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Participatory Action Research As Professional Development In Multicultural Education: What Are The Effects On A Staff In A New York City Public School?

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PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON A STAFF IN A NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL?

by

JIMMY IVAN KALAMARAS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON A STAFF IN A NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL?

by

Jimmy Ivan Kalamaras

Adviser: Philip M. Anderson

This dissertation studies the impact of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the format for professional development of teachers in the domain of multicultural education. The study was conducted in a public elementary school, hereby known as Queens Multicultural, within the New York City Department of Education. Using PAR as a guiding framework, eleven teachers at Queens Multicultural created the Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research (MEPAR) group to develop an approach to address multicultural education at the school level. PAR was found to be an effective form of professional development that allowed staff members to engage in deep and rich discussions about multicultural education, curriculum, and pedagogy. Through this experience, MEPAR teachers gained insight into what multicultural education means and how making small changes in their teaching practices could address four out of the
five *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* as defined by James Banks (2006). This research project also found that while PAR was a valuable tool for teacher professional development, PAR was unable to bring about school-wide change. The implications of these findings points to the importance of strong leadership and prioritized goal-setting in order to bring about changes in school structures and culture.
Acknowledgments

I dedicate this work to my parents. To my mother and father - I owe everything I am to the love, guidance and support you have given me every day of my life.

To my loving husband, Emilio. Thank you for putting up with eleven years of craziness and uncertainty. I dedicate the rest of my life to building a life and family with you.

Thank you to my sisters, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephew, aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Your words of encouragement and support have given me the strength, courage and will to keep moving forward over the years.

To all of my wonderful friends: #152, #NYCAD, #QC Cuties, #Forever Friends, #GC Crew! Over the years I have had the privilege to have so many amazing people come in and out of my life. Time passes, and life goes on, but the imprint you have left on my heart and life is there forever!

To Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg: Thank you for teaching me so much! You have influenced my work and my life with your knowledge and kindness. Above all else, thank you for your friendship, encouragement, and support.

To my adviser Philip Anderson: Thank you Phil for sticking with me over all these years. You encouraged me to keep moving forward when I was ready to quit. Thank you for knowing when I needed to be pushed, and for always being in my corner. I am grateful to have had you on my side.

A special thank you to my committee members Nick Michelli and Ken Tobin. Thank you for coming on board and helping me get to this final stage.

Last, but not least, thank you to my MEPAR co-researchers. Without you this would not be possible. Thank you for the effort, care, and trust that you put in me. You are amazing educators, colleagues and friends.
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Chapter 1

Why Multicultural Education?

In today’s globalized world, an effective domestic education agenda must address global needs and trends and aim to develop a globally competent citizenry. It is no longer enough to focus solely on ensuring that students have essential reading, writing, mathematics, and science skills. Our hyper-connected world also requires the ability to think critically and creatively to solve complex problems, the skills and disposition to engage globally, well-honed communication skills, and advanced mathematics, science and technical skills. Such competencies will prepare students, and our nation, for a world in which the following are the reality: Economic competitiveness, global challenges, and national security and diplomacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In these times when educational reform and closing the achievement gap among minority groups, English Language Learners, special education students, and children in poverty are the priority of the United States Department of Education, multicultural education should be at the forefront of these reform efforts. But for all the positive changes and educational opportunities that multicultural education could bring to the American educational system, it is virtually absent from reform discussions. When reviewing the U.S. Department of Education’s website, www.ed.gov, multicultural education is not part of the national conversation about improving education. Instead, initiatives and policies like Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind and Common Core State Standards dominate the landscape for how our nation can close achievement gaps and increase educational opportunities for students.
The absence of discussion around multicultural education at the national level is unfortunate because the goals of multicultural education align with the goals of the Department of Education. In its November 2012 publication of its international strategy for 2012-2016, *Succeeding Globally Through International Education and Engagement*, the Department of Education established Objective 1: *Increase the global competencies of all U.S. students, including those from traditionally disadvantaged groups.* Part of the rationale for this strategy is that:

*The United States is a multicultural society. It is essential that we are all able to communicate and work with neighbors, coworkers, and friends with different cultural traditions and perspectives. Such interpersonal skills and an appreciation for diverse viewpoints will facilitate civil discourse and a cohesive society*” (U.S. DOE, 2012).

The lack of a cohesive national plan or policy for the implementation of multicultural education in the present mirrors the historical record. There has never been a systematic approach to bringing multicultural education into American schools. Historians and researchers of multicultural education only make reference to small movements, local initiatives or special interest based efforts to bring multicultural education into schools (C. A. M. Banks, 2005; Dunn, 1993; Gay, 1983; Greenman & Kimmel, 1995; Stewart et al., 1992). The vehicles for change and
for adopting multicultural practices have always been teachers. Teachers bear the burden and responsibility for designing and implementing multicultural education in large urban school districts like New York City, Detroit and Pittsburgh that were experiencing local social movements and where racial and intercultural strife took center stage (Joshee & Johnson, 2007).

While the government has established equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policies that federal, state and local agencies systems have adopted, there is no multicultural education policy to speak of. Where multicultural education did previously receive attention and support in the United States was in universities and colleges of education. The former accreditation body for teacher education, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), required all teacher preparation programs to meet Standard 4: Diversity, in order to gain accreditation (http://ncate.org/Standards/tabid/107/Default.aspx). This mandate for colleges of education to provide coursework in multicultural education created an ideological and pedagogical rift between teachers and the schools in which they work in. Some teachers are able to successfully implement multicultural best practices into their classrooms, but others find themselves at a loss; they feel that their hands are tied when the public school in which they teach do not support them in implementing multicultural education because there is no multicultural education policy at the national, state or local level to follow (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005; Key, 2000).
Unfortunately, with the consolidation of NCATE into the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in July 2013, multicultural education’s importance in teacher education programs has been eliminated; the new standards for accreditation under CAEP make no mention of diversity (http://caepnet.org/accreditation/caep-accreditation-faqs/). As a consequence of these changes, teachers trained in the United States today are now graduating from teacher education programs with little to no knowledge and understanding of multicultural education. These teachers then enter public school systems that lack clear guidelines, policies and support for them to implement multicultural education. The outcomes of this misaligned system are frustration and ineffective teaching for students.

Consider the following two vignettes. These vignettes illustrate what has happened to multicultural education in our current national environment. With the lack of direction and support from policies or curricula on multicultural education, these vignettes represent what happens when teachers trained in multicultural education begin working in schools that have not explicitly adopted the values of multicultural education. These examples are based on real exchanges that I have witnessed in my fourteen years of experience in public schooling, both at the elementary and college level. While these examples have been fictionalized, they illustrate and represent some of the obstacles that consistently preclude multicultural education from becoming part of mainstream American education.
Andrew Jackson Elementary School
A group of fifth grade teachers in 95% homogenously white middleclass school district discuss the upcoming social studies unit on European exploration and the settling of the Americas. The most senior teacher on the grade, Ms. White, leads the meeting and begins the conversation. Ms. Spellman, a recently tenured teacher completing her master’s degree in education is teaching fifth grade for the second year and attempts to have some input into the meeting.

Now that we have completed our unit test on map skills, it’s time to start our unit on exploration. We’re going to stick to using the textbook in this unit. The school district chose this textbook specifically because it met all of the state standards and covered all of the specified content. We’re not going to need any supplemental material because the textbook has it all. This unit is going to be a lot easier for us to teach; our only concern in this unit is timing. We all need to make sure that we stick to the pacing calendar if we are going to finish the unit in time for the midterm.

I have some concerns about following the textbook, as is, Ms. White. I had difficulties teaching this last year. I had the only student in our school whose family was from the Dominican Republic. He was upset by the unit and brought up how Columbus mistreated and killed the native people. I didn’t know what to say because I didn’t know any of this either. I did some research and found that this was true. There were many things about the explorers that were not good for the native people. I think that we need to supplement this unit in order to give a balance of information to the students.

Ms. Spellman, while we appreciate your interest in this topic area, I am going to have to insist that we stick to the textbook. There is just no time to discuss material that is not in the curriculum. You’re going to have to do your best to tell the students that there are other views on what happened but that we don’t have time to talk about them in class. Besides which, that Dominican student has since passed into junior high, so there is no need to discuss these other points of view.

Ms. Spellman, I also disagree with you. I think that it is very inappropriate to discuss these things with students. We have always taught that Columbus was a great and brave explorer. If it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t be here. It’s not right to talk poorly about someone who did so much for the New World. Before him there was nothing, and Columbus helped bring order to the Americas.
That is what I thought at first too, but now I know that there is so much more information in our history that we just didn’t know about. I brought this up with my professors in my masters program, and they encouraged me to bring multicultural education into our curriculum. That would help us to teach things from different points of view and would help expose our students to diversity.

Ms. Spellman, this matter is not up for discussion. I appreciate your energy and willingness to help, but we can’t do what you propose. We have a curriculum and standards that we are responsible for following. We don’t have time for multicultural education, nor do we have a need for it. We only have a few minority students, and we’re not going to change how we teach for a handful of students. You will be expected to stick to the textbook and not deviate from the sequence of the unit. As the most senior teacher here, I will be checking to see that everyone is complying with the directive to use the district text.

In Andrew Jackson, the teachers believe in following mandates and textbooks. The standard curriculum remains what is most important and necessary to teach. The negative experience of one student or the dissenting voice of a colleague is not reason enough to make a change. In this context, multicultural education is viewed as content that is an addition to the standard curriculum. The implication is that including additional information and different points of view would keep teachers from doing “their real jobs”, which is to deliver a specific set of knowledge. Multicultural education can also be viewed as a dissenting and anti-American entity. Emphasizing and/or highlighting the shortcomings of heroes in our history violate our sense of patriotism and goes against what we were taught as children. Although there are facts to prove
that there were negative effects of Columbus’s arrival in the New World, teachers dismiss this new information as tangential and remain unmotivated to educate themselves on the topic.

This exchange also exposes the misconception that multicultural education is only for minority students, and that non-minority students would not benefit from it. The core problem at Andrew Jackson is that there is a deep misunderstanding about multicultural education; because of these misunderstandings, the staff devalues even having a discussion about multicultural education. Although it may not be the case here, personal feelings of prejudice among individuals or the collective group will increase the negative reaction towards discussions around multicultural education. At Andrew Jackson, there is also evidence of teachers willing to police each other to make sure that no one will stray from the approved curriculum. Staff culture is poor at this school, and the likelihood of having open collaborative discussions is minimal.

**Friends Elementary School**

*A group of third grade teachers in New York City meet to go over their curriculum calendar two weeks prior to the first day of school. The grade leader goes through each subject area: reading, writing, math, social studies and science. Towards the end of the meeting the grade leader asks if there are any questions. A second year teacher, Mary, who transferred from a neighboring district, raises the question.*

*You guys are professional and organized here. Thank you for making this transition so easy for me. At my previous school no one worked together, and I never knew what I had to teach because no one ever told me what the expectations were. I tried my best to use the state standards, but I never knew what anybody else did.*
You don’t have to worry about that here. We all work very closely together. If you ever have any questions or worry that you’re unsure how to teach something, just ask us for help. Grace is the math expert, Tracy is the literacy guru, Mike lives for science, and I’m the social studies queen. We’ve got everything covered. We hear you are an English Language Learner person; we can’t wait to pick your brain about that.

Wow, I’m really excited about this year. I just have one question. I haven’t heard you guys talk about multicultural education. How do you guys go about infusing multicultural education into your teaching? Does the school have a philosophy or a plan that we should follow?

Yeah. We’ve got that covered. Third grade social studies curriculum is all about countries around the world, so multicultural education is built into what we have to teach. We’re lucky. It’s the other grades that have to fish around for multicultural content to add to their curriculum. It’s really straightforward for us.

But you guys only mentioned a few multicultural content areas. What about pedagogy, instruction and cross-cultural values? I learned about the five dimensions of multicultural education in graduate school, but the curriculum plans only seem to address content. What can we do to make sure that all the third grade curricula address all aspects of multicultural education?

