportunities over a sustained period of time with their peers

allowed teachers to gain knowledge, build individual and department capacity, and improve their teaching practices.

Table 21

ANOVA for Fall and Winter DORA Assessments, Grades 6 to 8 (N = 59)

	Fall	Winter	Difference	Significance
High Frequency Words	3.72	3.54	-.18	0.99
Word Recognition	10.35	11.16	+.81	.148
Phonics	4.15	4.42	+.27	.290
Vocabulary	5.64	7.36	1.72	.000
Spelling	4.30	6.36	2.06	.001
Comprehension	4.51	5.62	1.11	.114
Weighted Score	5.50	6.84	1.34	.006

We also learned that it was invaluable to set high expectations for lessons coupled with creating and utilizing measurement tools to collect and analyze accurate data. For example, the student survey scale provided a mechanism to capture the perceptions of students, who were the intended target, about their learning experiences in the literacy classes. It was recommended by the team that surveys continue to be utilized to continue to hear from students about their lived experiences and gauge any changes in perception after any intervention. Additionally, the observation tool created for this study proved beneficial to the principal and the teachers as it outlined the agreed upon high-level practices and culturally relevant pedagogy expected in the lessons. For the teachers, the tool served as a guide when planning and implementing the lesson.

It should be noted that although the principal served as the lead researcher, the school leadership team, which included teachers, parents, and support staff, were an integral part of the planning and execution of the study. Additionally, the teachers served as facilitators and had full

autonomy during the book study and lesson study sessions to plan activities, make decisions, and provide feedback about the tasks and the process. Thus, they took ownership of the work and the process.

Conclusion

The overall PDSA cycle of multi-pronged professional development with two mini-PDSA cycles running sequentially for the book study and the Japanese lesson study had a positive impact on teacher practices, which led to an increase in the achievement and performance of middle school Black boys. When the literacy lessons were culturally relevant, Black boys actively engaged in the lesson's activities by reading grade-level texts, leading discussions, serving as facilitators, and completing high quality tasks. Additionally, Black boys showed progress from the fall to the spring on the reading diagnostic assessment. It is not clear whether the progress had a direct correlation to the culturally relevant pedagogy, but there were improvements in most skill categories. The findings clearly suggest that teacher practices improved and changed to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy and high-level literacy practices that positively impacted student engagement, achievement, and performance. It is recommended that these practices continue and that the interactive process of the PDSA cycles continue to support the improved teacher practices, greater student engagement, improved performance, and increased achievement in literacy and other content areas.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to provide professional development to build teacher capacity and improve teaching practices to engage and improve the achievement and literacy performance of middle school Black boys. A multi-pronged professional development was implemented that included a schoolwide book study and Japanese lesson study for the middle school literacy teachers. This approach allowed teachers to confront implicit bias, gain knowledge about culturally relevant and high-level literacy practices, and implement lessons that include both.

This study used improvement science to implement an overall Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle that encompassed two mini-PDSA cycles that ran consecutively. The first mini-PDSA cycle focused on a culturally responsive teaching book study that included implicit bias training and culturally responsive strategies to implement in the classroom to benefit middle school Black boys. The second mini-PDSA cycle focused on assisting teachers with using the knowledge and strategies to plan middle school literacy lessons that use culturally relevant texts and content to engage Black boys in high-level literacy practices like critical analysis to improve the performance and achievement. Chapter V summarized the findings, discusses the limitations of the study, and provided recommendations for practice.

Discussion of Findings

Culturally Responsive Book Study

This PDSA cycle launched a schoolwide book study to train teachers on implicit bias and culturally responsive teaching practices. By the end of the study, 67 teachers and support staff had read *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015) and

engaged in small group learning. All (100%) of the teachers and staff completed the cultural learning activity; all (100%) classroom teachers, in a reflection survey, committed to confronting implicit bias and implementing specific strategies offered in the study into their teaching practices.

Deviating from the original plan of facilitating small group learning sessions, the book study hosted two whole group sessions where teachers viewed modeled lessons and learned how to incorporate culturally relevant texts and content into the lessons across the curriculum. By meeting as a whole group, teachers were able to meet and engage in cross-group discussions and share their learning with the school, gaining perspectives from more colleagues.

Additionally, as a result of participating in the book study, survey responses specifically addressed being mindful of microaggressions against students as this relates to their names, cultures, and ability. Consistent with the strategy offered by Shields (2019), teachers learned the importance of confronting implicit bias in themselves, students, and colleagues in order to root out racism and inequities that plague Black boys.

After teachers shared their culture stories with other staff members to build community and respect for the diversity represented on the staff, several teachers began using storytelling as an empathy intervention in class to reduce implicit bias (Whitford & Emerson, 2018). The physical education teachers incorporated a project that invited students to share their cultural stories at the start of each gym period in middle school as a means of getting to know the students. The information learned from the students was incorporated into content and lesson activities.

