

## ABSTRACT

Examining the Influence of Multicultural Literature on Students' Perspectives to be Agents of Change

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African American and Latinx youth from low-income neighborhoods face insurmountable odds in public education; these disempowering educational experiences challenge students' academic, social, and cultural significance in the fabric of what it means to be a product of public schooling. By using multicultural literature, the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy serves as a conduit for empowering students to become critical thinkers and justice-oriented citizens. Using the theoretical lens of critical pedagogy, this study examines how multicultural literature influences students to become agents of change. Harnessing a phenomenological case-study approach, five participants from the Baylor University Freedom Schools program will be interviewed to share in their experiences about reading multicultural literature and its impact on their development of civic action. It is hoped that findings from this study will inform classroom practices by encouraging the use of multicultural literature, in that, students develop self-advocacy to promote social justice. Keywords: Multicultural Literature, critical pedagogy, agents of change, justice-oriented citizenship

Examining the Influence of Multicultural Literature on Students' Perspectives to be  
Agents of Change

by

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## DEDICATION

To the Baylor Freedom School scholars. A thirty-day program has turned into a lifetime of advocacy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Through a critical multicultural lens of the public education schooling system, teachers can identify the root causes of racial disparities in achievement and academic outcomes amongst students of color. Historically, and even contemporarily, standardized assessments have been used as a barometer for measuring the intelligence of students of color, which is based on a deficit model perspective (Atwater, 2008; Hursh, 2007; Lazarín, 2014; Shuey, 1958). Critical education scholars Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1998) shared how the funds of knowledge approach is used in schools, in that it is defined as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills (p. 133).” However, this approach has been underutilized, unrecognized, unacknowledged, and devalued. Other researchers have noted how students are faced with a demeaning and dehumanizing academic environment that opposes them at every point (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Lewis, 2001). Recently, a high school senior faced in-school suspension (ISS) for having shoulder-length dreadlocks (Beachum, 2020). This negative consequence demonstrates a lack of cultural competency in understanding the significance of dreads in the African and African American communities. Similarly, based on a district policy mandate in Midway ISD regarding hair and grooming, an elementary student was removed from class because his dreadlocks extended past the collar bone (Redman, 2019). Simply, the administration of both districts refuse to accept

the funds of knowledge presented within the African and African American community, as hair does not place a clear and present danger to the learning environment. The displacement of students from the learning environment to school suspensions are critical in pinpointing how zero tolerance policies contribute to the systemic inequities in public-schools (Martin& Beese, 2017; Martinez, 2010; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). It is a stark representation of how those policies feed the school-to-prison pipeline because of the lack of cultural competency and devaluation of students' funds of knowledge. The school-to-prison pipeline is a social phenomenon that integrates the unfair disciplinary procedures that lead to the mass incarceration of students, specifically African American males (Tucker, 2017). Negative perceptions about students of color, unfortunately, is the barricade that blocks their successful academic outcomes before they can even conceptualize entering.

However, there are programs that actively seek to empower students, despite hegemonic practices in traditional school curriculum and practice. In this case, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools model provides an opportunity to examine how culturally relevant pedagogies serve as a conduit for empowering students. Using the theoretical lens of critical pedagogy (Friere, 1970; Grirox, 2004) and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) levels of citizenship, this study will examine how multicultural literature influences students to become agents of change.

### *Testing as a Conduit for Future Failure*

National and state-level reports have been used as a measure to postulate that students of color are falling behind their White peers (NCES, 2019; NCES, 2019; TEA, 2019). However, many researchers have proven that these reports – which heavily/solely

rely on standardized testing as the measure – do not accurately portray the academic treatment, opportunity, or outcomes for students of color (Darder, 2011; Wasserberg, 2017), thus further supporting the argument that Black and Brown students are more likely to have a disempowered educational experience in school. The era of high-stakes assessment was enacted in public schools through educational reform initiatives in 1994, which required states to implement standardized testing in order to receive Title 1 funding (Education Reform Clinton Digital Library, n.d.). Title 1 funding is grant money allocated by the federal government to schools with a predominant population of low-income students to increase academic standards. This federal funding initiative was implemented in President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965 (National Center for Education Statistics or NCES, 2019; McClure, 2008). The original goal of the fund was to equalize education between low-income students and their peers through federal financial support, but often politics becomes a barrier for change. While it is unclear that the funding was contingent on meeting pre-determined standards of state-specific assessments, testing was in place to track students' academic growth (as demonstrated in NAEP) and accountability of schools (as noted through school report cards made publicly available), while providing data for international comparisons. To add further insult, the designation of a Title I school carries a negative connotation among teachers and administrators which continues the cycle of stereotype threat among students who attend.

Educational testing is a Eurocentric practice that was historically imposed on middle- and upper-class Whites in certain geographic regions in order to stratify European's intellectual abilities (Au, 2016). This practice is now weaponized to stratify

children of color from their White counterparts, and themselves, in today's public schools. Presently, testing has aimed to turn a blind eye and deaf ear when creating the test, but the lack of recognition regarding student diversity demonstrates the inherent bias that continues to pervade public school education. Stories of the "American Dream" are used in most standardized tests, for example, consider the following passages:

To many people, it may seem like a typical summer morning on the beach. There are sounds of seagulls calling and waves crashing against the sand. But there is also an unusual sound—the clicking of marbles as they slam against each other. A small crowd watches a group of young marble players, or "mibsters," play a game of marbles. But marbles are not just for kids. Anyone can play with marbles. (Texas Education Agency or TEA, 2019, p. 9)

In addition, review the following:

Imagine you are walking along the beach. Suddenly you see something shiny in the sand. Your inquiring mind makes you move in for a closer look. It is a glass bottle, and inside is a rolled-up piece of paper. This message in a bottle may have traveled halfway around the world before landing on this beach. (TEA, 2019, p. 18)

Each passage is used to anchor the readers' prior experiences at the beach, but many students in Texas may not have had that experience making the minute details needed to answer the prompts seem irrelevant. In these two examples, geography and access are two possible barriers to developing a connection and understanding of what the text requires from the student. Two passages from the same test use experiences that not all students taking the test will have, creating disparities in how the students will answer questions. The "American Dream" of education implies that students are able to do anything, when, in fact, in states like Texas, that is not the case. Instead, assessments become the gatekeepers of opportunity. In fact, third-grade reading and mathematics scores are used to determine prison beds for future incarceration (Appleseed, 2019). While it has not been explicitly documented that prisons' use testing results are predictors

for future inmates (Hudson, 2012), according to the data, a struggling reader in third grade is 95% more likely to become a high school dropout, and sadly, a high school dropout has a 63% chance of being incarcerated (Sum et al., 2009). With this information, it's hard to argue that while high-stakes assessments were not intended to be measures for future incarceration, the outputs of standardized assessments have led to a billion-dollar industry of commercial profits and political gain (PBS, 2002).

The National Center for Educational Services or the NCES test students, using the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or the NAEP test across the nation to provide data on the educational growth from previous years and creates a norm to reference for worldly comparisons (NCES, 2019). On the reading assessment, students must score at least a 240 to be considered proficient in the fourth grade, and 280 in the eighth grade. Trends are similar in eighth grade as compared to fourth grade. The gap between Black students and their White peers remained the same, while Hispanic students' gap decreased by 3 points (NCES, 2018). Shockingly, Black students in twelfth grade tested lower than White eighth-graders, middle schoolers are more academically ready for college than students about to graduate. The most recent reading score data for students in fourth grade determined a gap of at least 23 points between Black and Brown students and their White peers. This gap has been documented since 1992 (see table 1.1), which means for almost 30-years, there have been notable reading disproportionalities between students that remain stagnant (NCES, 2019). In the time frame that the test has been administered; the gap has remained leading to question the validity of the school system and testing measure, not the intellectual abilities of the students. The similarity of

scores between the students of color is that that is not the underperforming demographic but perhaps the system.

Table 1.1. NAEP

*Average Fourth Grade Reading Scores by Year*

Year	Black Students	Brown Students	White Students
1992	192	197	224
2002	199	201	229
2013	206	207	232
2019	204	209	230

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2019). National student group scores and score gaps: NEAP reading report card.

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/groups?grade=4>

The gap of achievement is not only present between races but prevalent within poverty. The NCES (2018) breaks down the student population into four quarters based on the poverty level, which is determined by the percentage of students enrolled in a Free and Reduced Lunch program (FRLP). The number of students enrolled in the program is often a key marker in determining the school and districts’ eligibility for Title 1 funding, as lunch programs are based on the household income of the student (Food and Nutrition Services, 2020). Low-income students are often criminalized and funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline. Reading scores decrease an average of 11.6 points in each quartile from the lowest percentage of students in FRLP to the highest. Ultimately, reading scores demonstrate a 35-point gap of scores between the lowest quartile of students in poverty and the highest (NCES, 2020), continuing a cycle of poverty, as the students are unable to demonstrate college readiness. As the data reveals, reading disparities are present within race and socioeconomic status.