I’m not really sure what you’re talking about, but we don’t need to worry about all that. Graduate school and the real world have nothing to do with one another. Besides which, we already do enough. In June the parents association always does an evening event for families. The children dress up in their native costumes and dance. The parents also bring in food, and everyone has a good time. I love helping out and eating every year.

That sounds amazing and fun, but what do the children get out of it? Do all children participate? Does everyone get an opportunity to learn about a culture that is not his or hers?

Mary, you’re asking some really great questions, but let’s not get side-tracked from our purpose. We’re supposed to be discussing curriculum and what we are going to teach. We can’t worry about all that other little things you are mentioning about multicultural education right now. We are doing the most important things right now, so let’s stick with that. I appreciate your questions and your input, but how about you see how we do things here, and then we can talk
about making any changes next year. Give everything a chance. I’m sure you’ll see that we do an excellent job already!

At the Friends School, teachers work together to create lessons and to teach a wide array of information, including countries around the world. At this school they have made the conscious effort to include multicultural content into their practice. What they lack, however, is a full understanding of what multicultural education is. Because the teachers feel that content is what multicultural education is all about, they are unable to recognize the necessity for an analysis of their multicultural education practices, and are therefore unable to see that they might need to make changes or improvements. This vignette also illustrates how teacher training programs and public schools are misaligned. While Mary has learned about multicultural education in her graduate school and wants to bring it into her teaching practice, she finds that there is no space for her to do so. Her opinions are dismissed, however gently and respectfully, as ideas that are inapplicable and irrelevant to the discussion about teaching and learning. In their minds, Mary’s colleagues already do accept multicultural education, and are unwilling to listen to Mary because they feel they are already “understand it” and are “doing it”.

While the two schools in these scenarios differ greatly in staff culture and their level of professional collegiality, they reflect some of the same attitudes, values, and ideas in education that act as obstacles to the implementation of multicultural education in schools. The staff at
Andrew Jackson does not even wish to entertain any ideas that are not already a part of the standard curriculum chosen by their district. While the staff at the Friends School is making conscious decisions to teach about different types of cultures, their actions are limited by their limited knowledge of the full complexity of what multicultural education means. Due to misconceptions about multicultural education and the lack of policies regarding implementation, these two schools have not been able to fully adopt multicultural education in their practice.

Both Andrew Jackson and Friends Academy share a lack of reflectiveness and willingness to self-assess practices. These two vignettes exemplify why schools have not been able to implement multicultural education; schools either feel that it is an optional or unnecessary addition to the curriculum, or they lack a full understanding of multicultural education. It is in these types of environments that multicultural education cannot take hold.

If misinformation, lack of awareness, and absence of policy are the obstacles that are preventing multicultural education from taking root in schools, then how can schools overcome these obstacles? If multicultural education is as worthwhile as its supporters believe it to be, how can it be brought into schools in meaningful ways that will benefit students? It is well known that the key to successful changes in schools and in staff is professional development (Fullan, 2001). If teachers and schools are going to change in order to embrace multicultural education, then there has to be an investment in professional development. Unfortunately, evidence shows that
professional development in the area of multicultural education has been largely unsuccessful and has been unable to leverage real changes in schools (AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education, Cochran-Smith, & Zeichner, 2005; Almarza, 2005; Key, 2000; Renta, 1999). This is due largely in part to the approach and the form through which professional development in multicultural education has taken.
Chapter 2

Defining Multicultural Education

Multiculturalism means everything and at the same time nothing. It has been used and misused so often and for so many conflicting reasons and agendas that no one at the end of the twentieth century can speak of multiculturalism or multicultural education without specifically delineating what he or she means or does not mean.

(Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997)

At its core, multicultural education is about equity, social justice and social change (J. A. Banks, 2006; Bennett, 2007; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Nieto, 2004). For those that believe in social change through education and educational opportunity, multicultural education is important at all educational levels, including elementary, secondary, higher and adult education programs (Stone Hanley, 2012). The potential benefits of multicultural education are far-reaching and beneficial to all members of society.

Whether you are a minority student whose academic needs get met through multicultural education, or a white mainstream student that learns to see the world from different perspectives, multicultural education positively benefits everyone (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey, & Edwards, 2006; Howard, 1999). Multicultural education contributes to both the social development of students and to their academic development. When students are exposed to and enter
conversations about culture, they develop an understanding of the cultural values and practices of others that allows them to sustain true intercultural dialogues (Appiah, 2006). In terms of academic achievement, multicultural education is potentially the great equalizer (Gay, 2003); multicultural education could be the fulfillment of the dream for equity and equality in American education that began with the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision in 1954.

Multicultural education is not a discrete discipline. It does not exist as a separate entity as English, Social Studies, Math, Science, Music and Art are categorized and organized. Multicultural education spans across the disciplines, intersects and bridges disciplines, and borrows from the disciplines; it is made up of all these disciplines. Yet multicultural education is not only about content. The scope and range of multicultural education transcends the traditional concepts of an academic content area. Multicultural education is more than a defined body of knowledge that people can learn and memorize.

This misconception of multicultural education as a body of knowledge that can be transmitted to students has contributed to its incomplete implementation. The problem with multicultural education is that for a long time it was interpreted and translated into classroom practices as the simple inclusion of non-white male centered content. This perception of what multicultural education means has become fossilized in our schools and has not grown with the constant reconceptualization and deepening theoretical field that gave rise to it. This very
misconception about multicultural education has weakened the democratic and socially just undepinnings of the movement when it comes time to practice and implement multicultural education in schools. The disconnect between those that theorize multicultural education and those that want to practice multicultural education is that they do not share the same definition on the subject.

**What is Multicultural Education?**

The sooner that aspiring practitioners realize that multicultural education is not simply a content based discipline, the easier it becomes to begin to put it into practice. Before trying to define the amorphous philosophies and structure, let’s contemplate what multicultural education is supposed to accomplish. According to James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (2004), multicultural education:

...is a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social sciences, behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies.

Multicultural education is thus an educational attempt to level the playing field for advancement in society; for minority and underprivileged students to have an equal chance at success despite
their racial, ethnic or other social affiliation. The ultimate goal of multicultural education is to work towards true equality across all areas of society, not just in educational institutions.

It is important to always remember that multicultural education stems fundamentally from a philosophy and belief. As Banks and Banks (2004) discuss, content and other ideas are used at the disposal of the philosophy and become the tools through which educators can bring about the fruits of multicultural education: “to increase educational equity for all students”.

Because multicultural education draws upon other disciplines in order to accomplish its purpose of social equity, it can be defined not as a discipline, but as a “metadiscipline” (C. A. M. Banks, 2005). Multicultural education is a metadiscipline because the emphasis is always placed on how to achieve the ultimate goal of equity and equality. True multicultural educators are always cognizant of their role and plan all of their efforts, actions and lessons in accordance to their goal and not just to content.

Multicultural education is thus a planned course of action; a how to guide for achieving excellence and equity. The problem we face today is that educators do not understand the connection between the purpose of multicultural education and the actual practice. This inability to conceptualize multicultural education as a system of purposeful practices with goals of social justice undermines the attempts of teachers to implement multicultural education; teachers cannot properly and effectively teach what they do not understand (Howard, 1999).
Although it is difficult to precisely define, multicultural education is an approach that recognizes that “respect for cultural diversity is connected to a commitment to social justice” (Boyle-Baise, 1999). Multicultural education is particularly interesting in school contexts because it satisfies both those that believe schools are centers for learning, and those that believe schools are agents of social change. In the context of this study, multicultural education will be defined as a systematic approach to educating students that is rooted in cross-cultural understanding, and whose purpose is to ensure an equitable education for all students, but particularly for those students who are disadvantaged.

**Dimensions of Multicultural Education**

It has been argued several times already that the lack of a complete understanding of multicultural education has been the most significant obstacle to its implementation. While there are any number of theorists and researchers that have devoted themselves to studying multicultural education (Bennett, 2007; Cushner et al., 2006; Nieto, 2004), I have chosen to use James Banks’s (2006) typologies of the *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* as the primary theoretical framework of this study. James Banks’s framework of multicultural education captures the complexity of the discipline in a comprehensive manner. Banks’s framework addresses content, pedagogy, and ideology, which make it the most useful framework to apply in
this study because it is an attempt to build a connection between theory and practice. Other multicultural education theorists such as Christine Bennet, Christine Sleeter, and Geneva Gay offer perceptive insight into the field, but their work centers, respectively, around research, practice, or theory. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) also offer a framework for critically categorizing multiculturalism into levels, but the focus of that framework is on power and privilege; not pedagogy. Of all of these voices in multicultural education, only James Banks offers a comprehensive framework that has the scope and ability to discuss all of the aspects of interest to this study: theory, practice, pedagogy, curriculum, perspective, and power.

According to James Banks (2006), multicultural education is characterized by five major dimensions: 1) Content Integration, 2) Prejudice Reduction, 3) Equity Pedagogy, 4) The Knowledge Construction Process, and 5) Empowering School Culture and Structure. A short explanation of each component follows.

**Content Integration**

This component of multicultural education recognizes that students need to be exposed to ideas and information that are not traditionally part of mainstream curricula. Content integration involves identifying and weaving marginalized knowledge, histories and experiences into what students learn in school. This is the dimension that people associate multicultural education with
and is the area that teachers and schools attempt to address when implementing multicultural education. The two previous vignettes of Andrew Jackson and Friends School present good examples of what content integration means. In Friends School the teachers did integrate content regarding cultures and practices of non-American people in their curriculum; they studied cultures around the world and learned about their beliefs and practices. Because the school did add non-mainstream content to its curriculum, the teachers at Friends School felt they were implementing multicultural education.

Sometimes the non-mainstream content is accepted and integrated into schools. Some of these examples include Black History Month, Women’s History Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month, among others. Here we learn about the culture and contributions of non-white peoples to our society (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997). There are, however, other topics that can cause much controversy. In Andrew Jackson they did not want to add, mention or entertain any information regarding the negative effects of Christopher Columbus’s exploits in the New World. That information is not part of mainstream knowledge that is taught regarding the great European explorers, and was opposed by the majority of the staff. Other examples of non-mainstream content that could also cause controversy are slavery, Native American removal, Japanese internment camps, and Gay history.
**Prejudice Reduction**

Effective multicultural education seeks to reduce prejudice and racism that is present in modern society. When students learn about themselves and others, they are able to break down stereotypes and see people as individuals with human dignity. While integrating multicultural content into the curriculum will expose students to people and ideas that are different from their own, that will not automatically translate into students having a respect or appreciation for those people that are different from them. The prejudice reduction component of multicultural education does not assume that exposure is sufficient to promote respect, understanding and appreciation of other cultures, but takes the stance that schools must actively teach and speak out against prejudice. A good example of this could be seen in discussions of early immigration to America and how the Irish were discriminated against. It is not sufficient to just point out that the Irish were perceived to be lazy, violent and drunkards, but it would be necessary to dispel these rumors and talk about how these prejudices were born out of ignorance and fear of the unknown culture. Prejudice reduction would also involve schools explicitly teaching and speaking out against racism, homophobia, misogyny, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudice in our society.
Equity Pedagogy

Multicultural education recognizes that people are shaped by their cultures, experiences and social backgrounds. Students’ ability to access knowledge is in turn also shaped by these social differences. In order for all students to have equal access to a solid education, educators must be able to respond to the different needs of their students. The needs of the students may be cultural, emotional, linguistic, or cognitive. Schools must be able to teach all students and not just mainstream groups. While content integration has been popularly conceptualized as what multicultural education is, equity pedagogy is mostly known as a separate entity called Culturally Responsive Teaching. Important figures such as bell hooks, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Lisa Delpit have been writing about knowing the best way to teach their students since the 1980’s.