After the study, during routine classroom visits and evaluations, the principal observed that 100% of classroom teachers implementing strategies and techniques offered from the book

study (Hammond, 2015). Teachers were incorporating different levels of the students' cultures including family customs, religious practices, and beliefs to increase the engagement of students. During the social and emotional learning periods, teachers were intentionally utilizing relationship-building strategies like creating learning pacts to create safe, trusting environments for students where they would not shut down but felt empowered (Hammond, 2015). Black boys were actively engaged in the lessons through discussion, presenting information, and serving as facilitators in small groups. Safe learning environments were created where Black boys shared their racial identity, perspectives on social issues, and emerged as leaders. Finally, consistent with the suggestions of Hammond (2105) teachers utilized a variety of techniques like brain-based learning, creating anticipatory sets, and chunking the learning to help culturally and linguistically diverse students process information and build intellectual capacity.

Teachers learned to shift their practices in a variety of ways to engage Black boys. They no longer excluded them or passed over them with assumptions that they were unmotivated and unwilling to learn. Teachers learned that taking the time to get to know about Black boys' cultures and interests became valuable assets in engaging them in high-level literacy practices. When teachers incorporated relevant texts and content, they observed how often Black boys raised their hands, shared their perspectives, and completed the learning tasks. Teachers acknowledged that they had been part of keeping Black boys as dependent learners by using only one measure of the diagnostic assessment DORA as a justification for not exposing them to grade-level content and high-level literacy activities. The book study provided a plethora of strategies to scaffold and process information and build intellectual capacity.

The book study promoted professional learning among colleagues and fostered a safe environment to confront personal implicit biases and that of others in the school community.

Also, along the way, adjustments were made by teachers to tailor their professional development cycles to maximize the learning and meet the needs of the teachers. Finally, the knowledge and strategies obtained from the culturally responsive book study can easily be utilized in literacy lessons and other content areas to continue to improve the performance and achievement of Black boys.

Literacy Japanese Lesson Study to Change Pedagogical Practices

Doig and Groves (2011) suggests teachers utilize Japanese Lesson Study as an iterative trial-and-error learning process to explore their practices, reflect, and gain support from colleagues. Consistent with the research of Vermunt et al. (2019), the quality of teacher learning and practices improved after each iteration as they participated in the cycles of the lesson study. The literacy team followed a structured format as they executed this lesson study. They established professional development norms that were reviewed weekly as they participated in the lesson study cycles.

Aligned to the four main phases offered by Lewis (2002), the teachers volunteered to plan a literacy lesson, teach the lesson, participate in a post-lesson debrief, and consolidate learning. The teachers worked collaboratively in every phase of the cycle with the support of their peers. Even when it became difficult and uncomfortable as teachers were confronting implicit bias in their peers, team members showed up, participated in the discussions and activities, respected the perspectives of their peers, and pushed each other to incorporate the learnings from the book study. After receiving critical feedback, teachers were willing to work with their peers to make adjustments and re-teach lessons.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers on the team intentionally selected and aligned each lesson to the same New Jersey reading learning standard; they varied the lessons to

meet the needs of their students, including special education and English language learners. By the close of the lesson study, Black boys were exposed to grade level texts and asked to produce outcomes that were aligned to the rigorous student learning standards.

If necessary, teachers scaffolded, gave accommodations, or made modifications. They did not offer pullout or alternative low-level assignments. The teachers learned to value student effort and ability by not decreasing the rigor and addressing their learning styles so Black boys could succeed. They learned that many students may learn in an auditory way, but Black boys responded positively to kinesthetic and visual activities. They also learned when Black boys were given a choice as to how to demonstrate their mastery, they actually completed the assignments and scored higher.

Additionally, each grade level planned one lesson that they taught in different settings in order to observe and compare teaching practices and foster growth through each iteration. As each teacher implemented their lesson, the observers gained insight and strategies to improve their own lessons as they taught their students. The teachers learned that developing standard teaching practices that encompassed culturally relevant high-level practices yielded positive results for Black boys in the different settings. Using the CRO tool as a guide, teachers learned that intentional planning led to greater success of Black boys in each setting.

Finally, during the debriefing sessions, the teachers were willing to give and receive actionable feedback in order to improve their practices. Additionally, teachers confronted other teachers who used microaggressions during any phase of the cycles. The teachers learned that it is not enough to acknowledge implicit biases but to confront them to create a safe environment for all students to learn (Hammond, 2015). As a result, we saw a reduction in implicit bias as the

lessons were taught and culturally relevant activities were planned specifically to engage Black boys.