There are also state-level assessment data points that negatively portray the academic abilities of students of color. Texas is one example. In the Lone Star State, students are required to take the STAAR beginning in grade three, and every year thereafter. Students are required to pass all high school standardized tests in order to receive their high school diploma (Texas Education Agency, or TEA, 2019). Students in the fourth grade are expected to take three State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in reading, writing, and math. STAAR is administered in the spring of the school year to determine the student growth and academic readiness for the upcoming grade, in addition to determining the success of the students, the STAAR is used to measure the schools and districts' academic accountability for students' growth. The testing data is broken down into four levels based on the scores, with the minimum passing score as Approaching Grade Level. If students are unable to meet the minimum requirement of the testing, they are required to retake the test during the summer. In the spring of 2019, 40 percent of Black fourth-graders who took the Reading STAAR did not Meet the standard, as compared to 17 percent of their White peers, and 29 percent of Latinx students who did not meet standards. This finding demonstrates that more than a quarter of students are not on testing on grade level, even at the state level (REF needed here). In eighth grade, the percentage of students who did not meet standards increased for all demographics except for students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islanders. Black students who did not pass (specifically, did not meet standard) were reported at 44 percent, Brown students at 39 percent, and White students at 21 percent (see Table 1.2). Although the majority of the demographics decreased in proficiency, there is still a deficit in reading achievement. The disparities of the gaps between the demographics are similar to NAEP

testing, as shown in table 1.1. The gap in academic performance is a nation-wide problem, but it is not the students, it is the system.

Table 1.2.

*Texas Reading STAAR Students Who Did Not Meet Standard in 2019*

Grade Level	Black Students	Brown Students	White Students
Fourth Grade	40%	29%	17%
Eighth Grade	44%	39%	21%

Texas Education Agency. (2019). State of Texas assessments of academic readiness: Summary report grade 4 reading. [https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Grade%204%20Statewide\\_FinalTX\\_STAAR38\\_Spr19\\_Summary\\_Reports\\_062220190253\\_tagged.pdf](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Grade%204%20Statewide_FinalTX_STAAR38_Spr19_Summary_Reports_062220190253_tagged.pdf). TEA.  
 Texas Education Agency. (2019). State of Texas assessments of academic readiness: Summary report grade 8 reading. [https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/8Statewide\\_FinalTX\\_STAAR58\\_Apr19\\_Summary\\_Reports\\_051120190231\\_tagged\\_Part3.pdf](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/8Statewide_FinalTX_STAAR58_Apr19_Summary_Reports_051120190231_tagged_Part3.pdf). TEA.

At a local level, the racial disparities regarding academic achievement are even more dismal. Reporting for Waco Independent School District 2018 STAAR follows this trend. It should be noted that this particular district is significant because student participants were enrolled in Waco ISD at the time of the study. As a whole, only 58 percent of fourth-graders meet the standard for passing; 17 percent less than the state and 12 percent less than the Central Texas region. Table 1.3 illustrates the racial composition of students in the district who did not meet the standard for STAAR. According to the data, students enrolled in Waco ISD have performed lower than their statewide and national counterparts. High stakes assessments were intended to show that the students are able to compete with their peers across the state. However, instead, it solidified the opportunity and treatment gap that students of color and low-income students face in schools.

Table 1.3.

*Waco ISD Reading STAAR Students Who Did Not Meet Standard in 2019*

Grade Level	Black Students	Brown Students	White Students
Fourth Grade	58%	36%	35%
Eighth Grade	33%	17% <sup>0</sup>	13%

Texas Education Agency. (2019). 2018-2019 Texas academic performance report: Waco ISD. <https://www.wacoisd.org/domain/7112>. TEA.

*Curriculum Hegemony*

Public education is supposedly situated as being an “equalizer” in that all students are presented with the same information and expectations of meeting standards, but in reality, that is not the case. They are subjected to mis- and dis- education by teachers, curriculum, and education practices that make them question their existence and worth (Brown, 2013; Kozol, 2005; DuBois, 1899; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Woodson, 1933). Pre-service teachers believe that “watered down information... protects [the students] from historical truths,” when in actuality, the fear of challenging the classroom dynamic and administrative backlash fuels student learning (Hubbard & Swain, 2017). The “Banking Model” of information continues oppressive practices in schooling (Freire, 1970). By allowing the educator to deposit information into the students’ minds without allowing the room to critically analyze what they are learning reinforces the extent of knowledge suppression within the school. It restricts the opportunity for the student to question the status quo and for teachers to enact change to eliminate it.

Schools implement a curriculum centered in a Eurocentric mindset; that is, the system of education accepts the social and cultural norms that dominate the White middle class (Banks, 2016; Dancy, 2014; Wiggan et al., 2014). Students who do not fall within

the spectrum of norms are placed at a deficit. As previously stated, education is presented as an equalizing opportunity for all. However, in reality, schools are capping students because they do not have the dominant group knowledge required to be placed on equal footing as their peers. It is safe to assert that in the case of schools that house a predominant population of Black and Brown students from low-income communities, the pedagogy and practices of schooling do not reflect the culture of its students. As Posner (2004) notes, a curriculum cannot be politically unbiased and neutral. When the content of what all students are supposed to learn and eventually become tested on are set to match a specific type of student, the rest of the class is expected to make great gains or will, unfortunately, fall behind. If the curriculum taught is unable to be neutral in any mindset, the testing that is aligned to the curriculum cannot be neutral. There is potential for curriculum violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2009); students could be harmed due to the restrictiveness of the curriculum. The pressure of the curriculum weighs down on the students and places them into a box where outside thinking is looked down on because it will not be on the standardized test. As earlier mentioned, the banking concept of education is heavily and consistently reinforced. To add, the curriculum is fueled by the teachers, so when teacher perceptions mimic the ideology of a colorblind stance, students face a double-sided mirror of oppression.

### *Disempowerment of Students*

Over-saturated police presence within low-SES neighborhoods, schools, and restrictive policies lead the push into mass incarceration based on false pretenses of potential violence. Zero-Tolerance policies allow for minimal infractions to be punishable through expulsions, referrals, in-school suspensions, and on-campus arrests.

Originally, the policy served as a cover for a loophole found within the Guns-Free Zone Act of 1990 (Dickerson, 1990). In the thirty years since, the policies spanned from possessions of the illegal substances (including weapons) to the dress codes infractions, tardiness, and disrespectful behavior (Dancy, 2014). The expansion of the policies placed a microscopic focus on low-income groups. The consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline directly impact the educational experience and achievement outcomes of students. Students who have faced school expulsion are behind their peers, and face an uphill battle to regain academic information missed from the removal of school. The academic loss students face from school removal exasperate the disparities of academic success and increase the likelihood of dropping out.

Disempowerment is a daily occurrence for students of color in public education. They face insurmountable odds of overcoming the ideologies, cultural bias, and racism while trying to learn. They are academically behind their White peers (Texas Education Agency, 2019; National Center for Education, 2018), and will continue to fall behind as they progress through school due to the oppressive policies that make them targets for the school to prison pipeline (Carter et al., 2014; Texas Appleseed, 2019). Mallet (2016) remarks that “society is not judged by the success of its most prominent or able-bodied but by how it treats its most disadvantaged” (p. 580). Looking at the state of public education for students of color, society has failed them.

Students of color are assumed to be the greatest threat and are placed under a rules-based regime in public education. Studies have shown that they face higher expulsion and disciplinary rates in comparison to their White peers (Appleseed, 2019; Barnes et al., 2018), based on the negative perception that African American males are

prone to violence and need to be restricted in dehumanizing policies (Desai & Abeita, 2017). It is also critical to point out that identity groups (race, gender, and social class) cannot predict their behavior (Banks, 2016).

### *High-Stakes Testing*

The evolution of high-stakes testing stemmed from the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB, 2008). Formerly, standardized assessments were not a mandated practice for K-12 public schools. Under this federal legislation, there are consequences for schools who fail to make adequate yearly progress (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). *No Child Left Behind* (2001) was a federal law signed into place that mandated states to track student growth and hold schools accountable for the learning. This was signed into place with the mindset of addressing the perceived gaps of performance on standardized testing. Although states did not have to comply, Title 1 funding was contingent on the participation in standardized testing.