An example of equity pedagogy (or Culturally Responsive Teaching) would be teacher tone. In her writing, Lisa Delpit (Delpit, 1988) explains that most African American students come from homes where their parent employ authoritative tones when giving their children directions and when disciplining them. When white teachers tell a black child “Would you like to go back to your seat?” the child interprets this not as a command or directive, but as a question. If the child does not in fact want to go back to their seat, then they will not go back. The format of the directive and the tone were not culturally relevant to the student. If the teacher, however,
simply said, “Go back to your seat immediately”, that child might have complied. Another example of culturally relevant pedagogy is eye contact. Most children in Asian and Latino cultures are taught that it is disrespectful to look an adult in the eye when they are speaking to them. If a teacher demands that a child looks at them in the eyes, this is not being culturally sensitive and would hurt and confuse the child doubly; once for not understanding why you are mad at them, and second because you have made them do something which they feel is disrespectful in their culture. Equity pedagogy is about knowing your students and making sure that your teaching practices do not adversely them emotionally or academically (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

**The Knowledge Construction Process**

Multicultural education includes understanding how power and conflict affect knowledge. Students are exposed to different points of view and understand that truth can be relative. Knowledge can differ across cultures depending on the point of view and values of a people. Good examples of the knowledge construction process can be found by examining historical and cultural disagreements. An examination of the history of World War II from the Japanese point of view would be different from the American point of view. Japanese history would argue that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a defensive strike, while American history sees
it as the “day that will live in infamy”. Other examples of how the knowledge construction process can lead to conflict or disagreements are topics like Native American land ownership beliefs, the Civil War, Arab-Israeli relations, and Immigration Reform. The emphasis in the knowledge construction process is not necessarily to choose sides, but to instead explore the reasons why different groups disagree about the same thing and how context influences people’s view of the world around them.

**Empowering School Culture and Structure**

Typical day-to-day practices in school have the power to either perpetuate social injustice or to break the cycle of injustice. Multicultural education is not only limited to classroom based instruction. Both classroom and school wide systems must be aligned to ensure quality educational experiences for all students. This is the most difficult component of Banks’s typologies to explain. What this essentially means is that there must be systems in place in schools that can support multicultural education and allow it to become embedded in the philosophy and practice of the school. This last component means that the school climate is such that it believes in multicultural education and allows for, and expects, content integration, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and knowledge construction to take place within the established structures.
A good example of empowering school culture and structures would be the Black schools in the South during Jim Crow (Hooks, 1994). These schools taught their children in an environment that was empowering. Students were taught Black History, were taught about prejudice and the point of view of both white and Black people regarding segregation and race relations. It was under these conditions that this Jim Crow generation grew up to become the defeaters of segregation.

Other examples of empowering school structures and cultures include universities and specialized programs that cater to the needs of specific groups of individuals, such as all-girl schools, Islamic schools, and schools for the deaf and the blind. The pattern for schools that promote an empowering school structure and culture is that they were created out of the need to support those subgroups of people that are typically marginalized in mainstream settings. The challenge remains for there to be basic public schools that can provide an empowering structure and culture for all those different groups of children that they serve.

James Banks’s typologies of the forms of multicultural education are a central component of this dissertation. My research interests in multicultural education have spanned over ten years, and in my experience, Banks’s framework has been the most useful lens through which to observe, analyze and explain multicultural education. This framework plays an important role in the professional development of the study, and in the analysis of the data. The effectiveness of
participatory action research as a form of professional development will also be evaluated using this framework.
Chapter 3

Professional Development

Will we break from the constraints of traditional school cultures and begin the process of closing the knowing-doing gap? If educators are to help more students learn at higher levels, they must break free from the restraints of their traditional structures and cultures and embrace what Michael Fullan (2007) has called “the new professionalism,” which is “collaborative, not autonomous; open rather than closed; outward looking rather than insular. The teaching profession must become a better learning profession” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2007)

In the previous chapters I argued that although multicultural education is a worthwhile endeavor that aligns with our nation’s current political and educational values, it is not being promoted by any national entity. This absence of discussion about multicultural education has effectively created a barrier that stops multicultural education from taking root in schools. In addition to this barrier, there is also the common problem of educators not understanding what multicultural education fully is. The question at hand is, “How can we move past these barriers in order for schools to adopt multicultural practices?” One answer to this question may lie in educational leadership. When schools are asked to change their culture or their practices, professional development is the most important leverage that school leaders have (Fullan, 2001).

Bringing about change in schools requires a significant investment in professional development, but not all professional development is effective at bringing about desired changes.
The overwhelming majority of the professional development that happens around multicultural education remains limited to teacher training programs; very little research or literature on professional development on multicultural education for in-service teachers exists (AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education, 2005). The existing literature indicates that there is little to no training for in-service teachers (Utley, Delquadri, Obiakor, & Mims, 2000), or that the training that teachers receive is ineffective because it does not lead to transference of the learning into teacher practice (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005; Key, 2000). If the professional development that is provided to teachers on multicultural education is ineffective, then it becomes necessary to think about the types of professional development approaches that are currently employed. If some forms of professional development are more effective then others, how can the professional development for multicultural education be transformed in order to become effective?

**Literature Review on Professional Development**

A review of research on professional development is necessary in order to isolate the forms that have a proven track record from those that fall short. In evaluating the research I found five recurring attributes relating to the efficacy of professional development. They can be viewed and interpreted as possible reasons why some forms of professional development are
more effective than others. Each is an important factor that must be accounted for when making decisions about professional development for teachers in a school. The five themes are:

A) Content Knowledge Focused Professional Development

B) Long-term and On-going Professional Development

C) Personal Motivation and Interests of Teachers

D) Practical and Hands-on Approaches in Professional Development

E) Contextual Understanding of Working Conditions

Content Knowledge Focused Professional Development

A content centered focus remains an important component of professional development. In certain subjects like mathematics, science and literacy, it is important to dedicate time to develop content specific knowledge with teachers, especially for teachers that do not have a strong background in the area. The research found that teachers that mastered more content knowledge were better able to apply that knowledge in their teaching (Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011). As teacher knowledge of content increases, so does the amount of content instruction provided in classrooms (Donnelly & Argyle, 2011). In addition to improving content instruction for students, professional development in content areas also has a significantly positive effect on teacher self-efficacy and self-confidence (Sinclair, Naizer, &
Ledbetter, 2011). The research emphasizes the importance of content knowledge as a component of professional development. Becoming comfortable with content knowledge in academic subjects areas was a determining factor for teachers to be more effective at providing instruction for students. Because the teachers had a firmer grasp on the specific knowledge of their discipline, this knowledge was then carried over and applied in their teaching.

**Long-term and On-going Professional Development**

The length of professional development is another important factor that impacts effectiveness. One-day professional development sessions did not have positive effects on teachers, while ongoing and long-term professional development did. The research demonstrate that professional development that takes place on a continuing basis, and over a longer period of time, shows positive results for teacher behavior (Dingle, et al. 2011, Donnelly, et al. 2011 and Sinclair, et al. 2011). The continuous support provides teachers with continuing opportunities to test out what they learn and to fine-tune their practice as they keep learning. What further distinguishes long-term professional development from one-day sessions is that long-term programs allow participants to form close, professional relationships; intensive relationships between teachers in the professional development program deepen the professional community of the participant and create a “renewable professional growth cycle” that teachers value and
pursue (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). Educators that participated in year-long professional development engaged in action research and collaborative inquiry throughout the year to find solutions to problems; participants reported that year-long programs were the most helpful form of professional development that they received from their schools and school districts (Gimbel, Lopes, & Greer, 2011).

Personal Motivation and Interests of Teachers

Teacher motivation and interest in the topics of professional development play a role in teacher learning. There is a difference between being assigned to attend professional development meetings, and being able to choose your own professional development opportunities. Teacher expectations for professional development can create tensions that negatively affect receptiveness of material learned in professional development sessions (Nipper et al., 2011). When professional development sessions do not meet the expectations of participants, teachers leave with negative attitudes towards the material.

Personal beliefs also impact how a teacher responds to professional development. Teachers bring their beliefs and experiences with them when they walk into professional development sessions. If the information and focus of the professional developments falls into the beliefs and experiences of the teacher, then they are more likely to internalize the
professional development and incorporate it into their teaching (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Teachers that are highly motivated by their belief in the importance of a particular training make the most significant improvement and will incorporate what they learn into their practice (Dingle, 2011). When teachers have the opportunity to attend professional development in which they are interested or motivated, there is a higher success rate. It is also of interest to note that teachers also like to know what to expect from their professional development sessions. If their expectations are not met, teachers are likely to ignore the information presented because it was not what they wanted.

**Practical and Hands-on Approaches in Professional Development**

There is a relationship between the practical, hands-on opportunities that teachers engage in during professional development and their growth. Teachers are more likely to benefit from professional development sessions that encourage them to take activities back to their respective schools to try them out. This strategy provides teachers with opportunities for reflective practice through practical, real-life opportunities that try out what they learned at their professional development sessions (Nipper et al., 2011; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Participants appreciate the opportunity to try out new things and to come back and to share what works well and what doesn’t (Sinclair et al., 2011). Teachers thrive when they are given the chance to experiment with
a concrete idea that they learned. The “real life” application of professional development sessions has a significant impact on teacher learning (Gilles et al., 2010; Gimbel et al., 2011; Pella, 2011). Functional activities provide teachers with the opportunity to try something new and different while still getting support from a structured program. This creates a safety net for teachers, which in turn makes them more willing to take risks.

**Contextual Understanding of Working Conditions**

The final component for effective professional development relates to the context and culture of individual schools that make up the school climate. Various approaches to professional development are usually seen as pure entities that have the ability to help teachers no matter what their circumstances; this perspective is limited in that it ignores the everyday reality of individual schools. When a teacher notices aspects of the professional development that do not fit into the philosophy or practice of the school, this leads to a tension within the teacher that usually will result in the teacher ignoring what they learned because they recognize that they are unable to implement the suggestions (Nipper et al., 2011). Professional development is not effective when a teacher feels that there is a conflict between the information that they are receiving and the rules or culture of their work environment. In a reversed situation, professional development is most effective when it acknowledges and accounts for context and school climate. Professional
development that takes place among colleagues and within schools has positive effects on teacher development. Because teachers from the same school are aware of the contextual issues that can be barriers, or conduits, for growth, they are more adept at making decisions that can lead to change and to grow as teachers (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

**The Road to Participatory Action Research**

Because typical approaches to professional development have been ineffective, it was necessary to review the research to find the most common attributes of effective professional development. If each of the five previously discussed attributes of effective professional development have the capacity to positively impact learning individually, then it follows that choosing a professional development strategy that incorporates most or all of the attributes will have compounded positive effects. In developing a plan for the most effective professional development in multicultural education, an approach that would incorporate content knowledge delivery, long-term meetings and supports, personal interest and opportunities for hands-on application into a local and individualized setting would likely flourish.

At this juncture in my research, I realized that the missing link between multicultural education and professional development was the social context. Upon reflection on James Banks’s *Dimensions of Multicultural Education*, it became clear that the hardest component to
achieve is the empowering school culture and context. For effective professional development to take place, the context and culture of a school are pivotal in determining if changes suggested during professional development sessions are going to be implemented in a school. This question of whether or not changes from professional development take root in schools coincides with the phenomenon of teachers from accredited teacher training programs not being able to use what they learned about multicultural education in their schools. The context of public schools not accepting multicultural education mirrors how professional development cannot take root if the school context will not allow it.

The best approach to teaching multicultural curriculum and employing multicultural pedagogy would therefore be a local school approach. An effective professional development program for multicultural education would have to take place at the local school level in order to gain a full understanding of the social context and structure of the school, and to be able to make changes to the culture and structure that would allow multicultural education to be implemented. Participatory Action Research (PAR) emerges as an approach that encompasses all the characteristics of effective professional development and bringing about change.

The use of PAR as a form of professional development for teachers has been studied recently and has produced some promising results. Dymond et al. (2006) used PAR at the high school level to support the science department in developing an inclusive curriculum that would
allow special education students access to a mainstream general education science curriculum.

Using PAR, the science department was able to adjust the curriculum, instruction and assessments in order to achieve their goal of inclusive education. Brydon-Miller & Maguire (2009) and James (2006) also explored using PAR as the format for having schools address issues of homelessness and economic disadvantage that were specific to their local communities. PAR provided the structure and forum for schools to be able to address areas of interest and need that were important to them (Guishard, 2009; Hutzel, 2007).