Overall Professional Development PDSA Cycle

Improvement science offers the PDSA cycle as a quick way to test an intervention through an iterative process. The initial aim of the study was to improve the engagement, performance, and achievement of middle school Black boys in literacy. In order to achieve those goals, teacher capacity and teaching practices needed to improve. This overall multi-pronged professional development cycle provided the opportunity to run two mini-PDSA cycles consecutively to improve teacher capacity and teaching practices.

Pre - and post-intervention survey data helped gauge the effectiveness of these two cycles and how they impacted engagement, achievement, and performance for middle school Black boys. Teachers were able to assess their efficacy in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices and their beliefs about how culturally responsive environments promote positive outcomes for middle school Black boys. After the intervention, survey data was used to gauge changes in teacher efficacy and beliefs. Survey data collected from the Black boys themselves was collected after the book study; this data revealed perceptions of students about their literacy class. The researcher learned that the intervention had a positive impact on several teachers and the Black boys they taught.

Semi-structured interviews, reflection surveys, and the CRO tool helped capture the actual strategies and practices from the book study that the teachers applied to their teaching practices. Additionally, during the post-intervention interviews, teachers were willing to share the changes they made to their reading lessons; this included adding culturally relevant texts,

connecting to the personal experiences of students, and allowing choice to students on how they will learn and demonstrate mastery.

Through informal discussion and exit tickets for both PDSA cycles, the teachers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to have job-embedded professional development that was tailored to their needs. They valued the opportunity to develop their skills and craft while receiving immediate feedback and support from their peers. Additionally, teachers learned the gift of the iterative process, to be able to keep running the cycles until the team reached the shared learning goal. Finally, the teachers appreciated the support of the principal, who honored their suggestions and decision-making, benefitting their individualized learning and, ultimately, improving the literacy engagement, performance and achievement of the middle school Black boys they taught.

As a Black woman and principal, I was extremely enlightened by the positive impact of internal changes made in teacher practice within the school. I understood how important it was to address this problem impacting Black boys in literacy to disrupt and dismantle their academic trajectory, but I could not have imagined or predicted all the benefits of this multi-pronged professional development program. I learned as a leader that prioritizing professional growth and development at the school not only benefited Black boys but all students and staff. I learned that providing teachers with space and tools to guide their planning and thinking helped them be vulnerable, collaborative, and committed to success.

Finally, I totally shifted my administrative style from authoritative to collaborative; where I thought I had to have all the answers and consult a few to be distributive, now each member of the school collaborates and is responsible for the vision and mission of the school. Moreover, they are part of the problem-solving efforts as they bring innovation, contribute to the

decision-making, and develop the school culture. Regardless of who sits in the seat of principal, I'm confident that this work will continue because the school believes in its value.

Limitations of the Study

The aim of this study was to improve the performance and achievement of Black boys in literacy. The study was limited by the small number of boys whose parents gave consent for them to participate. There were 65 middle school Black boys enrolled, but only 12 (18.5%) received consent to complete the Culturally Responsive Perception Scale. This scale was developed to capture how students viewed their literacy classes before the intervention and whether there were significant changes after the intervention. Future studies should focus on garnering parental consent in advance to get a good representation of the target group.

A second limitation to the study was the limited amount of time for the intervention. As a dissertation research project, the study was originally scheduled to run 16-weeks but actually ran 20 weeks. Even with the addition of four weeks, the study did not get to run a cycle for the eighth-grade teachers, so the middle school data collection was limited. Since this was a multi-pronged intervention, future studies should schedule the overall cycle to run at least one entire school year to allow for full cycles to be run of the mini-PDSA cycles.

The third and final limitation relates to the global pandemic, forcing schools to teach in remote environments. There was significant weekly and monthly uncertainty; some teachers struggled with managing the remote platforms. The original plan involved on-site teacher meetings and classroom observations so we could view body language, reactions, and student work. However, with remote learning, attendance was not consistently strong. Some students kept their cameras and mics off, and others only communicated in the chat. And, internet access was inconsistent for the students and staff. Some of the students who were given parental

permission to take the survey did not complete it; teachers had no way of knowing this since it was electronic and anonymous. Although there were some benefits to the remote teaching and learning environment, future studies should focus on onsite professional development, in-person classroom observations, and in-person survey completion by the students. If this is not completely possible, plans and considerations should be made for this level of unpredictability.