According to a study conducted by Klein, Zevenbergen, and Brown (2006) that examined how the increased emphasis on testing affected classroom instruction, findings revealed that one hundred percent of the teachers use some form of test prep in their teaching, and 71 percent admit to teaching directly to the test. Exposure to testing is not an uncommon occurrence within the classroom, but there was only a four percent reporting of authentic teaching during the study (Klein et al., 2006). If students are subjected to test prep pedagogy, then there is a misalignment of knowledge being taught. When students of color are performing lower than their White peers, the testing scores prove that the test prep style teaching is not effective (NAEP, 2019; TEA, 2019; TEA, 2018).

Teaching to the test is the caveat for job security across the country. In 2015, there were only five states that not use student growth (as documented by standardized testing) as a part of teacher evaluation. Sixteen of the remaining states used performance as a baseline for compensation (West & Odum, 2015). With performance-based pay connected to high-stakes assessment, students taking the tests hold the economic future of the classroom teacher. Teachers cannot control the independent variables within classroom, but they can control pedagogical practices, so when their job hangs in the balance based on scores, that is how they will teach.

Students that fall victim to test prep curriculum are typically students of color (Li & Xiong, 2018,). Many of the states use the tests to determine grade promotion or retention, and students who face grade retention is the strongest indicator of dropping-out (Sadker & Zittleman, 2004; Jimerson et al., 2002). Janesick (2010) asserts that testing is limiting intellectual knowledge within schools, as testing drives curriculum, everything else is omitted and students that pass are simply good test takers, or memorize facts. Cunningham (2019) also argues that standardized tests eradicate the epistemologies of non-dominate groups to perpetuate marginalization of those groups. In short, standardized testing is pushing out students, and leaving them behind.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Students of color from low-income communities are set up to fail in public education. Standardized testing shows a perceived gap of learning, insinuating that they are unable to perform at the same level as their White peers, while the curriculum does not affirm the knowledge that students' posse, instead academic success supports their White peers. The cycle of oppression continues until the oppressed recognize they are

oppressed, and that will not happen until there is a change within the educational system (Freire, 1970). As such, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the influences of multicultural literature provides a baseline for students to be advocates of social justice.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does the use of multicultural literature influence students to become agents of change?
  - 1a. In what ways do scholars demonstrate aspects of social justice and citizenship, as developed through participation in the Freedom Schools program”

By answering the research questions, this study will inform future teaching practices in efforts to create an equitable learning environment for minoritized students.

### *Significance of the Study*

The results of this study have the possibility to become foundational in changing curriculum and teaching in public education, with data to support the importance in using multicultural literature within the classroom. This study will inform the field of urban education, particularly on the impact of providing students of color with a critical multicultural perspective that will further encourage social action.

### *List of Definitions*

In the study, these terms are used frequently. As such, terms and definitions have been provided for a complete understanding of the research study.

*Agent(s) of Change* - Someone who participates or acts in a way that contributes to becoming a more socially just society through the demonstration of characteristics that promote activism and advocacy.

*Critical Pedagogy* – Teaching practices that address praxis in the evolving state of education. Teaching practices are neither neutral or unbiased, as there is an underlying motive behind what is being taught and the ways it is being taught.

*Funds of Knowledge* – The historical and present knowledge and skills learned and/or present within the culture present within a community.

*Minority* – Typically, students of color and low-SES students in education.

*Multicultural Literature* – Books that represent marginalized groups and cultures, through accurate portrayals in illustrations and plot.

*Social Justice Oriented Citizen* – Someone who is directed in addressing the social injustices within their environment, and the world by identifying the underlying cause of issues present within society. This person works to address these issues as a way to overcome problems that stem from the root cause.

*Students of Color* - African American and Hispanic students.

### *Summary*

African American and Hispanic youth from low-income neighborhoods are placed in an academic deficit that defines their educational career. Standardized testing scores reflect massive gaps in reading between students of color and their peers. In low-income areas, such as Waco ISD, district-wide scores are significantly lower when compared to the state level and national trends. In addition to low testing proficiency, students face disempowering experiences within their schooling experience including curriculum violence, zero-tolerance policies that directly target students of color, and the school-to-prison pipeline. In the face of these demeaning realities, multicultural literature provides reflection of the students and their situation; these books also have the

potential to empower readers and encourage justice-oriented action. This study helps students to fight for their right to a quality education through the utilization of multicultural literature. In the next chapter, literature highlights the realities of testing on students, how multicultural texts proves beneficial in the classroom, and examines the CDF Freedom School model. In addition, the literature will review multicultural texts and citizenship based education programs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

This review of the literature highlights fallouts that follow mandated testing and ultimately oppose educational practices foundational to empowering students. The literature also examines the pedagogical implementation of civic education and culturally relevant teaching through a discussion on curricular models. Following, the CDF Freedom School program is highlighted as a model that culminates social action and culturally relevant pedagogical practices in order to empower students.

#### *Citizenship and Empowerment within Curriculum*

Curriculum is the capstone of public education. It sets the foundational layout of standards, testing, and knowledge. It holds the standard to what students should know in an effort to be a functioning member of society. Democracy will dissipate if there are not active citizens that fully participate in the requirements to their highest potential. This skill must be taught to young people (Fleming, 2011). Levine (2009) highlights a "civic opportunity gap" of the youth across America (p. 20). In the 2008 election, one in four young adults with some higher education voted, while one out of fourteen of their peers with no college experience voted (Kirby, Marcelo, Gillerman, & Linkins, 2008, as cited by Levine, 2009). The lack of young voters brings to question if students are learning how to fulfill their civic duty as citizens at the K-12 levels and if they are being empowered to fulfill those duties. With greater student diversity in today's schools, educational practices have started to shift towards liberation and critical pedagogical

practices (Freire, 1970), with the inclusion of a civics based curriculum. A deep understanding of how democracy works within society is a crucial component in educational praxis (Freire, 1970) that paves the way for culturally relevant teaching within public education.

Quinn and Bauml (2018) investigated the impact of a week-long summer civics camp that promoted active citizenship and movement towards the social justice-oriented citizenship framework, as developed by Westheimer and Khane (2004). Findings revealed positive movement towards being social justice-oriented, students need authentic and purposeful experiences to foster a social justice-oriented mindset, "as well as opportunities for students to participate in authentic civic activities" (Quinn & Bauml, 2018, p. 198). Simultaneously, the same camp was held at another university where researchers conducted a two-year-long study to track the growth of the students, with the intension of varied demographics of participants in an effort to combat the civic opportunity gap (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016). Implications from both studies show that in a minimal timeframe, students can find value in superficial experiences that are perpetuated through videogames. However, it is worth noting that neither study worked towards closing the civic opportunity gap of marginalized students (Quinn & Bauml, 2018; Blevins et al., 2016). The civic opportunity gap is prevalent among marginalized students and inhibits society into being a fully transformed democracy.

Other civics based projects have also worked to promote efficacy among students, such as Project Citizen (Center for Civic Education, n.d.). The program is a commonly accepted curriculum in many states across the country, but in the following study, it was used as an after-school program. Morgan (2016) investigated how Project Citizen

impacted middle school students' civic literacy and efficacy, as an overall effect on the students, and which component of the program resulted in the highest contribution to development. The findings reported that students demonstrated growth in civic literacy and efficacy. The project's component had notable findings in student's efficacy about gathering information related to the civics (Morgan, 2016). Programs that promote civic engagement showed positive-growth towards students becoming fully developed justice-oriented citizens. (Quinn & Bauml, 2018; Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016; Morgan, 2016), which will develop into an active democracy.

### *Multicultural Literature*

One description of multicultural literature was understood as texts “by and about people of color” (p.xiii, Yokoto, 2001). Books centered around related issues that marginalized groups face (Yokoto, 2001). For example, children’s books based on promoting the positivity of African American hair or holidays unique to specific cultures. It has been often cited that there is an absence of literature that represents marginalized groups in the literary canons. (Multicultural Children’s Literature, 2011). That seems to be accurate within present-day literature, as it only makes up about 29% of recently published children’s books (CCBC, 2019). Multicultural literature allows for an in-depth perspective and analysis of the characters, along with their experiences. Temple et al. (1998) classified texts by the cultural impact: neutral, generic, and specific. The spectrum in the classification is gradual from the textual representation of minuet characters to accurate representation of cultural relevance to the plot.