This dissertation studies the impact that professional development in the form of participatory action research can have on teachers working at the school level to implement multicultural education. While other forms of professional development have been unsuccessful in leveraging changes in multicultural educational practices, PAR has the best chance to succeed where other forms of professional development have not. Because participatory action research requires members to be self-reflective, it can create opportunities where members will be able to self-identify the obstacles that are keeping them from being successful. Through participatory action research, members also have the opportunity to test out home grown solutions to their problems and to investigate the impact of those interventions on their curriculum, pedagogy and school culture.
Chapter 4

Methodology

No amount of research will be able to tell us, in any definitive way, “what works” in different (and always somewhat idiosyncratic) contexts. Furthermore, we have suggested that even if theory is introduced to mediate between research and practice as the authors of Scientific Research in Education propose, theory, by definition, is general whereas decision making in schools requires attending to (and finding ways to accommodate) idiosyncratic contextual factors. Thus, research findings and any theory generated from these findings can play only a heuristic role in educational decision making: Researchers of any sort can, at best, provide only conceptual tools to guide thinking about what to do in particular settings at particular points in time; they cannot provide anything like formulas or recipes for practice that can be mindlessly implemented.

(Donmoyer & Galloway, 2010)

The central focus of this research is to investigate the impact that professional development in multicultural education can have on a school’s teaching staff through the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR). As stated above, this study is the intersection of my investigations in the areas of multicultural education, professional development for teachers, and Participatory Action Research. Multicultural education is the content, teachers are the target population, and participatory action research is the process for which the content can be transmitted and learned by the target population. The desired outcome is to develop a teaching staff that possesses a deep understanding of multicultural education and that is able to reach a higher level of praxis that embodies the values and goals of multicultural education.
The primary research question is: How effective is Participatory Action Research as a form of professional development for developing multicultural education in an elementary school setting? Since praxis involves both theoretical knowledge and pedagogical skill to implement that theoretical knowledge, this dissertation will study and evaluate the level of knowledge that participants develop about multicultural education, as well as the manner in which the participants deploy this knowledge in their classrooms and at the school level. Teacher knowledge and teacher practice will be evaluated using James Banks’s *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* to determine the level of learning and transference achieved during the study. It is my hypothesis that because PAR contains the components of effective professional development embedded in its process, it will prove to be an effective form of professional development for teachers in multicultural education.

I have also identified secondary research questions for this study. In the area of multicultural education, I will gauge the extent to which teachers look to multicultural education theory to inform their practice. Is multicultural theory necessary to create a strong multicultural curriculum? I will use multicultural education theory to analyze the created curriculum to determine if it embodies multicultural values, either consciously or subconsciously. In the area of Participatory Action Research, I would like to discover how this type of professional development facilitates conversations around multicultural education. Will PAR be able to
promote the desired effect, and if it does, why are the changes on teacher teams more profound than any other type of professional development?

To summarize, my research will examine the impact that professional development in the form of PAR will have on a team of teachers looking to develop a multicultural curriculum, how PAR facilitates conversations around sensitive topics, and how teachers use multicultural education theory to inform throughout the process.

**Research Overview**

This study was conducted in a New York City public elementary school where I, the principal investigator, was employed as a teacher. Eleven teachers were recruited from the school’s faculty to form part of the Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research (MEPAR) group. As members of MEPAR, we investigated issues around multicultural education at our school, and created an action plan to address the multicultural needs of the school community. This study was conducted in two phases: a research phase and an action phase. During the research phase, committee members met and followed a participatory action research methodology to explore and discuss the needs of the school and issues around multicultural education that were relevant. During the action phase, the focus of the MEPAR group shifted their scope to creating an action plan that addressed the needs discovered in the research phase. The MEPAR group met two to
three Thursdays a month from August 2011 through June 2012. Data for this study was collected through interviews, audio recordings, reflective journals and field notes. The data was used to answer questions about the effectiveness of PAR and the extent that multicultural education theory is used.

Qualitative data was collected in the form of interviews, audio recordings, meeting transcripts, field notes and reflection journals. Participants were interviewed individually before the first MEPAR meeting and at the conclusion of the study. Field notes were taken during meetings and after meeting to summarize. In addition to field notes, audio recordings were made and transcribed for analysis. MEPAR members were encouraged to keep reflective journals, but none of the participants did; instead some participants took notes on sheets of paper, but did not submit them to me. I also kept a reflective journal separate from my field notes in order to keep track of my own thoughts as the study progressed. I did this in recognition of my dual role as participant and observer in this study, which I will discuss in detail later.

Choosing the Research Site

I created a Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research (MEPAR) team at the school where I was employed as a teacher. This school was chosen as the site for my research because faculty members had expressed concern over how this school, at the time in its third
year of existence, was going to handle multicultural issues that were beginning to arise in the
school and community. This need was discussed at faculty and grade meetings, and as a doctoral
student studying multicultural education, I volunteered to lead the initiative that would study
multicultural education at our school. At that time I was also reading research on professional
development and was developing my theory on participatory action research as a form of
professional development for multicultural education. I approached the school’s principal with a
research proposal for using PAR as a way to investigate the multicultural issues at our school and
as a way to provide professional development to teachers in multicultural education. The
principal agreed to the plan and granted me permission to conduct my doctoral dissertation
research at our school.

The decision to conduct my research at the school where I was employed was not done
out of convenience; instead the decision was made because the school matched the conditions for
participatory action research to take place. Firstly, there was a need: teachers at the school
recognized that they had been avoiding discussions and making decisions about cultural and
racial issues that had been surfacing from families and staff members. As a new school, Queens
Multicultural Elementary School¹ (QMES) was developing curricula and norms to regulate our

¹ Queens Multicultural Elementary School (QMES) is a pseudonym for the school.
school culture; it was noted that we were not serving the cultural and social needs of the students and families in our culturally and racially diverse school.

It became commonplace for teachers to bring up questions about curriculum and pedagogy related to culture during grade meetings, faculty conferences and inquiry team meetings. These questions and issues continued to pile up without teachers coming to any decisions. The request for more time and attention to be paid to multicultural education finally came out of the social studies inquiry team, a team of which I was a member. After spending a year discussing and developing a curriculum for grades K-3, the team came to the conclusion that we could not continue to write a curriculum until faculty members across the school had deeper discussions about multicultural education and developed a common understanding and language around multicultural education. It was at this point that I, as the social studies inquiry team leader, volunteered to lead the initiative and approached the principal for permission to use the school as the site for my research.

In addition to the need for professional development in multicultural education, Queens Multicultural was also chosen because it was a school that followed a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model at faculty, grade-level and inquiry team meetings. As a school that following the PLC model, Queens Multicultural encompassed an established staff culture where members worked together to identify the curricular, pedagogical, and operational needs of the
school. Since the faculty members already had the PLC structure in place that was based on collaborative work and curricular problem solving, Queens Multicultural was an excellent candidate to extend the collaborative PLC framework into the problem solving and research based practice of PAR and to investigate my research question.

There is a clear overlap between the PLC format for conducting inquiry and the Participatory Action Research methodology. A PLC group conducts inquiry that is a combination of case study and action research methodologies. During inquiry, teachers look at data (test scores) and/or student work to look for trends and patterns. Based on the evidence gathered from the data and/or student work, the inquiry group develops a plan to target an area of need and to provide an intervention to remedy the problem. Over time, the inquiry group continues to gather data to monitor the progress of the intervention and to determine if the intervention is successful in making improvements. If the intervention is successful, the findings are shared with the staff, and the intervention becomes part of the best practices that the entire school staff is expected to implement.

Like inquiry, PAR is a problem-solving endeavor rooted in the research process, requiring evidence and data to draw conclusions. What sets PAR apart from inquiry are the embedded liberation and self-efficacy lenses that drive the process (Feagan & Vera, 2001; Hutzel, 2007). In other words, there is no real methodological difference between inquiry and
participatory action research; what makes them truly different is that a group conducting PAR is empowered by the idea that they are sharing the responsibility of developing a solution to a shared problem that they are invested in solving as both a social community and a research community. The differences are thus ontological and epistemological; it is the way that the group views the research process and uses the research that makes inquiry different from PAR.

Methodological, Epistemological and Ontological Frameworks

While this dissertation research seems very straightforward in its attempt to determine the effectiveness of PAR as a form of professional development in multicultural education for teachers, there are actually different layers of research methods and philosophies at work in this research. At its most basic level, and in order to gain approval from the NYCDOE, CUNY Graduate Center and Queens College institutional review boards, this study was conceptualized as an action research project. I had developed the hypothesis that PAR would be an effective form of professional development, and I tested this hypothesis by implementing PAR (independent variable) with a group of teachers and then collected data in order to determine the results (outcome) of the intervention.

Because this study was conducted in a single school with no control group for comparison, it would fall under the category of action and evaluation research (Picciano, 2004).
In the broadest sense, this is an action research project, but there are also elements of case study, ethnography, autoethnography, and of course, Participatory Action Research embedded in this work, which complicates the epistemological and methodological designation of this research as action research. This research represents not only an intersection of disciplines, but is also an intersection of methodologies; I would classify this as a mixed-methods study. Due to the nature and complexity of the topic and the questions that were being investigated, it became necessary to borrow elements from different traditions of research (Donmoyer & Galloway, 2010; Feagin & Vera, 2001a; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

The parameters of a typical action research study involve applying a predetermined action or intervention that is monitored to observe the impact of said intervention. But the use of participatory action research in the study prohibited me from having every step outlined before the MEPAR group met. Participatory action research requires all members in the group to play a role in investigating the problem and figuring out ways to try and solve the problem through collaborative work and dialogue. To an outsider reading about this study, it seems clear that PAR is the intervention that is being tested, but from the insider perspective of the MEPAR group that is not the case. The insiders of the MEPAR group understand that they have been charged with the task of investigating multicultural education at Queens Multicultural to attempt to understand
what is happening at the school level and to develop solutions and approaches to make improvements in the curriculum and in teaching strategies.

This situation brought complexity to the study because there were actually two studies proceeding simultaneously: the study I was conducting as an outside researcher that was interested in the effectiveness of PAR as professional development in multicultural education, and the PAR study I was facilitating and leading with my MEPAR members to investigate how we could identify our needs for multicultural education and develop solutions for improvement. This duality posed a challenge for me because I was both an insider and an outsider for the entire duration of the study, always having to think of and account for the integrity of each type of study. Fortunately, this challenge also brought opportunities as well; one such opportunity was the ability to record my personal and professional reflections as part of the data collected. As both an insider and outsider in this research, I had a unique perspective that merited being shared. I have dedicated a separate chapter at the end of the study to add this autoethnographic layer to my study. I have chosen not to integrate it into the body of the action research study because it would “contaminate” my study to make it less “objective”, but also because it is a unique perspective that merits being shared.

It is also worth noting here that the outsider/insider terminology that I have described above does not just relate to the two layers of my research, but to the epistemological and
ontological difference of the knowledge and perspective that the researcher brings and uses to conduct the study (outsider), and the knowledge and experience that the participants draw from to develop a solution to their problem (insider). The New York City public school teachers at Queens Multicultural have *indigenous knowledge* about teaching and learning that they have used to solve everyday pedagogical problems and issues that arise at schools on a daily basis (Kincheloe & Semali, 1999). MEPAR has been designed to take advantage of that knowledge in hopes of finding solutions that align with the values and the reality of life at Queens Multicultural.

This is particularly important when it comes to answering the research question about the ways in which teachers use theory to inform their practice and to questions about how I chose to facilitate the MEPAR group. Out of respect for the *indigenous knowledge* of the MEPAR group, and for the integrity of the PAR model of shared responsibility, it was important for me as the outsider/insider not to push my outsider research agenda onto the group. I limited bringing in my “outsider” perspectives to the group to discussions and questions about the PAR methodology we were using, and when I was asked to address specific questions regarding my research project. I will further reflect on this choice in the autoethnography section at the end of the dissertation.
Analysis of the data took place throughout the study and after the study was completed. Both James’s Banks *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* and Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2003) were used to analyze the data and to make shifts in the direction of the study. Grounded theory was used by both myself as the primary researcher, and by the MEPAR group to guide us in our actions. While the focus for MEPAR was always to achieve improvements in multicultural education, the path to this improvement was never known and next steps had to be discovered by using grounded theory.