Implications for Future Practice

This study was designed to address an extremely specific problem at my school from an equity perspective. Since the problem of Black boys not performing or scoring as well as other races in English Language Arts is pervasive, the findings of this study offer hope for transforming schoolwide professional development by using culturally relevant pedagogy to impact student achievement and performance. Our school plans to continue these practices to benefit Black boys schoolwide. These practices have proven more effective for Black boys than exclusion, pull-out programs, or extra tutoring. Black boys can benefit from quality first instruction that is intentional and deliberate in incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy and engaging them in high-level literacy practices. Black boys can improve in achievement and performance when they are not seen as the problem or the reason for failure. Developing effective teacher practices and building capacity in the literacy department can positively impact the achievement and performance of Black boys.

Although the focus was mainly on teacher knowledge and improved practices, there are implications for leadership as well. The structure of the PDSA cycles promotes shared and distributive leadership. True distributive leadership involves members owning the vision and mission of the school or organization. By giving teachers autonomy over the scope and sequence of their professional development, it helped them own the work of building their capacity, the

department, and ultimately the school. Continuing to engage in these practices will further inspire and empower teachers to take an active leadership role in building the success of students and the school.

Although the challenges of the global pandemic birthed opportunities to participate in the sustained learning opportunities, this may be difficult to maintain once the school returns to hybrid or full in-person learning. One of the benefits of remote learning was that the teachers became comfortable planning and meeting virtually. All departments had a 45-minute common planning time that teachers had autonomy over; if they chose, they could coordinate to meet during those allotted times to plan and debrief. Additionally, the school had support staff who believed in the value of this work and were willing to cover classes while other team members observed lessons. As long as the leadership prioritizes this work and teachers are flexible, this work can continue, and the practices can be sustained. Finally, we had video cameras and were able to record lessons for observers who had schedule conflicts, allowing us to upload the videos for review before the debrief sessions.

Finally, the school district can benefit from the approach of using Improvement Science to test solutions to local problems similar to the one persistent at our school. School district can benefit from thoroughly examining a problem using tools like empathy interviews, data, and the fishbone diagram; driver diagrams then inform the choosing of levers to address the problem through iterative PDSA cycles. This allows solutions to district problems in a short time frame.

Most importantly, this school district and other educational institutions cannot continue to blame the very students they are charged to educate. They cannot continue to pile on external programs and hope to see a result at the end of the school year. Improvement Science provides structured, systematic opportunities for innovation, new learning, and capacity building. In a

large district or organization, when effective solutions emerge for a local problem, it is incumbent upon the organization to scale up effectively to impact more students.

Conclusion

For decades, lack of engagement, underachievement, and underperformance of Black boys has been researched with a spirit of blaming the boys, their families, and their socioeconomic status. Additionally, the focus has been on getting boys to learn to read by third grade; when this doesn't happen, their problems often persist into high school and the remainder of their adult lives. This study, however, begins in middle school, where Black boys are charged with reading to learn. This study offers hope beyond third grade to change the course for Black boys and put them on a solid path to success. The plan for improvement began with the teachers understanding their own implicit biases and how they intentionally or unintentionally contribute to creating an unsafe learning environment that impedes the success of Black boys.

Learning and acknowledging personal implicit biases is not enough; teachers must protect the learning environment for Black boys by confronting peers and students who perpetrate microaggressions consciously or unconsciously. Teachers also need inclusive strategies to implement that encourage the participation of Black boys and promote their engagement in high-level literacy practices. The combination of culturally responsive training and Japanese Lesson Study ensured that teachers in this study had the necessary skills and learned how to confidently incorporate those skills into their daily teaching practices daily.

This multi-pronged professional development intervention led to a structured protocol, encompassing small group and whole group activities, to support individual teacher learning and capacity-building throughout the literacy department and the school. Additionally, lesson planning, surveys, and observation tools emerged from the study. Teachers agreed to add a

component to the lesson plan to address cultural relevance during the planning stage. The CRO tool, developed by the researcher, can be used by teachers and principals to monitor the use and implementation of culturally relevant practices. Finally, the student CRP scale survey can be utilized to capture student voices, perspectives, and feedback about their literacy learning experiences.

The use of improvement science and the PDSA cycles provided a meaningful transformation for professional development at this local school that built capacity among the teachers, staff, and principal. By using this iterative process, teachers were able to gain knowledge, improve their teaching practices, and build the capacity of the literacy department. Their commitment and efforts helped to authentically engage middle school Black boys in rigorous literacy practices. Those practices led to measurable improvement in the engagement, achievement, and performance of middle school Black boys.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Teacher Informed Consent

Title of the Study : Improving Performance and Achievement in Literacy for Middle School Black Boys

Who is conducting and funding the study: Ms. Rosalyn Barnes is conducting this study under the advisement of Dr. Margaret Orr and Fordham University.

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. You are being invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 22 years or older and currently teaching at the school.