Similarly, Bishop (1997) observed that literature falls into a scheme based on the text and illustrations. The depiction of the culture within the text is accurate and relevant

to the representation of the culture. These ideas represent the theme that multicultural literature is a vast concept, but the purpose is to articulate an experience that will resonate with the reader. This study is centered on the use of multicultural literature, so it is important to clarify the characteristics of multicultural texts in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings (2006) emphasizes that learning will increase if the students find it meaningful, so if students find books meaningful, they will read. In relation to the classification of multicultural texts, students of color will not automatically gravitate toward texts that have a character that has similar physical features (Temple et al., 1998). Scieurba (2014), examines how students of color construct personal meaning from books, and how the assumption of reflective literature needs to be reevaluated in what reflects personal relevance through qualitative interviews and interactions during a three-year study. The results determined that literature can be seen in the light of a “mirror,” or “window” (Scieurba, 2014), meaning that the students construct relevance through the reflectiveness of the story, like looking in a mirror, or the story can contract personal meaning that applies to their lifelike looking through glass.

Similarly, Verden and Hickman (2009) researched the implications of using experientially relevant literature on adolescents that have been diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders. Many of the disorders stemmed from trauma-related experiences as later revealed. Throughout the course of the study, the participants became more aware and self-reflective of their situations in relation to the books they read, showing an overall improvement in behavior regulation and a critical understanding of their personal lives. Providing literary texts that students are willing to read can lessen the learning gap, although it is naïve to assume youth will gravitate to mirrored texts.

Concluding that students are drawn to text that is reflective of them, in appearance and experience (Scrubia, 2014; Verden & Hickman, 2009; Hamilton, 2005;)

The multicultural literature in the classroom is scarce due to the depletion of funds throughout public education, and the meager amount of texts published every year. Alongside the teacher choice of texts present in the classroom, and the emphasis on non-fiction literature to use as test prep. Classrooms reflect the fast-growing diversity of the world, but the reflecting literature has remained stagnate within that trend (CCBC, 2019). In response to the lack of culturally reflective literature, different programs and community groups have come together to provide multicultural literature to the students within the area of the studies. Rosado, Amaro-Jiménez, & Kieffer (2015) developed a program where parents published stories for the community about their culture and traditions. The majority of participants self-identified as Hispanic and shared that there are specific cultures within an ethnicity that are severely unrepresented. The lack of multicultural literature is a major issue, but it is not more complex when considering the lack of representation in subcultures within a particular community. Similarly, Zygmunt et al. (2015) hosted an event where community members selected children's books to distribute, selecting texts that were reflective of the community itself. Both studies revealed that access to literature had been proven to enhance the quality of life and educational progress (Formbly, 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2015; Rosado et al., 2015). The limited access to multicultural literature aids the systemic inequities within the schooling experience. Instead of promoting culturally responsive teaching through the implementation of multicultural literature, the students are subjected to assimilations of the dominant culture (Piper, 2019).

Multicultural literature helps to alleviate the opportunity and treatment gap that marginalized students face within the public-school system. Identifying the components of what it means to be classified as a multicultural text sets the mark for understanding why it only makes up less than a third of the published texts (CCBC, 2019). Research has found that students are more likely to read if they find it enjoyable (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As discussed, providing texts that hold connectable content is a conduit for an impactful learning experience (Sciurba, 2014; Zygmunt et al., 2015; Verden & Hickman, 2009).

### *Curbing Summer Learning Regression Through CDF Freedom Schools*

Summer learning slide is an epidemic that plagues the urban areas and low-income students (McCombs et al., 2014; Alexander et al., 2007). Students will lose on an average of 20 percent of their reading gains from the school year, during the summer (Kuhfeld, 2019; Thum, & Hauser, 2015). Summer learning loss is prevalent within low-income students as they do not have access to educational resources and programming over the summer months, alike to shutting off a faucet of learning, Borman et al., 2005; Entwisle et al., 2000) The learning loss sets back students who are already chronically behind and in turn widens the achievement gap.

Under-performing schools are the most susceptible to skill-drill-kill teaching practices, as they are faced with limited resources and underprepared staff that students are unable to academically keep up with their peers (Jackson & Howard, 2014; Kozol, 2005). In an effort to minimize the regression of academic learning, summer programs have developed as a way to help students retain information and hopefully gain knowledge during those months.

The regression of knowledge during the summer has the students underprepared for the following academic year. Students lose a fifth of learned content during the summer (Kuhfeld, 2019; Thum, & Hauser, 2015). The research has found that students who were enrolled in the summer program outperformed their peers during the beginning of the school, post-summer school, but the achievement advantage is not sustainable throughout the school year (Zvoch, 2019). Another study concluded that through a review of pre- and post-test data, and interviews, students did not make any significant academic improvement but had an increased interest in literacy (Gao et al., 2016). If students are more interested in academic-based activities, their knowledge base will increase as their exposure to literature increases.

Summer programs demonstrate that while there is potential for growth, most outcomes demonstrate sustained knowledge (Bowers & Schwarz, 2018). As long as student data remained stagnant, the students did not encounter learning loss during the summer months, thus preventing the summer slide, developing the idea that summer programs have the potential to foster the environment to foster a desire to learn of the students (Gao et al., 2016). Freedom School is a 30-day program that provides literacy and critical pedagogy to students who are at high risk of experiencing a mis-education within the public school system. They are exposed to an in-depth Civil Rights curriculum that is withheld during the school year, and they find heroes within the books they read that highlight how one can become an agent of change.

Freedom School is a six to eight-week long summer literacy program developed under the Children's Defense Fund. This program is derived from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer developed through the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Although 56 years have passed since the original summer, many of the components of the program has stayed. Providing learning opportunities that have cultural relevance to the scholars not changed much from the original curriculum (Children's Defense Fund, 2019; Cobb, 1991). Today, the program focuses on literacy and enforces this through the daily Integrated Reading Curriculum, where the students read multicultural texts and complete activities that focus their reflection of the text. The texts that are chosen help reinforce another critical learning component from the original Freedom School: social action. Charles Cobb, the mind behind Freedom Schools, was adamant that youth would elicit change in the structure of power within the democracy (Jackson & Howard, 2014). Freedom School creates an overall positive impact on the students in the program. The program reinforces a critical pedagogy in contrast to today's' learning, as seen in *No Child Left Behind* (Watson, 2014). The program provides opportunities for students to receive culturally responsive teaching, a stark contrast to what they receive in public schooling (Jackson & Howard, 2014). The implementation of using culturally responsive teaching stems from Gay's (2000) notion that when teaching a diverse population, implementing characteristics from their culture will effectively resonate with students.

Research over the make-up of the Freedom Schools program is limited. Although Watson (2014), gives insight into the transformation from the original Freedom School to the present-day program. This highlights the notion that Ella Baker, who developed the model in 1964, mirrors ideologies with Freire (1970) about centering learning through discovery and social movement, eradicating the Banking Model (Watson, 2014). This is also a direct correlation, of why the children are called scholars, as they are identified

within the same intellectual plane as their teacher, dismantling the hierarchy between students and teachers in the formal school setting.

The social advocacy movements are seen through the social action and National Day of Social Action components of the program, where the scholars are immersed in advocacy covering topics such as voting, childhood hunger, and gun violence (CDF, 2011). Social action is tied directly to the community in which the site located, so it is critical that scholars see the community leaders and members, which happens in the first activity of the day: Harambee. Harambee is a Swahili term that means "all pull together." During this time, the scholars engage in motivational songs, cheers, chants, and a read-aloud from a member of the community. From there, they transition to the classes where they begin the Integrated Reading Curriculum (Children's Defense Fund, 2011; Watson, 2014). The ideologies and framework of Freedom School are drastically different from the normalized public education. Watson (2014) notes

This refusal of traditional schooling methods and the implementation of action-based instruction are drastically unconventional when looking at today's K-12 schools. In order to meet the diversifying needs of the nation and the world, students must first think critically about education's role in the world and in their personal lives. Only when this critical conversation occurs will the awareness of a globalized citizenry and interconnectedness be reached. (p. 181)

The ideologies of Freire (1970) have found a present-day place for 21st-century students to find praxis in education.

### *Summary*

Recent literature has shown that marginalized youth are placed in restrictive educational experiences. They fall victim to the hidden curriculum (Posner, 2003; Gabbard & Flint, 2013), biased policies, and oppressive learning environments (Kozol,

2005). In many instances, they are a deficit score instead of a tiny human trying to learn. In a country that promotes “leaving no child behind,” we are leaving a whole group of people behind, to promote a political agenda that promotes a systemic cycle of inequity. The impact of testing weighs heavily on every person associated with a public school, and it is most felt on the students and teachers. To combat inequitable systems, the implementation of pedagogical practices pertaining to multicultural literature and social advocacy, as seen through the CDF Freedom Schools program, is a way to reshape learning in a growing diversified society. This information helps cultivate the study of how students become agents of change through exposure to multicultural literature during the Freedom School program.