**Recruitment and Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited from the teaching faculty at Queens Multicultural. I created and distributed a flyer to all teachers and invited them to an information session. At the information session I gave a brief presentation of my research agenda and took questions from the attendees in order to enhance the transparency of my research and to address any possible concerns from teachers. Copies of participant consent forms were distributed, and teachers who wished to participate in the study were instructed to bring the completed forms to our first meeting session. Teachers were made aware that their participation was voluntary.

Participants in this study did not receive any compensation from me. However, due to the nature of the work that we would be doing in this study, I was able to secure a professional
development allocation from the school’s principal. I would provide, lead and facilitate ongoing professional development for teachers in multicultural education for the MEPAR group, and they would receive per session compensation from the school’s budget for their time. Principals in New York City are required to provide professional development for teachers and are required to allocate funds towards professional development for teachers. There was a mutual benefit for both the school and myself in this study; the school secured professional development for its teachers at no cost for my services, while I was given permission to conduct my research at the school. Teachers also received a benefit from this study, as they gained access to professional development that would take place at their own school.

The risks of participating in this study were minimal. Being a part of a school committee is a normal and usual practice for teachers and faculty. Serving on the Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research (MEPAR) committee was no different than serving on any other committee in a school, such as School Safety or Curriculum Committee. The only differences were that the proceedings of each MEPAR meeting were recorded, interviews were conducted and a dissertation was published. Steps were taken to ensure the privacy of committee members. No participants are mentioned by name, and the location of the school will not be divulged. Pseudonyms for all participants and for the school were crafted to ensure privacy.
Individual interviews, journal entries, video/audio recordings and field notes are confidential and are stored in a locked cabinet; only the PI and his dissertation advisor have access to these documents. The results of the MEPAR group have been shared and made available to the school community, the NYCDOE and to the CUNY Graduate Center.
Chapter 5

Documenting the Journey

Much qualitative field research, such as participant observation or unstructured in-depth interviews, allows those being studied to generate or shape many of the issues and questions raised in the research— and, often, the direction in which the research proceeds. In this way, qualitative research frequently entails understanding how people think, act and react. Qualitative researchers can garner new ideas and theories from listening carefully to their subjects’ questions and interpretations, many of which could not be anticipated in advance of the research. (Feagan & Vera, 2001)

As mentioned previously, Queens Multicultural is a new school that was opened in September 2008. As this study began, Queens Multicultural had just ended its third year and was starting its fourth full year in 2011-2012. In this third year the staff members decided that they needed to focus more on multicultural education, and this study was conceived to assist in that endeavor. While following all of the guidelines for a proper research as set forth by the IRBs of both CUNY and the New York City Department of Education, due to the nature of the origins of the study, the participants had already self-selected for involvement. Once I received final clearance from the NYCDOE in the summer of 2011 to proceed with my research, the group was ready to begin work. That summer, eleven teachers that were dedicated to bringing multicultural education to Queens Multicultural embarked on their yearlong journey and participation in the Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research (MEPAR) group.
The eleven teachers that participated in MEPAR represented a wide cross-section of the teaching staff. We had representation from every grade and from teachers in different license/certification areas. The majority of the participants were white, but that also matched the make-up of the teaching staff at large. Out of a teaching staff of twenty-seven, twenty-four are racially white. Of those twenty-four racially white teachers, four are Jewish, four are Latina, nine are Italian-American, one is Irish and one is a Southerner from Virginia. The remaining five racially white teachers are of mixed European ancestry, including Greek, Latino, Italian, Jewish, German and Irish. The three non-white teaching staff members are Haitian, Guyanese and Filipino.

The teachers who participated in MEPAR did not reflect the same level of experience with multicultural education and did not share the exact same reasons for wanting to be in the MEPAR group. While every teacher wanted to be directly involved with bringing multicultural education to the school, they did not have a common understanding of what multicultural education was, nor did they have a clear vision of what their personal contribution to the group would be. In essence, the only common thread amongst the MEPAR group was the belief that multicultural education was important. This common belief in the value of multicultural education bound the group together early on, but also led to other challenges down the road when making decisions about a shared action plan.
Meet the MEPARians

Deena is an eleven-year veteran teacher. She worked with the principal to develop the proposal for Queens Multicultural. Deena was part of the founding team when the school started in September 2008. As an educator and a colleague, Deena is a white, thirty-three year-old, liberal teacher who is very socially conscious and evidences a deep interest in social justice and providing opportunities for underprivileged students. She worked in two different inner city schools before coming to Queens Multicultural. Deena was a member of the social studies curriculum committee and played a large role in identifying and vocalizing the need for our school to address multicultural education. Deena cultural background is a mix of Irish and French Canadian.

Deena decided to join MEPAR because she “enjoy[s] discussing big ideas and [wanted] to be a part of something larger”. In more concrete terms, she also expressed a desire to “to know about best practices; things I could be doing better.” Multicultural education was important to her because it is “important for the students, [and] we have a very white staff. We need to understand our own prejudices. We might be leaving a whole population out because of the way we were taught. We and they (students) need to know our biases”.

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Marina is a newly tenured teacher in her fourth year of teaching. Like Deana, Marina was also a founding member of Queens Multicultural and started her teaching career at age twenty-two at Queens Multicultural. Marina had recently earned her B.A. degree when she was hired. Over her first three years teaching, Marina developed an interest in social studies and curriculum development. Marina, Deana and I became core members of our social studies curriculum development team. Through this process Marina saw the importance of multicultural education and advocated for the staff to have discussions about our stance on multicultural education.

“We’ve had thoughtful conversations [about multicultural education] and have pushed for it, [but] what do we recognize and celebrate?”

Marina’s interest in multicultural education came from her experiences in her elementary school; she is a second generation Italian-American who grew up in Brooklyn. While she recognizes that she “was sheltered at home, school exposed me to different people. My experiences living in a diverse neighborhood with a school that focused on community and a global perspective stayed with me.” As a middle schooler, Marina moved to Long Island where “kids don’t have the language to discuss difference”. Marina feels that multicultural education can give students “exposure and the awareness to recognize differences and commonalities in class, school and in the neighborhood; and to appreciate [that].”
Marlo is an eighth year veteran teacher and literacy specialist; she is thirty-four years-old.

Marlo’s professional interests are primarily in curriculum and literature for students. She feels very strongly in the power of literature to “expose kids and families” to new concepts and material. Marlo has “a passion for culture and learning”, and for bringing literacy and ideas to her students. She feels that it is important for students to “make [their] own judgments, and not those of their family or their community’. [They need to find their] own perspective because they don’t know about the world yet. Marlo has a strong belief in the power of knowledge and feels that it is her duty to bring knowledge, in the form of literature/ literacy to students so that they can become informed. Marlo is coming to the multicultural education group because she believes that giving students knowledge is “a good opportunity to come by bias and racism.”

Marlow herself is a multicultural person. She considers herself a “Mutt”, as opposed to a “full-breed”, because her family background is a mix of cultures. Her family is Italian, Catholic, and Jewish. Marlo has shared with us that her grandmother was Jewish, but her Italian Catholic mother-in-law took her under her wing and taught her how to cook, clean and raise her children as Catholic. Embracing cultural and religious differences was a part of her family upbringing. A lot of Marlo’s passion and interest in multicultural education also comes from her being a mother; she sees things from the perspective of a parent and wants her students to have that exposure that she tries to provide for her sons. Marlo’s children are also multicultural and have a
Latino father; she sees the beauty of diversity in her community and wants to help others see this beauty.

Vincent is one of only three male teachers at Queens Multicultural. He joined the school only six months ago at age twenty-six, but has a couple of years of experience as a substitute teacher on Long Island as a physical education teacher. As the only physical education teacher at the school, Vincent has every child as a student and knows every single student in the school.

Vincent’s interest in multicultural education stems from his growing awareness that he has had very little experience with different types of people. “I’ve had experiences with Trinidadians and Spanish speaking people, [but] I never spoke to anyone from Guyana before.” Vincent expressed that he feels multicultural education is “good for us to know as teachers. To make people aware of what they do and say to parents and in interactions with students.” He sees the need for multicultural education in his own life as a professional and recognizes that he does not know enough about the people in the community that her serves.

I would characterize Vincent as an intuitive anthropologist; Vincent loves to watch people and talk to people that are different from him. He likes to “figure people out” and will often put himself in situations where he tries to help with difficult or irate parents. He wants for “everyone to understand each other [and to] feel comfortable.” Vincent’s interests in multicultural education come from his own upbringing. Vincent is first generation Italian-
American; his parents emigrated from Italy in the 1970s, and he was always aware of how his parents were different from other families. Instead of being ashamed of them, he understood that his parents were the way they were because of their experiences and culture. This drove Vincent to be attracted to meeting people that were different from him and trying to figure out what makes them tick.

Jane is a 9th year teacher and has been at Queens Multicultural for three years. She has previously taught in other city schools, as well as schools in the more affluent city of Yonkers. Jane is a young, 32 year-old, white, Jewish teacher that is interested in helping students “see beyond themselves”. From her point of view, it not enough for students to just be “surrounded” by people that are different, but to be “exposed” to different cultures; although classes are filled with children that are different, that proximity is not sufficient to bridge cultural gaps. Jane feels really strongly that we “need to teach about other cultures, traditions, [and] differences [in order to create] connections and experiences.”

Jane defines herself as being multicultural; although she is Jewish, she was raised in Ecuador and attended school in Cuenca from elementary school through high school. This experience of living in a foreign country and being immersed in a culture, language, and religion different from her own had a real impact on Jane. This physical exposure, and close encounter with culture that she experienced as a child was so powerful, that as a teacher she believes in
creating experiences that students will remember. She wants children to ‘become excited’ when learning about different groups that “are not represented in their class”. While Jane feels strongly about creating these experiences for students, she is also very concerned with how these ideas can be taught. “I’m worried about time. Will this be one more thing? Or will it be part of the curriculum?” As a teacher, Jane is very organized and structured; she is concerned that she will not be able to accomplish her teaching duties if multicultural education is adopted at our school “in addition” to what is already expected.

Shelly is a second year special education teacher at Queens Multicultural. Prior to this, she was a teacher’s assistant for six years in different schools on Long Island. In her six years of experience, she noticed that multicultural education “was not a focus, [and] was not part of school culture.” Although Shelly had had some experience with multicultural literacy through her Master’s program, she notes that she “has not been able to apply [it], either here or anywhere. When she heard about this group, she wanted to be a part of it because she feels multicultural education “has to come from somewhere”. She wants students to see how “everyone is different, have students relate to it, and increase acceptance”.

Shelly is a twenty-seven year-old white, Catholic women; she is 3rd and 4th generation American of Italian and German ancestry. Shelly’s own isolation in her upbringing from people that were different from her drive her to want for students to “learn the differences of where
people come from, their traditions, and how they run their lives; to learn to accept those
differences and that it’s OK.” Shelly wants to transmit these understanding to her students, but is
unsure of herself when it comes to her knowledge of culture and of multicultural education.
Shelly sees the MEPAR group as a source of professional development; an opportunity to learn
about multicultural education and multicultural practices. She feels strongly that she “needs to do
a lot of research. To read it and come in and talk about how to apply it.” Shelly’s goal in this
group is to “do a lot of listening before contributing” because she feels that she is a novice in this
area.

Nasreen is a forty year-old woman of color from Guyana; she is married and has three
college-aged children. Nasreen is a first year teacher at Queens Multicultural, but is not new to
the school. Nasreen has been a substitute teacher at this school and several nearby New York
City schools for the past three years. She is certified in childhood education, has a Master’s in
Literacy, and is also pursuing ESL certification. Nasreen wants to be part of this group because
“the committee ensures that student needs are met”. She feels that “teachers should have
knowledge [in order to be] fair to the kids”. Nasreen wants to be part of the group that will bring
uniformity to the school. She feels strongly that “creating a curriculum that touches everyone
will not meet the needs of the students. Content needs to be incorporated and not just touched on
[in order to achieve] inclusiveness”.