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate in this study, this will have no effect on the services or benefits as a teacher.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to investigate how Black middle school boys are experiencing literacy instruction. The researcher will examine if providing an intervention will improve Black boys' performance and achievement.

What you will be asked to do in the study: If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete 2 surveys about teaching and student learning that will take approximately 25 minutes to complete online. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview about literacy instruction and student learning. It will include questions about professional development, lesson plans and lesson activities. The interview will take approximately 1-hour.

Time required: The survey will take approximately 25 minutes and the interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be administered twice during the study.

Risks and Benefits: As a teacher, you may experience discomfort thinking that your participation will be part of your evaluation, but your participation will serve no risks. You may benefit from being part of the professional development opportunities offered by the study and by contributing to improvement work in this school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Access to Existing Records: During the study, we will not be asking for ANY personal information or records from you.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for this survey. It will be for educational purposes only.

What will be done with the information we collect from you: During the interview, the researcher will preview the protocol with you. Then the researcher will ask you questions and give you time to respond. If necessary, the researcher will probe you to say more about a

particular question. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by an app. The results will be coded and included in a dissertation about the study. It will be available through Fordham University.

How is your information protected: I will protect the confidentiality of your research records by using pseudonyms. Your name and any other information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from the data collected as part of the project. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name will not be used in any report.

Recording: We will be recording audio during the interview so that we can capture all of your responses accurately. Only Ms. Barnes and Dr. Margaret Orr will have access to the recordings or the transcripts. The transcripts will be password protected online. After the dissertation defense, the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. No names or identifications will be attached to the recordings or transcripts.

Who to contact if you have questions about the study: (If you have any questions about the study or the interview, please contact: Ms. Rosalyn Barnes @ 201 915-6510 or rbarnes1@jcboe.org).

Who to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study: Michele Kuchera, IRB Manager, Phone: 718-817-0876 E-mail: IRB@fordham.edu

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.

If you agree to participate in this study please sign on the next page. Thank you.

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Black Boys and Literacy

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and **I have received a copy of this description.** I understand that this (interview/focus group) will be (audio-/video-)recorded).

Name (Printed) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

I agree to allow this interview to be (audio-/video-) recorded. I understand that I can request that the recording be stopped at any time.

Signature: _____

Your completion and return of the questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this study.

APPENDIX B

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

Empathy Interview for Teachers

Teacher Name _____

Yrs Experience _____ Gender _____ Ethnicity _____

1) As a seasoned teacher, how would you describe the differences in students, after the rollover of students coming in from our feeder school PS #33 and the exit of students attending other programs throughout the district?

2) As a middle school ELA teacher, you experience the shift in students from elementary to middle school? How would you describe the ethnic makeup of the students?

3) How do you choose texts or assignments for your students? What are the factors that you consider?

4) How do you know if a literacy lesson is successful?

5) Describe your expectations for the students you serve? Do they vary at all?

7) Describe a scenario where you noticed your students were having a challenging time? Who? What? Why?

8) Which students would you say are disciplined and/or suspended the most in middle school? Ethnicity? Gender?

9) Describe what you would consider an offense warranting an out-of- school suspension.

10) Describe what the school would consider an offense warranting an out-of-school suspension.

11) Do you feel like all students have an equal opportunity to participate in Algebra, STEM, Coding, Student Council, or other Clubs?

12) How would you describe the ethnic and gender make up of students that are classified in middle school?

Empathy Interview for Students

Student's Name _____
Current Grade _____ Age _____
Gender _____ Ethnicity _____

- 1) Describe your experiences when you were in elementary grades K-5 learning how to read and write?
- 2) How would you describe a successful reading lesson in elementary?
- 3) When was the last time that you connected with a character, setting or plot of a story utilized in your class?
- 4) In 6th grade there was a shift in enrollment, due to the inclusion of students from our feeder school PS 33 and the exit of students possibly transferring to other programs throughout the district? What was that like?
- 5) How were your teachers' expectations for your work in ELA in grades 6-8?
- 6) Describe the complexity of the assignments in 6th – 8th grade?
- 7) Describe a challenging time between 6-8 the grade
- 8) Did you notice in middle school, which students were being disciplined and/or suspended? Explain.
- 9) During the transition to middle school what were some of your challenges?
- 10) In middle school did you feel like you had an equal opportunity to be in Algebra, STEM, Coding, Student Council, or other Clubs?

APPENDIX C
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Protocol Title: Culturally Responsive Student Learning Perception Scale

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide whether to provide permission for your child to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: This survey scale will aim to learn how Black boys experience literacy instruction. Our aim is to improve their instructional experience and so we want feedback from them as we try out new approaches. The results will be used to benefit students in our school. The results will also be used as part of Rosalyn Barnes graduate degree program, for a published dissertation on this improvement work. **Who is conducting and funding the study:** Rosalyn Barnes will be conducting the survey on behalf of Fordham University .