The review of literature addressed the implications of high-stakes testing and the substantial effects on the curriculum that is addressed. Through the Freedom School program, it has been addressed that it is a 30-day program grounded in literacy enrichment and social action. The literary texts students are exposed to are categorized as multicultural literature, that encourage culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Also, civic curriculum and programs were addressed to highlight the differences in programs for students to develop into a justice-oriented citizen fully. The research design will be detailed in the following chapter, along with the process of analyzing the results. In an effort to answer the research question through the lens of critical pedagogy and levels of citizenship (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This study aims to examine how reading multicultural literature influences civic action amongst adolescents. Throughout the six-week-long summer program, students were exposed to a variety of multicultural texts and participated in social action projects. The books chosen for the program provided exposure to diverse characters, historical relevancy, and themes of social justice. The study implements a qualitative framework harnessed in a phenomenological case study, using semi-structured interviews as the means of data collection. This chapter will outline the research design, data collection, participants, and the framework for analysis.

#### *Research Design*

In order to accurately answer the posed question, this research will employ a qualitative research framework. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of qualifications” (p.17). Qualitative research strives to seek an understanding of phenomena in its naturalistic setting (Hoepfl, 1997). Stemming from a “human-research approach” (Given, 2015), this study will look at the impact literature has on adolescents to enact a change within their society, or as stated above, it is a natural setting (Hoepfl, 1997). Measuring personal impact or gain is best done from the perspective of the subjects. The subjectivity of information cannot be confined within the bounds of a spectrum but from a holistic viewpoint.

A qualitative research framework's purpose is to evaluate human behavior and the compelling decisions behind it. Sutton and Austin (2015) resolved that qualitative research is to determine the reasoning behind human interactions. Understanding the comprehensive narrative of the perspective in its natural state creates the data compilation from the participants in this study. This is the ideal framework for the study, due to the innate nature of how literature can impact a developing mind. It is impossible to quantify self-efficacy, and measuring personal impact or gain is best done from the perspective of the subjects. The subjectivity of information cannot be confined within the bounds of a spectrum but from a holistic viewpoint. Therefore, it is impossible to define this growth by a statistical measure as one cannot quantify the value of knowledge.

This study will utilize a case study approach. A case study's purpose is to investigate within a unit of subjects (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Using a "bounded entity" (Yin, 2012, p. 145) of a single factor to determine the commonality of the subjects. The bounds of which the study will revolve is the participation of students in a summer literacy program (Baylor Freedom Schools). Due to the innate nature of Freedom School, this study must utilize a case study method due to understanding the underlying impact on students. This case is harnessed in a phenomenological framework. It is an approach to qualitative research design that focuses on a lived experience (Manen, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The phenomena that will be highlighted in this study is adolescent participation in the Baylor Freedom Schools for a minimum of two consecutive years as a scholar.

### *Positionality Statement*

I am a White, monolingual female getting ready to enter the education field. My narrative matches the national population demographic of teachers in public schools. I sought out to do this type of research to find a way to bridge CDF Freedom School into the formalized classroom. The program is reliant is built on a platform of reading, so the educational component could be transitioned into the classroom.

In my first year of Freedom School, I was a Student Leader Intern, or classroom teacher, for a middle school site. I worked with a diverse population of students who would remark that the books they read were better than the books in school, or that during the school year they were constantly pulled from class for behavior issues. Students who have the markers to be high school dropouts were actively engaged in reading and social justice, a large contradiction to the public schools' expectation of them. In my second year, I was the Site Testing Manager and Assistant Project Director. While administering the literacy tests to the students in the program, I discovered that it was biased and it was not reflective of the program. While it does track the reading level progress of the students, it did not offer a component to hear their voices about the program. Experiences in formal and informal schooling, lead to the development of this research.

In receiving formal education through teacher preparation institution, and also having experiences with the program of study, I feel that these experiences will help me to understanding the participants and their responses to question. I am more knowledgeable about the nature of the program, that this components helps me to better understand functions that contributed students' development of becoming agents of

change. On a personal note, this study helps me to prepare for my future classroom on the importance of implementing multicultural literature and social justice.

### *Research Question*

The study seeks to examine how students' exposure to multicultural literature influenced them to become agents of change. The study aims to answer the following question:

RQ1: How does the use of multicultural texts influence students' perspectives about learning?

RQ1a: In what ways do scholars demonstrate aspects of social justice and citizenship, as developed through participation in the Freedom Schools program?

### *Theoretical Framework*

#### *Critical Pedagogy*

Giroux (2004) proposes that Critical Pedagogy is a “form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation” (p. 34)” That when pedagogy and resistance demonstrate how learning is always situated in the relation of who holds power, and the understanding of the relationship is critical in the expansion of democracy. Giroux (2004) supports that:

Central to such a challenge is providing students with the skills, knowledge, and authority they need to inquire and act upon what it means to live in a substantive democracy, to recognize the anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial, and gendered inequalities. (p. 35)

Critical Pedagogy needs to be situated in a mindset of problematizing within itself, but also in a larger frame to contest the situated domination that perpetuates social injustices. This allows students to think critically about the power structures that remain dominant as they move towards a liberated democracy. It teaches students to challenge the systemic inequity placed upon marginalized groups, questioning the authority of what is being taught in the perspective of hegemony.

Education is a factory-made to produce –isms and intolerance (Gains 1999, as cited in Giroux, 2004). Freire (1970) highlights that goal of critical pedagogy is the liberation of the oppressed from the oppressor, but to fully complete this process, the oppressed need to be ‘critically conscious’ of the oppression by the oppressor. Freire’s (1970) theory highlights the power structure between teachers and students, in an effort to exemplify the socialized structures of who holds the dominant power in education. Ira Shor et al. (2017) places critical pedagogy in the light equality in the present day, as he discusses that “democracy demands equality,” (p. 3) as liberation is unfilled without it. He highlights to place “social justice as an orientation towards democracy, equality, ecology, and peace” (p. 16). A fulfilled democracy cannot be complete without acknowledged the power struggles within the educational framework, as it supported through the dominant regime.

Theorists have challenged that critical pedagogy cannot be done only within the schooling environment (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2004), but it outside to combat injustice within the democracy of the world. Students who are placed in marginalized groups are stereotyped to be the cause of the achievement gap when, in reality, it is the complacent and greed of society. Students are not seen as a “social investment” (Giroux, 2004, p. 45),

but instead way to push the dominant perspectives. Critical pedagogy works to redefine the power to reclaim a truly equal democratic system.

The theory of critical pedagogy stems from the work of Freire (1970) and Giroux (2004) as a way to implement social transformation within the fundamentals of education. Recent events surrounding the death of George Floyd, a man who was murdered on film while being taken into police custody, highlight the importance and necessity of critical pedagogy (Ebrahimji, 2020; Graves, 2020). The *Black Lives Matter* movement is tied to raising awareness about systemic inequities that exist in our society. Critical pedagogy provides an educational lens for students to understand the world around them, specifically, giving them tools to analyze issues that may directly impact them. Freedom School's curriculum ideals are aligned with critical pedagogy (Watson, 2014). Addressing the shift of perspective of education and social justice through multicultural literature can provide the scope in which the participants recognize the praxis and advocacy (Freire, 1970).

### *Levels of Citizenship*

Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) classify their levels of citizenship into three distinct categories *personally responsible citizen*, *participatory citizen*, and *justice-oriented citizen* through the development in educational programs. It is important to note that all three levels are "good citizens," but are distinct in their own ways. As an effort to classify the best citizen archetype for advancement of the democracy, but "no single formulation will triumph (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 238)." The three modes of citizenships are three educator responses to the determining of what type of citizen is

needed for an effective democratic system. It is critical to define each component as it relates to society, and its response in solving social problems.

*A Personally Responsible Citizen* is the epitome of responsible, emphasizing on the importance of a single entities character, and “to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community (p. 240).” Simply, it is a person that follow the status quo. *A Participatory citizen* is active throughout the community and its functions. In this perspective, citizens must participate and lead within the established society. Both perspectives find room the educational system today, for students to flourish and develop to the fullest extent. It can be argued that these perspectives are supported by political agencies as they are encouraged through mandated curriculum, such as the social studies TEKS.

The outlier and least common perspective within the framework is the *Justice-Oriented Citizen*. Arguing that they need to analyze and understand the forces that intersect within the democracy. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) clarify the lens of a *Justice-Oriented citizen*:

Its focus on responding to social problems and to structural critique make it somewhat different, however. Building on perspectives like those of Freire and Shor noted earlier, educational programs that emphasize social change seek to prepare students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. These programs are less likely to emphasize the need for charity and volunteerism as ends in themselves and more likely to teach about social movements and how to effect systemic change (p. 242).