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Nasreen’s own cultural background and experiences as a Guyanese woman influence her decision to be a part of the MEPAR group. “Back home [Guyana] is multicultural. I can bring where I’m coming from as an immigrant; My understanding of Guyanese, Caribbean, and Islamic culture. Nasreen is one of the only three teachers of color at the school, and the only person of Muslim faith. Nasreen wears a headscarf every day and stands out as a Muslim teacher in the community. Although she is from Guyana and does not speak Arabic, children and families from other Muslim nations at our school are drawn to her. It is well known at our school that after Nasreen started working at our school, a handful of girls from Pakistan and Bangladesh started to wear their headscarves to school, as they felt comfortable doing so because Nasreen was their teacher.

Belle is twenty-seven year-old black, Haitian woman in her 6th year of teaching. Prior to coming to Queens Multicultural, Belle taught in Brooklyn in a predominantly black neighborhood, and chose to move to this school because it was in a more heterogeneous school. Belle is very community orientated; one of her long-term goals is to run an after-school program in order to give students somewhere to go that is safe and reinforces schooling. Belle’s focus on building community stems from her deep faith, and from her experiences in her own church community. It is clear that Belle has a deep sense of pride for her Haitian culture; she got that
from being part of her church community, and wants for students to be a part of something that “uplifts and builds pride”.

Belle’s vision for multicultural education is based upon two significant experiences in her life; one is her church, and the other is her participation in a project where she was immersed in Sikh culture at her university. Before participating in this project, she had a strong sense of identity, and then through this experience she was exposed to a completely different faith and culture; she saw great value in this experience that allowed her to “have respect for Sikh people and to understand where they were coming from”. Belle believes that “it’s important to expose, understand, tolerate, and accept. [There would be] less problems and less bullying. Being able to find out about different cultures, and find out that they belong.” Belle believes that as a school, we need to showcase different cultures and provide experiences, activities and presentations to both share the cultures of the students at the school, and to expose students to cultures that they do not know anything about.

Pat is a twenty-nine year-old white, 3rd generation Italian-American woman. She is an early childhood special education teacher, and prior to coming to Queens Multicultural two years ago, she taught for three years each at a group home and a preschool. When it comes to multicultural education, Pat feels, “I don’t know much about it. Just the multicultural dolls I would have in dramatic play in the preschool, but that’s it.” This inexperience with multicultural
education concerns Pat because of the “diversity here. Every year the community changes”, and she feels that she is unequipped to address the cultural diversity that is reflected in the school community. At her previous schools, she worked with students with severe disabilities and culture was not an issue; at Queens Multicultural her students exhibit milder disabilities and receive a general education curriculum. For the past two years of her career, Pat has been facing the challenge of how to work with culturally diverse students, and is eager to learn.

Pat joins the MEPAR group in search of professional development and guidance. As a special education teacher, Pat is used to taking curricula and modifying it to allow her students with disabilities to learn the same content and standards as their general education counterparts. What Pat is looking to find through this group is a “structure and framework. The committee will bring the school together; it will create a program, curriculum and vision [in order for teachers to] have the same goal.” Pat wants to bring multicultural education to her students, but she does not have the knowledge or expertise. Her expertise is in curriculum modification, and not in curriculum development, so she is looking for clarity as to what she should be doing when it comes to multicultural education. What Pam brings to the group is the lens of a special education teacher that is able to think of how to best teach students different concepts, once the concepts have already been decided upon.
Katerina is twenty-nine year-old white, 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Italian-American woman; she is a Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) and has been at Queens Multicultural for two years. Prior to coming to this school, Katerina worked at a hospital in Queens as an SLP as well. Working at a hospital and at a school in a diverse community has heightened her awareness to the importance of culture. “I want to become more educated on the topic. I work with different types of students. We teach in a diverse place. We need to be aware of etiquettes.” As an SLP, Katerina has to tap into how individual students learn best, and she has learned that “different cultures have different ways of learning and working with each other.” She feels that teachers need to have this knowledge about students and their cultures so that they can “adapt, integrate and conduct outreach”.

Katerina comes to MEPAR as a strict practitioner. She is someone who gets the job done, and sees things in terms of outcomes and products. Katerina is a no nonsense kind of person that always stays focused on the end result, and in this case, the end result she sees for MEPAR is “getting teachers and students to become aware multiculturalism, how to interact with one another, and how to be respectful.” What Katerina hopes to get from this experience is to learn more about other cultures, and wants to contribute her experience of having worked with people from different cultures. Another reason why Katerina joined MEPAR is her desire to build community and to be helpful to the school community. It is well know that Katerina chose to
move to a school setting because she wanted to feel a part of a community of colleagues that worked together, something that she did not have at her previous job. I would characterize Katerina’s desire to be in MEPAR as having to do less with her interest in multicultural education per se than her desire to be a helpful colleague to the other members.

Tammy is a twenty-eight year-old white woman from Long Island; she is of Italian and Irish ancestry. Tammy is a 4th year teacher and teaches third grade; she came to Queens Multicultural two years ago from a predominantly black school in Brooklyn where she taught 6th grade for two years. Tammy recounts how she felt discriminated against for being white, and how students, parents and other teachers treated her poorly because she was not Black like them. Now that she’s at Queens Multicultural, Tammy recognizes how she doesn’t “really know what multicultural education is because [she’s] never been somewhere diverse.” When she was teaching in Brooklyn, all of her students were black, so there was no diversity in terms of culture; everyone came from the same neighborhood, and had shared experiences within that neighborhood. Tammy didn’t have to worry about diversity in Brooklyn, but at this school she feels there is a great need to “talk about different cultures, and making sure that everyone is treated equally and respectfully.”
Tammy’s main reason for joining MEPAR comes from her experience with students in her class last year. She noticed from reading books during her character education period “children’s perceptions of black people and the other handful of black students in the school”. Although her particular group of students had been together for three years, and they were familiar with each other, they still didn’t know about each other’s culture; there was teasing and giggling, and that didn’t sit right with Tammy. Tammy saw that they had limited experience with people that were different from their community and realized that she wanted to expose students to “the arts, music and foods of other cultures [to see] their differences and how they are special.” I believe Tammy’s desire to be part of MEPAR stems from her own negative experiences at her previous school; having had the personal experience of being discriminated against makes her want to prevent that from happening in her classroom. Tammy has a very emotive personality, and she wants for all of her students to feel comfortable in her class. Tammy is very excited to be a part of MEPAR; she want to learn about resources and different perspectives, but has one major reservation. Tammy wants “the time to carry multicultural education out, and for it to be part of our everyday instead of being isolated.”
Establishing a Baseline

After interviewing everyone, it was important to bring everyone together so that group members would have an opportunity to share and hear from one another about their ideas concerning multicultural education. Everyone in the group knew that they were to be a part of the multicultural education group, but they did not share a common understanding of what that meant. The Multicultural Education Participatory Action Research group did not have any established guidelines or set purpose except to address multicultural education at Queens Multicultural. And so the group began by trying to define and establish what multicultural education meant for them. In order to share their ideas and come to explore their thoughts about multicultural education before bringing in theoretical texts, we engaged in an activity. Every teacher was asked to write down their personal definition of “multicultural”, and the goal that they perceive multicultural education is supposed to meet.

Jimmy: What I don’t want you to do is to write what you think other people want to hear. Just really at its core, what do you think multicultural education is? After you have finished your definition, I would like you to write down what is the ultimate goal or purpose of multicultural education on the back of the page.

After 10 minutes have lapsed.

Jimmy: What I would like for us to do, is to go around in a circle. We’ll go around the table for us to read out what we wrote, and then if anyone feels like they want to add something like how to explain the reasoning, then you may. The whole point of this… everyone knows where they are
coming from. So, part of our first major goal in what we are doing: to understand where everyone is coming from before we can actually build towards where we are going to go. So does anyone want to start? Nasreen?

Nasreen: Short. Multicultural education is a curriculum that provides opportunities to explore groups that are different than their own. The goal: This will develop an understanding of the culture different to theirs.

Deena: Multicultural education is examining what we teach and how we teach it to include various perspectives. So one example would be: read aloud the various races, ethnicities backgrounds families and religion. And its goal would be to build tolerance, knowledgeable school communities where all could feel represented.

Jane: Exposing students to a variety of different cultures or traditions from other places foreign today. The goal is exposing students to cultures they are unfamiliar with.

Tammy: Multicultural education is when students of different backgrounds… I didn’t finish. And then I had cultures, races, and abilities are treated equally. Exposed to each other’s differences. And for the goal, should be exposure, accepting and sharing each other’s differences and cultures.

Shelly: I put multicultural education is teaching students about different cultures. It teaches them how to accept and respect people that are different from them. The goal of multicultural education is to increase the students’ awareness of their own background as well as the background of the people around them and to increase their respect of these differences.

Katerina: Providing educational setting servicing at least two different cultural backgrounds. This also includes that the instructors have some training. Experience working with and including multicultural ideologies into learning. And the goal would be to expose both students and teachers to different cultures in order to accept culture and to understand how they learn. To respect other’s cultural beliefs in the academic setting.

Belle: I wrote multicultural education is the teaching of tolerance, creating the picture of diversity, and to show that everyone is different… Is different but the same as well. The goal is that everyone will be treated fairly, and have a respect of each other’s differences. For example: language, culture, race, gender, etc.
Pat: I put teaching children about others and their own cultures?

Katerina: With a question mark?

Pat: Yeah a question mark. There are question marks at the end because I’m not familiar with multicultural education. So these are my own questions. And to teach tolerance and understanding of different cultures to everyone – that would be the goal.

Vincent: Multicultural education should be a program which takes all aspects of each culture and find a commonality among them.

Marlo: Multicultural education is teaching children of different cultures about different cultures in order to foster tolerance and a true sense of American communities. And the ultimate goal is to give children and families knowledge and exposure of world cultures that would help delete biases.

Marina: Multicultural education is celebrating the differences and commonalities between us; and the goal is to infuse the teaching, and recognition of various cultures, traditions, and celebrations within our school community and around the world.

Jimmy: I said that multicultural education is a systematic approach to educate students about diversity and to show respect for the way people are, and that equity is the purpose. So as we were going around the room, were you surprised at what anyone said? Were there- was there any one that said exactly the same thing you said?

Jane: What I thought what’s interesting is, I wasn’t thinking about... I was just thinking about exposing them as opposed to the tolerance part. Which I think Belle, you said, and Marina you said. I didn’t think of it in that way, but it is important. To teach them for the purpose of tolerance and understanding and equity.

Jimmy: Yes. Any other? Any surprises?

Deena: What the similarities and the differences were between our answers.
Jimmy: When I was interviewing everyone, there were so many... Everyone had a different perspective. I think that in our minds we all kind of know or think we know what it is and what the goal is. But it’s everyone shared here, everyone shared a different aspect of how they view multicultural education. And that’s going to be very important. That’s going to be something that we have to iron out, because if we’re going to be in charge of doing something, Then the product, whatever product that we are going to create, has to reflect those different goals and those different ideas about what people feel multicultural education is. Because I think that everyone has a really valid point of view and has something very interesting to say. And a lot of people surprised me. Was there anything that you realize that you completely left out your definition that you felt was really important that someone else mentioned?

Katerina: I like how Michelle mentioned to not only learn about other cultures, but your own. I guess I assumed that when you learn about another culture you kind of just going to learn about your own. I guess to make it more prominent that you are part of a culture too and that you should learn about your culture first.

Shelly: I didn’t actually think about... Like I wrote about from cultures, but also looking at the ability and genders. It’s not just about the cultures. There’s a lot more, a lot more than I thought. A lot of people mentioned different things.

Jimmy: One thing I was surprised at was how people talked about our population, and how we have to serve our population here. But sometimes, for example, our population is mostly Hispanic. And so on the one hand, It’s part of our job to embrace that and to celebrate that, but then on the flipside that cannot be the only thing we do because we’re going to buy into the continued isolationism. And that’s something that really shocked me as people were speaking because I never thought of it that way. And I think that that’s important to me and it’s important for us because every time someone says something, you can really open up your mind to something different.