What your child will be asked to do in the study Your child will be asked 27 questions about reading, writing and how they experience literacy success. The survey scale will be voluntary and anonymous. Their names will not be included in the study. We plan to compile the information to get a sense of how students experience literacy instruction.

Time required: The students will complete the survey during the 20-minute block in the beginning of class. They will take the survey at the beginning of the study and the end.

Access to Existing Records: We will not be requesting any other information.

Risks and Benefits: Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and there will be no penalty for not participating. All students/children for whom we have parent consent will be asked if they wish to participate and only those who agree will complete the forms. Moreover, participants will be free to stop taking part in the study at any time. Students will only experience discomfort similar to talking about their school experience. They may experience benefits from contributing to improving their school and the experiences created for them.

Compensation: There is no compensation for this study.

Confidentiality: Ms. Barnes will keep the information and data collected in this study confidential. The data and results will be kept electronically and under password protection. Only summary information about the themes and ideas will be compiled and shared.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this survey is voluntary and there is no penalty for your child not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: At any time, you may remove your child from the study.

Who to contact if you have questions about the study: If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Rosalyn Barnes @ 201-915-6510 or rbarnes1@jcboe.org

Who to contact about your child's rights as a research participant in the study:

Michele Kuchera, IRB Manager

Phone: 718-817-0876 E-mail: IRB@fordham.edu

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU PROVIDE PERMISSION FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

If you agree to have your child participate in this study please sign on the next page. Thank you.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to allow my child to participate in the procedure and **I have received a copy of this description.**

Student's Name: _____

Parent or Guardian's Name (Printed) _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D
FORDHAM IRB APPROVAL

To: Rosalyn Barnes (R), Margaret Orr
 Emails:
 From: Michele Kuchera
 Subject: Exemption Notification - IRB ID: 1804
 Date: 03/25/2021 4:15 PM EDT



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
 THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Fordham University IRB

Protocol Exemption Notification

To: Rosalyn Barnes
 From: Michele Kuchera, IRB Office
 Subject: Protocol #1804
 Date: 03/25/2021

The protocol **1804. Improving the Achievement and Performance in Literacy for Middle School Black Boys** has been verified by the Fordham University IRB as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b)(1): (1) Educational Research on 03/25/2021.

Please upload the site permission or email to the IRB once received.

You may obtain a pdf download of this notification by visiting your protocol page in Mentor.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please contact irb@fordham.edu to discuss any changes you may contemplate.

Thanks,

Michele Kuchera,
 IRB Office

Institutional Review Board
 Fordham University
 Collins Hall, B-31/B-34
 Phone: (718)-817-0876
 (718)817-0055
 Email: irb@fordham.edu

APPENDIX E

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

OUTCOME EXPECTANCY SCALE(CRTOE)

- (1) A positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students.
- (2) Incorporating a variety of teaching methods will help my students to be successful.
- (3) Students will be successful when instruction is adapted to meet their needs.
- (4) Developing a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse cultural backgrounds will promote positive interactions between students.
- (5) Acknowledging the ways that the school culture is different from my students' home culture will minimize the likelihood of discipline problems.
- (6) Understanding the communication preferences of my students will decrease the likelihood of student-teacher communication problems.
- (7) Connecting my students' prior knowledge with new incoming information will lead to deeper learning.
- (8) Matching instruction to the students' learning preferences will enhance their learning.
- (9) Revising instructional material to include a better representation of the students' cultural group will foster positive self-images.
- (10) Providing English Language Learners with visual aids will enhance their understanding of assignments.
- (11) Students will develop an appreciation for their culture when they are taught about the contributions their culture has made over time.
- (12) Conveying the message that parents are an important part of the classroom will increase parent participation.
- (13) The likelihood of student-teacher misunderstandings decreases when my students' cultural background is understood.
- (14) Changing the structure of the classroom so that it is compatible with my students' home culture will increase their motivation to come to class.
- (15) Establishing positive home-school relations will increase parental involvement.
- (16) Student attendance will increase when a personal relationship between the teacher and students has been developed.
- (17) Assessing student learning using a variety of assessment procedures will provide a better picture of what they have learned.
- (18) Using my students' interests when designing instruction will increase their motivation to learn.
- (19) Simplifying the language used during the presentation will enhance English Language Learners' comprehension of the lesson.
- (20) The frequency that students' abilities are misdiagnosed will decrease when their standardized test scores are interpreted with caution.
- (21) Encouraging students to use their native language will help to maintain students' cultural identity.
- (22) Students' self-esteem can be enhanced when their cultural background is valued by the teacher.
- (23) Helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds succeed in school will increase their confidence in their academic ability.
- (24) Students' academic achievement will increase when they are provided with unbiased access to the necessary learning resources.