This citizen address the root of injustices within society, and have the capabilities to voice their opinions while weighing other ideals alongside their own. This perspective is concentered in social justice, it shares similarities with the *Participatory citizen*, as “civic

participation (has) been historically used to pursue social justice (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 245). The democratic society would never evolve without all three types of citizens.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) note the significance of their framework due to conflicting ideals of which type of citizen is best for the greater development of the democracy, as “conceptions of “good citizenship” imply conceptions of the good society (p. 238).” The overlap of *Justice-Oriented* citizen and critical pedagogy, highlights the need for students to have the opportunity to learn how to become socially justice. Freedom School implements a critical pedagogy curriculum that support the development of *Justice-Oriented* citizens.

#### *Data Collection*

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview protocol between the researcher and participants. Semi-structured interview protocol utilizes a set of guiding topics and/or questions that allow for the participants to recall information in a less-rigid format (Blee & Taylor, 2002). It allows for the participants to recall in a personalization of information, unlike the implementation of a structured interview. Semi-Structured interviews allows for the researcher to use probing questions to activate the participants’ prior knowledge relevant to the study. All interviews will be one-on-one, so the participants are not influenced by their peers’ responses.

All participants in the study were minors. The researcher required parental consent for their child to participate in the interview. Research has questioned that validity of minor’s or adolescents’ participation in research and if they are reliable data

sources (Skelton, 2008). As this study is qualitative phonological case-study that is directly reliant on their personal experiences and viewpoints.

### *Participants*

#### *Criteria*

To be considered to participant in the study, students had to attend Baylor Freedom Schools for a minimum of two consecutive summers. All the participants had to fully attend the program from the beginning to end. Students that did not meet these criteria were ineligible to participate. Students who were considered eligible to participate had to have parental consent to participate in the study. Participation or lack of, does not reflect any impact on students' eligibility to participate in future Baylor Freedom School programs.

#### *Procedures*

All participants were interviewed one-on-one with the researcher. Each interview lasted an hour in length and was recorded on a device. The participants completed one interview. Once the responses were transcribed, the participants were asked to do a member check to determine the validity of the transcriptions (Birt et al., 2016). The recordings were kept on a secure device that only the researcher had access. The interview began with questions relevant to the student, and their current school experiences. Then the researcher asked questions relevant to the research question. Questions were outlined for the researcher to use.

## *Participants*

The participate data pool is represented of 80% of the participants being male, all participants are students of color, with 60% African American and 20% Latinx. All of the participants attend Waco ISD schools and live within the Waco community. The participants attended the program for at least two consecutive years.

Participant one, Gabby (Pseudonym) is a Latina female. She has participated in the program for three year consecutive years. She is a 14-year-old, freshman in high school who excels in her academics and is a member of the cheerleading team. She has attended the Freedom School program since the first year, and has been an outstanding student throughout the program.

Participant two, Alex (Pseudonym) is a Latino male. He has participated in the program for three consecutive years. He is a 14-year-old freshman in high school. He has remarked on the lack of interest in school, and finds himself in trouble often. He is a member of the marching band at his school, and he excels in STEM related classes. He has participated in the program since the beginning, and he has demonstrated considerable growth being interested in reading.

Participant 3, Devon (pseudonym) is an African American male. He is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader and is 12-years old. He is excelling in sports, specifically football, and he has thrived in the program.

Participant four, Dylan (pseudonym) is an African American male. He is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader and 13-years old. He is quiet and enjoys writing songs. He has participated in the program for the past two years.

Participant five, Jack (pseudonym) is an African American male. He is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader and 12 years-old. Jack has exceptional skills in reading and he thrived in the program. He has participated in the program the past two years.

### *Analysis*

Transcribed interviews will be coded and themed using an open coding process. Coding allows for the researcher to extend past the empirical content of the data to analyze it at a phonological level (Bryant & Charmza, 2007). Codes were condensed and organized into categories –these categories will formed overarching themes for the study. To ensure validity of the research process, triangulation of the data, peer debriefing, and audit trails were completed. All data was organized in prevalent and reoccurring themes as seen through the interviews.

The process of coding the data begun with the development of the codes to be analyzed. Once the codes were created, they were then categorized by reoccurring codes. The categories were developed by the overlap of the codes. They were then reclassified into small themes, and then into overarching themes that answered the research questions. The overarching themes were revealed by through a deep analysis of the participant responses, leading to the research questions being answered.

### *Summary*

Using a qualitative research design, the study will investigate the student perspectives of multicultural literature on their development to become agents of change. Adolescent interviews provide reliable data in the context of educational research, as they recall personable experiences that contribute to the development of multicultural

literature. All data will be analyzed using an open coding process and results in the following sections. In the concluding chapter, the results of the data will be discussed, and implications for future research will be addressed. In addition, future practices for equitable teaching practices will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

This study aims to examine the impact of students' exposure to multicultural texts with regards to become agents of change. Five participants were interviewed to discuss their perspectives and experiences from attending the Baylor Freedom School program. All participants were required to have attended to the program for at least two consecutive years, and as such they have ample experiences with a variety of multicultural literatures and opportunities to participate in socially just oriented activities. The goal of this research to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: How does the use of multicultural literature influence students' perspectives about learning?

RQ 1a: In what ways do scholars demonstrate aspects of social justice and citizenship, as developed through participation in the Freedom Schools program?

Research question one asked *How does the use of multicultural texts influence students' perspectives about learning?* In response, the following themes were revealed: (1) "you can stand up to things you don't think you could stand up to", and (2) motivated by books about impossible situations. In the first theme, students shared that they were intrigued, enjoyed reading, and felt they could defy the odds. In the second theme, students shared that they were motivated by *Forged by Fire* and *Give a Boy a Gun*. In the final theme, students felt they were agents of change, difference makers, justice-oriented citizens, justice-oriented, and could enact community change. The following sections detail the findings for research question one.

*You Can Stand Up To Things You Don't Think You Could Stand Up To*

Students highlighted how they felt empowered in the learning environment. The participants were asked *“How did the books have an impact on you?”* Many shared a commonality of *Defying the Odds*. The characters and events in the various texts they read were representative of overcoming the odds of the situation they were in. Gabby shared *people you never thought or expected to stand for something*, they defied societal expectations *and proved people wrong*. Another mentioned *it's like you can stand up to things you didn't think you could stand up too* (Dylan).

The participants are repeated attendees of the program, and they shared how it sparked interest in the learning environment. When asked, *“why did you attend the Freedom School program?”* the majority of the participants shared that they were *Intrigued* by the program. The participants had already shared their expectations about the program, and that it peaked their interest to willingly spend their summer in an informal schooling environments. Devon shared that they wanted *to see what it was about* and *so they wouldn't be bored in the summer*. Others shared that *it was something new* (Jack) and they *wanted to go* (Alex). *Intrigued* by the program was present in the majority of the responses from the participants.

*Students were asked about their likeability for the books read during the program.* All of the participants shared that they *Enjoyed Reading* the books from the program. Jack shared that they *found them* (the books) *more interesting than the books we read at school*. Various participants shared that the books they read *were good* (Jack), and they *were interesting* (Alex). One participant in particular highlighted how the books *told me about how the world was*, (Alex) in relation to the fight for historical freedoms that were

common themes presented within the books they read. Another shared that they *had so many favorites* of the books they read during the program (Gabby). *Enjoyed Reading* were present in all of the responses from the participants.

#### *Motivated by Books about Impossible Situations*

In the second theme, the participants discussed the impact the texts had on them. After asking the participants about their experiences with the program curriculum, they were asked if they had a favorite book. *Give a Boy a Gun* and *Forged by Fire* were prevalent responses from the participants about their favorite books. It is important to note that some of the participants were unable to identify single favorite books, so all of the participants mentioned *Give a Boy a Gun* and the majority mentioned *Forged by Fire*. Alex found realistic meaning behind *Give a Boy a Gun*.

Cause it's about what schools are going to right now. School shootings stuff cuz kids get bullied.... Cause a lot of schools are getting shot at and stuff. Our school was threatened of getting our school shot at Wednesday night. And that's what the book was about. They were going to a dance or something, and all the football players were messing with the people, were messing with this boy and he started drinking and doing drugs and stuff. Then he got so fed up with it and everything. At the Valentine's school dance he was shooting people and everything. There was bombs at the school. He wanted to kill everybody and the kid making fun of him.