In defining multicultural education, the group shared their opinions and showed that they each had a slightly different perspective on what multicultural education entails. Katerina jumped right into giving a concrete, yet idealistic response, where there would be a school with a
least two different cultures, and that the school would provide opportunities to share and learn about the particular cultures in the building. She saw this as a practical solution for providing multicultural education to students in a school. The rest of the group did not address how multicultural education would be accomplished, but instead focused on what they would do in the classroom. Jane, Vincent and Marlo shared how teaching about specific cultures and exposing students to other cultures is what multicultural education is about: giving students the opportunity to see something that is different from themselves. Nasreen also thought of culture, but was very specific in thinking about multicultural education as a curriculum; curriculum is significant for teachers because it lays out what is expected to be taught in the year, and Nasreen is thinking about how multicultural education is a specific set of knowledge that must be taught just like math, science or social studies.

Marina and Vincent mentioned how multicultural education involves pointing out the commonalities between cultures. Tammy, Shelly, Belle, Pat, and Marina all mentioned talking about differences between cultures. Theirs was a different perspective on multicultural education because it entailed students explicitly thinking about how one culture is similar or differs from their own, in relation to specific aspects of culture. An exposure approach assumes that seeing a different culture or being around another culture is enough for students; that proximity in and of itself will lead to an internalization of appreciation for other cultures. Teachers in elementary
school know very well that simple exposure is not a sure fire way of getting students to learn specific concepts. That is why Tammy, Shelly, Belle, Pat, and Marlo extended their definitions to include the teaching respect, tolerance, fairness, equality and acceptance; this shows how these teachers view multicultural education as transformational and not simply as a set of knowledge.

Only Deena directly discussed multicultural education in terms of how it would impact her own personal teaching; most teachers thought about what would be taught, while Deena spoke about how it would be taught. She said, “examining what we teach and how we teach it to include various perspectives.” Deena shows that she has the understanding that not only does the curriculum have to change, but that the teacher must also.

Based on this initial discussion to define multicultural education, this group appeared to display the collective knowledge that, at a basic level, reflects all five components of James Banks’s Dimensions of Multicultural Education. The bulk of the teachers spoke about things related to content integration and prejudice reduction, but Deena’s definition touched on knowledge construction and equity pedagogy. Katerina’s suggestion touched on empowering school culture. Collectively they have a good foundation from which to begin, and even though the group’s ideas are underdeveloped in terms of defining the “fullness” of each dimension, it should be noted that without having had any previous knowledge of James Banks, this group of teachers evidences a solid knowledge base from which to work. Now that we know what this
group of teachers knows about multicultural education, what remains to be seen is how participating in MEPAR affects their thinking and their ideas about multicultural education. Will learning more about the theory deepen their understanding, or will theory not play a role in their development of a plan for multicultural education at the school?

**Identifying Challenges and Goals**

The members of the group share prior knowledge as to the working definition of multicultural education; they also have different ideas and conceptualizations of what the MEPAR group will accomplish, and have concerns as they embark on this journey. Their hopes and concerns are deeply rooted in their day-to-day practice as teachers. As practitioners, teachers are constantly expected to have concrete lesson plans with step-by-step directions, as well as long term goals for instruction; this group exemplifies this duality of teacher practice as they express their hopes and concerns for this project.

*Jane: I don’t want this to be another thing that we have to do. I can’t – It really needs to be planned out, and we need to know from the beginning. Remember when Ms. Samberg brought up the whole cooking thing? I was like I don’t have time for something else. I want it to be a part of the... trying to figure out how we can incorporate the multicultural in what we already have and expanding on that, rather than it just been one more thing that we have to do.*

*Tammy: Like Jane said. I don’t want it to be another thing that we have to do. I feel that it’s really important, and that it’s meaningful to us, and it’s meaningful to the children.*
Shelly: I was talking to Jimmy about this before. I’ve been to other schools before this, and it was always talked about, but it was never ever put into place. And I read a lot when I took a class in literacy that was through multicultural text. I love that part, reading different books and including literature. I feel like I learned a lot, but I have to look back at the resources. I myself feel I would have to read more on cultures and hear more from all of you. I don’t feel like I’m an expert in anyway in any different cultures.

Katerina: The negative part for me is that I don’t know the theories. I’m unfamiliar with the theory of multiculturalism.

Pat: Reservation... I have no experience with multicultural education at all, besides the basic multicultural dolls and the dramatic play in preschool. But other than that... And reading multicultural books just as read alouds... But as far as teaching and incorporate it into, I mean, I’m sure that I’ve done it without realizing that I’ve done, but I don’t have much background or information.

Marlow: I like writing curriculum. I really do. I love social studies and incorporating literacy into it. I’m very interested to see how to take the standards. The New York City scope and sequence for social studies, and how you know... Vertically, just to be able to incorporate culture into all the grades where everybody’s, like just growing and building on each other.

Marina: We were looking at the scope and sequence yesterday in inquiry and this is a lot of entry points for what we wanted to do here. So I don’t think that that part will be so hard. It’s just a matter of making it a priority. I don’t feel like we do enough in the younger grades with multiculturalism. It’s been something, I know we all have been talking about for a long time. I hope we get to put something into place.

Belle: I’m really excited about learning about multicultural education and being a part of creating a curriculum or doing whatever it is that we get to do here.

Nasreen: Reservations. I really have not, except that I agree with everyone else about it not being in addition to something we have to do. In my conversation with Jimmy, I said maybe it could be incorporated into the social studies.
Deena: It’s really scary. I think having actual multicultural conversations in the class. I mean, it always comes up when I talk about Martin Luther King Jr.; when we watch the “I Have a Dream” speech, we always end up having a whole conversation about why the use of the word “Negro” in the speech. The children are reading higher-level texts with different social issues. In another book “Jacob’s House”, it’s about a Roman Catholic and Jewish boy. Reading these things would be part of our multicultural curriculum, but it’s also really scary. A kid could go home and say, my teachers used the word “Negro” today, or my teacher is teaching me about Jews. I am nervous about the nitty-gritty of what gets said at home or what our common curriculum is.

The primary concern for the group is classroom curriculum and “fitting” multicultural education into an already packed instructional program. Much of their concern stems from the experience the teachers had the previous year implementing a character education program supported through a grant. The School Leadership Team (SLT), which is comprised of the principal, teachers and parents, decided to incorporate character education into the instructional program in order to instill the values of Courage, Loyalty, Justice, Respect, Hope, Honesty, and Love. This project aligned with the school’s mission, which was to foster a tightly knit community. While teachers saw the need for character education, and liked reading the books that came with the program, they were constantly being faced with the issue of time.

This preoccupation of “fitting” something in, and having “one more thing” to do comes directly from the expectations set forth for teaching every subject area as per their allotted time increments, which in turn is mandated by either the state, the city or the principal. The teachers faced this problem directly with character education as they struggled to allocate time in their
schedules to teach the lessons. The outcome from that year-long attempt to implement character education was frustration and resentment at being expected to implement something without having the necessary time to do it. This frustration and resentment came to be rested on both the guidance counselor and the principal; the school counselor led the initiative and supervised the grant, and the principal supervised teacher implementation.

Teachers had hoped that the principal would cut back on some of her other expectations in order to allow for character education to happen; when this did not occur, teachers became frustrated and wary of taking on any additional initiatives. And so the focus of the conversation on how to incorporate multicultural education immediately shifted to the incorporation of multicultural education into the already mandated curriculum: making it a part of the literacy program and social studies program was the immediate reaction. Directly linked to this concern of time is the awareness of priorities. Marina feels that after having worked in social studies inquiry, it could “be easy enough” to directly link multicultural education with social studies, but it is all a question of priority. If multicultural education is given priority over other things, and is given the time, then the work that is easy enough to do can get done without having to be concerned with “getting in trouble” for letting something else go by the wayside.

Another concern from some of the teachers, particularly Pat, Katerina and Shelly is knowledge. These teachers do not feel they know enough about multicultural education itself, its
theories, its practices and the actual knowledge of other cultures. They are coming to this project in the hopes of learning more, so that they can become more knowledgeable educators. Their hopes are for professional development and guidance; their concerns are gaining the adequate knowledge that they need in order to implement multicultural education in their classrooms.

One final concern identified by the group is dealing with controversial topics in class with students. Deena brings up how controversial issues can pop up while teaching seemingly harmless topics. We celebrate a national holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but looking at his famous “I Have a Dream” speech brings up the word “Negro” which sounds a lot like “n-word”. And reading a good piece of children’s literature brings up discussion about religion. The concern that Deena raises is not that of having proper knowledge, but the concern that she will get into trouble if parents disagree with what she is teaching, or if students don’t adequately explain what is happening in class and lead to parents to jumping to conclusions.

There is a real fear of consequences for teaching multicultural topics amongst teachers, especially for New York City teachers, as a result of a long history of bad publicity. In the 1990’s there was the public rejection of The Children of the Rainbow Curriculum that was introduced by then Chancellor, Joseph Fernandez. The Rainbow Curriculum included books that directly addressed the diversity of New York City, including homosexuality. The outcry from parents and the media against the curriculum forced Chancellor Fernandez and the Rainbow
Curriculum out. In 1998, the near firing of a white teacher from a Brooklyn school for reading the book, *Nappy Hair*, to her third grade black students caught every teacher’s attention (http://www.adversity.net/special/nappy_hair.htm). The fear of sanction and possible loss of one’s job is very real, but the MEPAR group takes a stand on this right from the beginning.

*Jimmy:* Part of what we are talking about is capturing the teachable moment. Deena, we’ve talked about how you have addressed issues like gay parents and homosexuality, which is something I am incredibly uncomfortable doing because I am. I’m actually very comfortable teaching kids about anything that has nothing to do with me. I have no problem talking to children about Judaism, or Islam, or anything like that. But I wouldn’t do Christianity. I feel safe doing the other, because I feel no one is going to question me. Because how can I indoctrinate you if I’m not part of that group. But it’s almost like this is a safe distance. So there is safety that no one can accuse me of doing something inappropriate. But then on the flipside, if I happen to hear a conversation where kids are calling each other fags, I feel like it’s my responsibility to say something. So it’s like you can’t sweep it under the rug, which sometimes we do because we are uncomfortable dealing with those things. And I think that that’s something that we need to work on as a staff, and to talk about these things. Even though we are not comfortable talking about a subject, sweeping it under the rug is condoning it.

*Jane:* It’s our responsibility like you were saying. We have to teach them. Like this is why people are ignorant.

*Deena:* Well, and we’re making the world a better place.

*Vincent:* It sounds like educating ourselves first brings the confidence to talk about something. But then at the same time we don’t want to step on anybody’s toes.

*Marlo:* I feel like I learned a lot being around staff like ours. It’s also that we are uncomfortable talking about it. And these kids, they really don’t know; they just know what they are exposed to at home, which can be very little. We need to educate the parents and let them be on board with the curriculum as well-somehow. If they know what we are teaching them, we have a common
language. The children are with us for a few hours a day. If push comes to shove, they are little you know, clones of their families, because that’s what they hear and that’s what’s embedded in them every single day. So we could teach it, but how much of a difference are we going to have with just us teaching it to them. You have to expose the community. You know... it takes a village.

Tammy: When I was teaching in Jamaica, if a student got in trouble, they would say I was racist. Where did they hear that from? You know, she’s racist. I wouldn’t be working here if I were a racist. But that’s what they hear. They don’t hear that at school, they hear that home. And they were in the sixth grade. So by the time they were in sixth grade, it’s not just their parents saying things anymore.

Pat: That’s them internalizing the ideas, and then the ideas becoming their own.

Although the teachers in this group know they will be grappling with controversial issues, they know that it is a worthwhile and important endeavor. The tone and perspective of the group is very much a liberal-minded one. Elements of social justice and a desire to help bring equal opportunities to all students are evident. Wanting for students to respect one another and appreciate one another seem to be the end goals, and the obstacle to achieving this goal is the entrenched racism and prejudice that students come to school with from their families.