- (25) Using culturally familiar examples will make learning new concepts easier.
- (26) When students see themselves in the pictures that are displayed in the classroom, they develop a positive self-identity.

APPENDIX F

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STUDENT LEARNING

PERCEPTION SCALE (CRLPS)

- (1) I trust my teacher and have a positive relationship.
- (2) My teacher uses a variety of teaching methods to help me be successful.
- (3) My teacher changes the lessons if I need it to be successful.
- (4) My teacher encourages us to have positive interactions with students from different backgrounds.
- (5) My teacher demonstrates that she knows that my home life is different from my school life and does not hold that against me.
- (6) My teacher allows me to use language that I am comfortable using to communicate.
- (7) I am encouraged to use what I already know to connect to the new information I learn.
- (8) My teacher teaches the way I prefer to learn.
- (9) My teacher uses instructional material that includes my culture which makes me feel good about myself.
- (10) My teacher provides visual aids to help students who are ESL.
- (11) I appreciate my own culture because my teacher teaches about the contributions of my culture made over time.
- (12) My teacher expresses that my parents are an important part of the classroom.
- (13) I feel like my teacher understands my cultural background and the manner in which I behave.
- (14) My teacher is willing to change the physical structure of the class to benefit and motivate the students.
- (15) My teacher has a positive relationship with my family.
- (16) I want to come to school everyday because I have a good relationship with my teacher and peers.
- (17) I get to choose how I will demonstrate mastery of my learning.
- (18) My teacher includes my interests in the daily lessons and activities.
- (19) My teacher encourages students to use their native language in school.
- (20) When I see people that look like me used in the books we use in literacy, it helps me develop a positive self-identity.
- (21) If my teacher uses culturally familiar examples, it makes learning new concepts easier.
- (22) When I see myself in the pictures that are displayed in the classroom, I feel valued.
- (23) My teacher encourages me to strive for A+ work.
- (24) My teacher encourages us to take a stand against racism.
- (25) My teacher encourages me to take the lead in discussions.
- (26) (Text box question) List (1) book that you read this year and tell why you liked it.
- (27) (Text box question) List (1) assignment you completed that you liked and explain why?

APPENDIX G

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (CRTSE)

- (1) Adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students
- (2) Obtain information about my students' academic strengths
- (3) Determine whether my students like to work alone or in a group
- (4) Determine whether my students feel comfortable competing with other students
- (5) Identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students' home culture
- (6) Implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students' home culture and the school culture
- (7) Assess student learning using various types of assessments
- (8) Obtain information about my students' home life
- (9) Build a sense of trust in my students
- (10) Establish positive home-school relations
- (11) Use a variety of teaching methods
- (12) Develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds
- (13) Use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful
- (14) Use my students' prior knowledge to help them make sense of new information
- (15) Identify ways how students communicate at home may differ from the school norms
- (16) Obtain information about my students' cultural background
- (17) Teach students about their cultures' contributions to science
- (18) Greet English Language Learners with a phrase in their native language
- (19) Design a classroom environment using displays that reflects a variety of cultures
- (20) Develop a personal relationship with my students
- (21) Obtain information about my students' academic weaknesses
- (22) Praise English Language Learners for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language
- (23) Identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards linguistically diverse students
- (24) Communicate with parents regarding their child's educational progress
- (25) Structure parent-teacher conferences so that the meeting is not intimidating for parents
- (26) Help students to develop positive relationships with their classmates
- (27) Revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups
- (28) Critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes
- (29) Design a lesson that shows how other cultural groups have made use of mathematics
- (30) Model classroom tasks to enhance English Language Learners' understanding
- (31) Communicate with the parents of English Language Learners regarding their child's achievement
- (32) Help students feel like important members of the classroom
- (33) Identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards culturally diverse students
- (34) Use a learning preference inventory to gather data about how my students like to learn
- (35) Use examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds
- (36) Explain new concepts using examples that are taken from my students' everyday lives
- (37) Obtain information regarding my students' academic interests
- (38) Use the interests of my students to make learning meaningful for them
- (39) Implement cooperative learning activities for those students who like to work in groups
- (40) Design instruction that matches my students' developmental needs

APPENDIX H
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LITERACY OBSERVATION TOOL

Observer: _____ Date: _____ Room # _____

	Mark a tally each time the teacher engages in these culturally responsive literacy practices.
<p>High Level Questions & Discussion Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions like: Why, What might, What if, etc. • Socratic Seminar • Discussions w/peer facilitators • Responding to the responses of peers 	
<p>Culturally Relevant Texts/Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • books • topics/issues • tasks • racial concerns • linguistic/language 	
<p>Connections to Specific Experiences of Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student choice/voice • Discussions • Social experiences • Cultural Referencing 	
<p>Literary Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Analysis • Evaluating texts • Determining author's purpose • Point of view 	

APPENDIX I

LITERACY PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

FOR BLACK BOYS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Verbal Consent:

Participants in the interview will be explained the following:

I am conducting a research study to improve the performance and achievement of Black boys in literacy. This interview will be published, but your responses will not be used for any evaluative purpose. Anything you say, will not be held against you in any way. Your name and the names of any students will be kept anonymous.