Gabby responded with

So there was this boy that moved to school and he got bullied and whatever. Him and his friend got tired of it, and they decided to hold hostage at a school dance and shoot people. Cause I was bullied when I was little, and that really affected me. Then I see how they turned out on it, and I was like good thing I did not do that cause like, that's not who I am. Now I help people who get people, so they don't do the same thing

Jack responded with

*Give a Boy a Gun*. I liked the story, it was mostly called, it was very realistic for a fiction book. It was very realistic to what was going on in the world right now. I liked the story behind it and the perspective. The perspective was more like, it was in third person or first person. It was the people who were there, they were giving details about what happened that night, or that day.

Participants also mentioned how *Forged by Fire* was “about family and what families go through” (Alex), and about a family “whose mom is an addict and the stepdad was abusive...it was an interesting book” (Jack).

The themes of: (1) “you can stand up to things you don’t think you could stand up to,” and (2) motivated by books about impossible situations, are the results to research question one. The perspectives of the students shifted to challenging the status quo within their own environment, and they are motivated by the books they read during the program. The books were mentor texts as the characters became agents of change, and empowered through impossible situations. They influenced the students in a shift directed toward social action, as discussed in the following research question.

#### *A Socially Just Perspective*

Research question one A asked *In what ways do scholars demonstrate aspects of social justice and citizenship, as developed through participation in the Freedom Schools program?* In response, the following theme was revealed: (1) A Socially Just Perspective. The students shared examples of how they felt they were agents of change, difference makers, and justice-oriented citizens through the Freedom School program. They also highlighted ideals of being justice-oriented, and could enact community change through those ideals. The following sections detail the findings for research question one.

In this theme, students highlighted the shift of perspective to becoming socially just. When asked about the connection of the program to the books they read, all the participants responded that the books did support the over-arching program theme as an Agent of Change. For example, one participant shared that it *support(ed)* the theme because as they read the books that led them to *changing ourselves and our lives* (Devon). Jack shared is historical freedom movement that happened as people were agents of change during the *civil rights movement*:

Black people would sit at a white only place and order something, and then leave. Basically forcing them to say yes. You can make a difference by slightly do slight things that kinda make a difference...they would eventually build to make a big difference...they would make up the end of all segregation. It would all end.

The historical and personal examples of the impact the texts made on the students lead the to be *Agents of Change*.

When the participants were asked, “*Did the characters in the book become an agent of change?*” All of the participants identified a characters’ experience of being an *Agent of Change*, and they identified the paradigm shift as the characters in the texts overcame insurmountable odds presented to them in the texts. Alex responded with, “this book taught me to become an agent of change,” highlighting the influence fictional characters have on their readers through the actions they take in the text. He continued with, “they taught us to March, to put our thoughts out there, even though we’re younger. Put our thoughts out there and change something.” Other participants highlighted specific examples of how the characters enacted changes, “he was trying to get rights” (Devon), “he was an agent of change within himself (Dylan),” and “one of them told the person, we need to stop this, we took it to far (Gaby).” The text examples are from books discuss Dr. Martian Luther King Jr., gun violence, and domestic violence influenced by drugs.

All of the characters in the texts are placed in impossible situations, and they highlight how there is still opportunity to become an *Agent of change*.

The participants were asked if they were capable of becoming agents of change in their own communities and how they would do so. Communities in this question were not clarified to the geographic definition of community, so for the purpose of this research community can be referenced as: geographical, relational, and identity. Majority of participants revealed it is obtainable to be an *Agent of Change* within their community. Gabby shared, “I wanna do something...I want to adopt kids from people who never had a chance” Two participants (Dylan & Jack) simply responded with an affirmative “yes.” Another participant shared, “Yeah, because they see what kids think and kids are the future. They are the people that are coming up. they can see what they think and they can change it (Alex).” Being *Agents of Change* was a prevalent theme in the responses from the participants.

When the participants were asked “*What does it mean to be an agent of change?*” The majority shared themes of *Community Change*. Participants shared that they thought becoming an agent of change resulted in the change of the community as a whole, and the shift of perspective of the people that it impacts. Dylan revealed, “to help change something, someone or someday. You are helping change something. You might not be noticed but you are still changing something.” Other participants revealed the perceptual shift of being, such as “to be a better person of the outcome (Gabby)”, and “to change what people say (Alex).” Devon revealed, “It can change your life, (and) the people around you lives.”

The participants were asked “*in what ways were you an agent of change during Freedom School?*” The majority shared the examples of being a *Justice-Oriented Citizen* (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Dylan shared:

We did a march towards the end of it, about how we need to stop gun violence even though we probably won't get noticed by everyone, I was still an agent of change because I was protesting with everyone else. By addressing the problem and working hard to change it. (when asked to elaborate addressing the problem) The situation that causes the problem. if you started at the root, when you pull it you get it quicker. When you start at the top, you might pull it out, but you might just pull out some of the leave. If you get deep into the dirt, you will pull out the whole thing.

Gabby discussed how they gave a speech about education, “I feel like we have the advantage in America to stay in school, and like girls around the world don't really have that option”. Another participant said, “we found a way to have our voices heard (Jack)”, as they lead a demonstrated that protested gun violence in schools. The participants revealed ways they were agents of change during the program that made them *Justice-Oriented*.

When asked “*do you believe you can make a difference?*” All of the participants revealed that they believe they can be a *Difference Makers*. Majority of the participants responded “yes,” with Jack saying, “I know I can make a difference.” After attending at least 60 days in the Freedom School program, all of the participant believe they can be an *Difference Makers*.

The results of the data demonstrated the students feeling empowered to be agents of change within their community. The students hold a Socially Just perspective, highlighting the personal belief that they can enact change within their community. The experiences that they have had through the Freedom School program, has inadvertently shifted their lens of what social justice means.

### *Summary*

The results have revealed three overarching themes throughout the data from the participants. The major themes include: (1) “you can stand up to things you don’t think you could stand up to,” (2) motivated by books about impossible situations, and (3) socially just citizens. In chapter 5, there will be a discussion of the findings from this chapter, alongside a recommendation of this research for future studies. The discussion section will connect existent literature and theoretical underpinnings to the findings of the study. Next, the implications for teaching as found from the results of the study. Finally, limitations to the study that can be addressed in future studies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to determine the influence of students' perspectives of learning and the impact on the growth of citizenship in relation to students becoming agents of change after reading multicultural texts. Chapter one addressed the problem of high stakes testing and its influence on the public-school system. Chapter two highlighted research that examined citizenship based programs, multicultural literature, and Freedom School as way to curb summer learning loss. Chapter three provided the foundation for this study having outlined the procedures and participants of the study. Chapter four's presentation of findings revealed that three major themes of (1) "you can stand up to things you don't think you could stand up to," (2) motivated by books about impossible situations, and (3) socially just citizens. Finally, this chapter will discuss each of the findings in connection with the existent literature and theoretical framework. In addition, this chapter will provide implications for teaching, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

#### *Discussion of Findings*

The experiences of each participant in the Baylor Freedom School program are individualized and hold unique perspectives of the impact. There are three major themes that encapsulate the experiences and growth of all the participants as they recount their experiences in the program. The themes are discussed in the following sections.

### *Research Question One Findings*

This research concluded that there is a positive influence on students as they interact with multicultural texts, and it is supported by current literature. The access to multicultural texts allows for the students to reduce the systematic inequalities perpetuated by the dominate cultures, ultimately beginning to close the educational achievement gap (Piper, 2019). Researchers hypothesized that the achievement gap is dominated by students of color, due to the fact that high-stakes testing is reinforced by the funds of knowledge persistent in the dominate groups (Cunningham, 2019). The purpose of these two works is to hypothesize that standardized testing is not culturally relevant, and if it was there would not be such a gap in achievement.

The findings from the first research question allows for a dual examination to the answer. To clarify, *the use of multicultural literature*, is done through exposure to texts by reading and read aloud. The students that participated in the program, followed the “Freedom School Way” as they were able to read texts in a variety of ways with their peers and teacher. These texts were foundational in the program, and could be classified as a mentor text for the rest of program’s function. The influence of the books had three possibilities for each of the participants: negative, neutral, and positive. All of the participants in the study, recited examples of positive influences. Although it could be argued, that an adolescent participating in social justice related activities is a negative influence, it is not. The literature highlighted that relevant texts are conduits in creating an impactful learning environment and if they find them enjoyable (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Scieurba, 2014; Verden & Hickman, 2009; Zygmunt et al., 2015).

Action in social justice makes the space for voices that often go unheard. As adults, these marginalized adolescents will enter a world that promotes the same systemic inequities they face in school. The deck is stacked, and it is not in their favor. The implementation of multicultural literature provides a foundation with using critical pedagogy in the classroom. It provides perspective to identify the oppressed and oppressor within a book, that can translated into the realities of the students' lives. As the oppressor cannot experience liberation if they do not acknowledge they are being oppressed (Freire, 1970), students will not have the comprehension skills to address their own oppression. In alignment with the theoretical framework of Grioux's (2004) work on critical pedagogy, the of multicultural literature challenge the relations of power with the society. The participants highlight how they can challenge the societal power systems as they combat social inequities they face as marginalized youth, through being agents of change in which 100% of the participants said they can be. While the data did not show the participants explicitly challenging the power structures of society, they highlight ways they could correct perceived wrong in their community.

In this study, the participants emphasized positive interactions with the books they read during the program. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared the movements of how the characters impacted them, that they had "*so many favorite books* (Gabby)," and they learned valuable lessons from the texts. Access to literacy that youth want to read will begin to lessen the achievement gap, and they lean towards texts that are reflective of themselves and their experiences (Scrubia, 2014; Verden & Hickman, 2009; Hamilton, 2005). The data revealed that positive influences of the of multicultural literature shifted the participants to become agents of change, as the character within the

books did. These books were their favorite for two distinct reasons. Both books were relevant to the students and the world they live in, as they recounted how their schools have been threaten, or their friends were in bad family situations. The second is the characters were cannons of the prefect main character, they were flawed. The students were able to recognize those flaws, and books with the prefect plot and characters are not real. The texts served as a mirror and window to realistic world that they could change.

### *Research Question One A Findings*

This research concluded that the students demonstrated social justice and citizenships as they participated in the Freedom School, leading them to become Socially Just Citizens. Current research has highlighted different programs that work towards students reaching Kahne and Westheimer's (2004) highest level of citizenship, but like Freedom School students are not intellectually developed enough to be classified as "Justice-Oriented Citizens." Quinn and Baumel (2018), highlighted that students need authentic experiences to shift towards the highest achievable level, as also shown in other relevant studies (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016). Socially-just citizens are the halfway step towards becoming fully evolved into Justice-Oriented citizens. Using Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) framework of the types of citizens, the participants' responses directed them past "participatory" but not full evolved into "justice-oriented" citizens. They combated systematic inequalities that plague marginalized groups, specifically low-income students, and students of color.

In this study, participants recalled different experiences of social action as they attended the program. Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed participating in march, social demonstrations, and public speaking to gain awareness of injustices

happening within their community and the world. The findings to this research question that when students are given the opportunity to engage in social justice activities their inner ideologies of social justice are transformed. Opportunities open doors, so when the participants had opportunities to participate in various forms of social justice, such as speeches, demonstrations, and marches in a safe environment, it encourages them to continue in participating.

### *Implications for Teaching*

The results of this study is meant to be a pedagogical shift towards using a critical pedagogy curriculum within the classroom (Freire, 1980; Giroux, 2004). There is an abundance of research that supports the implementation of culturally relevant teaching (Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay, 2000), and this research is supportive and calls for educators to create opportunities to for students to fully assimilate in to Kahne and Westheimer's (2004) Justice-Oriented citizen. Curriculum that goes unchanged, will continue to educate students in the current systematic oppressive ways that promote injustices for marginalized youth.

The diversity within the classroom is greater than it has been before, and it will continue to grow (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019), so it is critical that teacher education implements culturally responsive teaching practices. Pre-service teachers or current educators need to understand the value of multicultural literature within in classroom. In the study, the participants had shown an increase in reading from the exposure to multicultural texts that encouraged them to read more. Simply have the opportunity for students to read diverse texts will enhance their academic and cultural competency knowledge. Multicultural texts can be used as a springboard between social

justice based projects and the classroom curriculum. The possibilities for children's literature and the uses are endless, and simply not allowing access to these texts is inexcusable.

### *Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*

This case study implemented a small group of participants that attended the Baylor Freedom Program for only 2-3 years, depending on the participant. The lack of variety within the data pool, and time experienced in the program creates a limitation within the current research. The participants age was specific to adolescent students, instead of ages that are able to participate in the program, due to relative newness of the Baylor site. The research design for this study fit the qualifications for being a qualitative study, as it is impossible to quantify personal perceived impact of growth by a student. Implementing a quantitative section would allow for indisputable data on tracking the literacy abilities of the students during the program. Another limitation of this study involves the responses from the participants. Due to the age of the participants in the study, they often would use one worded responses to the questions being asked. It can skew the in-depth analysis of a deeper meaning made by the students.

Future research calls for an extended research period that can track the participants over a prolonged time frame to document to shift of citizenships, and greater interactions with the texts. Year-long studies would provide rich data detailing an extensive transcript of student learning. It would capture the significant differences from formal and informal learning environments. Long term studies will accurately document the authentic learning ebbs that students have in the classroom, as the learning experiences is not exponential.

There is a need to implement a quantitative study alongside to provide numerical data of the impacts that of multicultural literature and citizenship have on students. Quantitative data could show the literary growth/decline students have during a summer based enrichment program. Research could infiltrate into the classroom to research the opportunities of how students interact with of multicultural literature and activities demonstrating social justice.

A diverse approach to studies over citizenship and culturally relevant pedagogy will result in a solidified understanding of research based teaching practices for all students. It will provide the need in the literacy marketplace for publishing diverse texts that encourage representation of others and their situations. The research could bring to light systemic changes within the public-school setting and the curriculum implementation for the students. Any research in the field of education is substantial, for it effects the learning outcomes of future generations, and the impact will be generational.

### *Conclusion*

Harsher discipline policies, mis- and dis-education, projections for incarceration, and the ever-widening achievement gap that is further tethered to high-stakes assessment, language discrimination, and deficit model teaching are components of what Kozol (2005) describes as apartheid schooling. To counter, this study aims to capture students' experiences in education a means of liberation and social justice. By using multicultural literature, the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy serves as a conduit to empower students to be critical thinkers and justice-oriented citizens. The lasting impact of this study will allow for the systemic changes for equitable teaching practices and curriculum implementation. Through the documentation of recent literature and studies, it

has been shown that this study is unique in its purpose, but relevant to the multicultural education research.

The state of education is over-run by standardized testing and the widening opportunity gap between students of color and their peers. Kozol (2005) recounts the adverse effects on students as they face the over-loomng mandated tests that hold schools to be accountable for learning. Mandated testing that only account for half of what the student learns (Pearson, 2012). Shifting the focus from drill-kill test prep to curriculum that empowers students to be participants within the democracy, as coming of age youth are not actively participating in their civic duties, like voting (Levine, 2009). Empowering students also stems from pedagogical practices, like culturally relevant teaching and the implementation of multicultural literature. Freedom School encapsulates the multicultural literature, culturally relevant pedagogy, and social action experiences for high-risk youth to participate in as a summer enrichment program. In a system that promotes “leaving no child behind,” it seems that summer programs are picking up the students that were left behind.

This study aimed to examine the impact of multicultural literature and civic action on adolescents through the Freedom School program. Using a qualitative method in a phenomenological case study, the research was looked through a critical pedagogy and levels of citizenship lens (Giroux, 2004; Freire, 1970; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). The innate nature of setting, creates a focus on the participants lived experience through the Baylor Freedom school program, as they adhere to the interview questions. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews that was analyzed through open coding procedures.

The results of the study were codes, categorized, and thematize to answer the research questions. In response to the first research question, *how does the use of multicultural texts influence student's perspective about learning*, revealed students the perspectives that “you can stand up to things you don't think you could stand up to,” and they are motivated by books about impossible situations. The second research question, *in what ways do scholars demonstrate aspects of social justice and citizenship, as developed through participation in the Freedom Schools program*, revealed that students evolved into being socially just citizens. Addressing the results through a theoretical lens alluded to supports the theories of Freire (1970) and Giroux (2004), as texts can be situated for students to question the dominate power structures of the world. In turn, supporting Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) theory of a Justice-Oriented citizen, as students gain experience to participate in social justice activities. The Freedom School program is a supplemental environment disengages the disempowerment experiences marginalized students face in public education.

The lack of opportunities students have to read multicultural literature and participate in social justice in the public school classroom are over shadowed by the dominance of high-stakes testing. When the pressurize stress emitting from standardized testing is removed from the learning environment, and students' identities are integrated with the curriculum, students thrive. They are able to see the perspectives of others, through windows and mirrors, and they can enact on the injustices they see in the communities by walking out the door. This shatters the inequalities perpetuated by school, ultimately shatters the glass house that is the public-school s

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