I will use this interview protocol as a guide. In order to be respectful of your time, I may move you forward from one question to the next. However, if I do and you feel that you have details to add that would help my understanding please feel free to continue.

I will limit my comments during the interview because I really want to hear what you have to tell me. However, if at any point there is information that you would like from me or you require clarification on any point, please do not hesitate to ask.

With your permission, I will audiotape this interview. The purpose of the audiotape is two-fold, first, so that I can accurately capture what you share, and second, so that I do not have to write extensive notes, allowing me to more fully listen to what you are telling me. I may jot some notes down here and there just simply as reminders to myself. To preserve confidentiality, we will use pseudonyms for the school and classes you might refer to and for your name in case those are mentioned in the conversation. Only I will be aware of what the pseudonyms are referring to.

Do you have any questions?

Pre-interview Questions

The following will be sent to the interview candidates before the interview via email:

I would like you to think about your literacy class. Think about how you engage your students, particularly Black boys? How do you utilize students' culture and interests in your lessons?

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

What has been your experience with incorporating students' culture in lesson planning?

- How do you learn about your students' culture?
- What is your perception of students' cultures that are unfamiliar to you?
- Can you describe some experiences where you learned about your students' culture in the classroom?
- What challenges have you encountered when trying to incorporate students' culture in the lessons?

- Do you feel that you have the ability to provide learning experiences to the whole class about students' cultures?
- How have you learned to incorporate students' culture into your lessons?

Based on your experiences, how do you define culturally responsive pedagogy?

- Are there any examples that you can give to illustrate your definition?
- How are you changing your reading assignments based on the book study?
- How will you address implicit bias if you recognize it in yourself, students or colleagues?

During your tenure here, describe the professional development you have engaged in ?

- Are there any systems or structures to support your professional development and growth?
- During professional development, are there opportunities for discussion, modeling or practicing?
- How prepared are you to teach high level reading practices to your students?
- Do you feel like your personal professional development needs are met throughout the school year? Explain.
- Are teachers prepared to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy?
- After a professional development session offered by the school, do you feel confident to implement concepts and/or strategies?
- After participating in the book study or Japanese Lesson study, how will you change your teaching practices to benefit your students?

APPENDIX J
MENTOR TEXTS



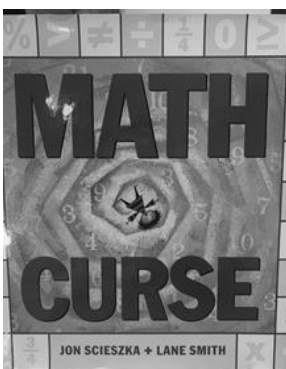
Liam's First Cut by Taye Jones

Pre-K -8 Literacy lesson
 Positive family relationships: father/son
 Milestone event of a first hair cut
 Liam has autism
 Home- school connections to prepare for the cut
 Community support and celebrations
 Picture prompts to create narratives
 Informational/Explanatory writing



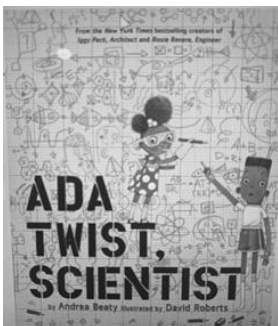
What Do You Do with a Problem? by Kobi Yamada

Pre-K -8 Social Studies lesson
 Build a Campaign: for Social justice, Against stigmas
 Changing Endings: Finding something amazing in problems
 Examining Civil Rights and voter suppression
 Essays or Projects on Racism, sexism, Ableism, etc
 Build a campaign



Math Curse by Jon Scieszka

Pre-K - 8 Math lesson
 Advocacy project for girls in math
 Creating and solving math problems at different levels
 Evaluating characters in mythology
 Researching women who excel in mathematics



Ada Twist, Scientist by Andrea Beaty

Pre-K - 8 Science lesson
 Campaign for Black boys and girls in STEM
 Develop engineering project
 Research careers in STEM
 Engage in High-level task: reading, questioning, critical thinking, creating, writing, etc.