As a point of clarification, the teachers do not necessarily see parents as enemies, but as vehicles through which prejudices that exist in society find their way into student’s minds. Parents themselves can be victims of society, but they can also perpetuate stereotypes, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to their children. The teachers in this group want to be vehicles for transformation, and are setting themselves up as agents working against ignorance. But this is all
tempered against the obligation that they have as teachers to teach specific curricula and standards as mandated by the state, the city and their direct supervisor.

The MEPARians thus have articulated two major issues from the onset of this study. One is establishing an ideological goal of creating an environment where students can learn about cultures other than their own and come to respect and appreciate them free from prejudice; the other is a desire for a concrete curricular and pedagogical plan or approach that will allow teachers to instill multicultural values while still accomplishing their mandates as teachers in a public school setting. I am avoiding using the word “goal” here because a goal implies having made a set decision and striving towards achieving it. While the group began the study by engaging in worthy discussion around multicultural education, and while it is clear that the group has collective knowledge and a shared set of values, this realization did not occur to the group; The group did not come to consciousness or synthesize any understandings from their conversations. The MEPARians engaged in rich dialogue without coming to any consensus, conclusion or determination, which in the long run ended up becoming the pattern for this group. This inability to make decisions will be discussed throughout this dissertation and will be a topic for discussion in the findings
Chapter 6

The Journey Begins: Dealing with Theory

Jimmy: I brought James Banks with me again today as a reference. Let’s take 5-10 minutes to review before we start.

Tammy: Can you just tell us the highlights? I can't read now.

Jane: Can you read it to us?

Katerina: I have read so much already.

(Summer Meeting - August, 2011)

From the first meeting MEPAR established that every member desired more of a background in multicultural theory. In response to this request from the group, we spent three different sessions concentrating on and looking at three different theoretical sources: James Banks’ *Dimensions of Multicultural Education*, James Banks’ *Levels of Multicultural Content Integration*, and *Why I Loathe Black History Month* by Debra Dickerson. The outcome of this short cycle of exploring theory was contradictory: a simultaneous connection to, and rejection of, multicultural theory. On the one hand teachers spoke to and fed off of the texts, and on the other, they talked about issues not directly related to the text and refused to continue to explore different multicultural texts after dealing with just these three.

Jimmy: Do you want to mention the part that stood out to you?
Marina: Culturally responsive teaching, because it reminded me of emotionally responsive. It’s an easy way to think of it. Just to be responsive, which I think we probably all already are, but just being able to use that language. I know sometimes Deena and I put emotionally responsive read aloud in our plans- just to remember to do it.

Vincent: I don’t see how equity and pedagogy goes. Like dynamic, How much more can a teacher do? I – I mean I don’t teach in the classroom but I can only imagine. To worry about changing the language that they use?

Katerina: I think we touched a lot on what it said when we did our definitions.

Shelly: I like the part under the knowledge construction process. I think this is what we talked about last time. Multicultural teaching involves not only infusing teaching content, but changing the structure and organization.

Pat: That’s what I was just saying to Shelly right now, I don’t really understand the whole knowledge construction thing. Like how do we do that?

Shelly: I think that’s what we want to do, but how?

Deena: I connected that with all of the stuff happening with CCSS. ‘Multicultural theories believe that the values, personal histories, attitudes, and beliefs of researchers cannot be separated from the knowledge they construct.’ So that idea of teaching them to be critical thinkers. I almost feel like it wasn’t until I started watching the Daily Show that I would watch the news and question what people were saying. But that idea that who’s representing information can’t be separated from the information given.

Jimmy: That’s a very difficult concept. Even for us. I have to remember that really what this whole thing is talking about is understanding point of view.

Deena: I think it’s also cool, the last line. Multicultural pedagogy seeks to re-conceptualize and expand the western calendar to make it more representative at inclusive of the nations diversity... that reminded me of the whole Texas social studies debate. It was this school year, that Texas buys schoolbooks for the whole state. And so they had a team that was approving or rejecting things from the social studies curriculum, so they were rejecting all of these things. They were rejecting Hispanic Americans, women, and people from different backgrounds.
Marina: That’s the problem with programs in general. To try to water them down so that…
Because they’re trying to sell them to every state, and so they try to keep them neutral.

Deena: But then there are other ones into the opposite. On page 34 they have a prominent Black American, and on page 96 they have a Chinese-American. Almost so they could say, “see how we are addressing this. Look at how diverse our textbook is!”

Belle: But they only have one page, not like a chapter or two.

Deena: That it’s an extra thing and not something that’s infused throughout.

Belle: So it’s the programs too.

Deena: And that is a huge issue with the Core Knowledge program.

Marino: That’s also books in the upper grades. I remember my high school history teacher telling me not to believe the books. And my US history teacher going off about what wasn’t in the textbook.

Deena: Well the whole Core Knowledge idea was to teach the Western curriculum.


Marina: There’s absolutely nothing multicultural about that.

This excerpt exemplifies how the group dealt with reading multicultural theories. The conversation is not exactly haphazard, but it is not unified either. Everyone was talking about the dimensions of multicultural education, but they were doing so in a way that was almost stream of consciousness and did not allow for a deep group-wide discussion. When people brought up certain points, some members would add onto it, and others just kept moving on to another point.
When Marina brought up her connection from equity pedagogy to emotionally responsive pedagogy, Vincent commented about how teachers are expected to do so much within this framework. Shelly and Pam came in right after that exchange and changed the topic of conversation to knowledge construction. Deena picked up the conversation and made a personal connection to how *The Daily Show* taught her how to think about who is giving the news. I made a quick comment after that regarding point of view, and no one else said anything else about knowledge construction. Deena picked up the conversation again and discussed diversifying the content. These eleven exchanges made up the second longest discussion thread on a single topic for this session. The longest discussion thread was on a topic not directly related to the dimensions, but was definitely a worthy topic of conversation: Asian stereotypes.

*Nasreen*: *I was thinking about the perception that Asian students are better at math and science, and that people assume this.*

*Deena*: *That came up in my class.*

*Vincent*: *Get out here! Really? In second grade?*

*Deena*: *We have one Asian student.*

*Tammy*: *Me too, and the kids automatically ask, ‘Did Sonia get 100? Did she get a four?’*

*Vincent*: *But do they say that because…*

*Tammy*: *Because she’s so smart!*
Vincent: But is it because she is always on task?

Marina: I don’t think it’s because she’s Asian.

Deena: No, no. They say that. “Chinese people are good in math”. And I was like, “that is racist, that is prejudiced. We could discuss this.” In Asian society there is more of an emphasis...

Vincent: Is there such a thing as good prejudice?

Deena: It’s still prejudice. There’s an article in the New York Times. Asians are not good in math. There is a cultural paradigm of emphasizing mastery of skills. And they’ve done studies and in Asian languages it’s easier to say and to memorize numbers so you can hold onto them. The numbers have the base -10 system built into them and so they’re much faster to say and remember.

For some unknown reason, only during our theoretical sessions did the group fail to engage in deep discussions on a single thread of thought. This is in deep contrast to the other discussions that would spill over from week to week later on in the study. The conversation about Asian students was an aside, and generated more interest and discussion than anything else that was in the text we were focusing on. Jane and Katerina’s silence throughout the conversation seems to be indicative of their disinterest in discussing the theory. Jane and Katerina both expressed that these topics were all things that we “had already touched upon” when we were trying to define multicultural education as a group. Perhaps this feeling of redundancy stopped them from wanting to be part of the discussion. In addition to the silence of some, the pattern of
not listening to each other and not adding onto what someone was sharing may be due to lack of a connection/comprehension of the text.

As a teacher, I have come to know that shouting out random points when asked a question is indicative of someone just looking to say something so as to not get in trouble, and not because they really have anything to say. The only person that was really engaging with the text and showing that it made sense to her was Deena. This may be because she has so much prior knowledge because she is an extremely liberal minded individual who attended an elite liberal arts college, or because the rest of the group was not interested in delving into the literature.

This pattern of disinterest in the theory and text persisted into the subsequent meetings, which ultimately led me to stop attempting to make connections to theoretical texts. When we discussed Why I Loathe Black History Month, conversations started in response to the text, but would then go off to discuss items not directly related to the readings.

Jane: I’m against it. It’s gone beyond celebrating for just one month a year. We did it just to apologize for the past. We need to recognize that we are past this. I don’t want my kids to talk about the same things that I did when we were young. I don’t want us to say ok, we’re done with African American history, now let’s move on to Women’s History month.

Marlo: I just talked about isolation.

Belle: It has to be embedded in the curriculum and not just one month.
Deena: I asked them about MLK, and these kids know about him because we’ve talked about him every single year since K. And when I asked them what they knew, they didn’t know… Oh yeah, he got shot. It was the only big thing they knew… so is it worth it to just doing it for one month. But we didn’t do black history, just MLK, which is a difference.

Marlo: We did, we brought it into biographies in first to include MLK, presidents, Black history and women. Because it’s so talked about. To see how it would work, and we talked about how we would do it next year. It just seems monotonous. Why are we doing this? The kids don’t remember about MLK and we know you taught it to them in K, so we can read a book about it, but, if your doing a study on civil rights, well then they are going to have a lot more information about that time and what was going on, you know.

Deena: That won’t happen till fifth grade.

Marlo: Well then it won’t happen until fifth grade, but you have to celebrate his achievements on his birthday, but there has to be a way.

Jane: Well it should be like an author study. It can’t just be like, plop, and then we walk away from it. We’ve been looking at the End of Year assessment and we’re like, we taught this but the kids don’t remember it.

Jimmy: That’s a good question. How much of it is the reason they don’t remember? Is it because it is far away, or because we taught it in an isolated manner? I mean there’s no way to determine why? It could be both. I know these guys did it with them in K and then in second

The conversation started off strong with Jane talking about how she disagreed with Black History month, and Marlo, Deena and Belle also connected to the idea presented in the article about how Black History Month isolates African American history to one month a year. But when Deena and Marlo start to recount specific details related to issues they have had in their
own classrooms, the conversation moves away from talking about the merits and shortcoming of Black History month and move towards trying to figure out why students don’t learn, or remember anything from year to year. This is important dialogue for teachers, particularly for conversations dealing with vertical alignment and teaching and learning, but at that moment in time, the focus was not to discuss those issues.

My intention in discussing the group’s inability to stay on topic is not necessarily a criticism, but an observation. The group didn’t stay on topic because they did not want to stay on topic. They wanted to bring the discussion to a more concrete place for them to interact with. As a person that teaches multicultural theory at the graduate level, my expectation was for the teachers in the group to engage with the readings at a theoretical level just like at my university; the members of the group had other plans. They kept bringing the text back to their own real and concrete context.

The desire to learn more about multicultural education seemed to come in second behind the desire to identify the issues in multicultural education that the school was facing and needing to figure out how to deal with these issues. One could interpret the lack of direct discussion of the theory to a sort of sublimation or a rapid form of metacognition that allowed the members of the group to move past the theory and deal directly with the reality of their situation. In other words, despite the semblance that the MEPAR members seemed to be eschewing multicultural
theory, they simply didn’t have a need to dwell on the theoretical because they were ready to
discuss the reality that they are faced with as practitioners.

The only theoretical piece that the group really interacted with was the Levels of
Multicultural Content Integration. Teachers had a lot of questions and comments about this
reading, and engaged in discussions where they tried to figure out where their practice ranked on
this continuum. Something about this continuum made a connection to the teachers in the group
and led to genuine interaction with the reading.

Vincent: Do the levels actually matter? Is a 4 better than a one?

Jimmy: The idea is that 4 is the highest level. Total integration versus no integration. So yes, 4 is
better than 1.

Jane: I feel we’re more 1 with a dab of 2.

Marlo: We are trying. We are adding instead of restructuring. I think that 3 is our ultimate goal
to restructure and to embed it into our curriculum, and I looked at 4, and I was WOO that’s like
High school.

Jimmy: I think we do some level 4 things: Food Pantry. I didn’t think of it until now. We’re
teaching kids to take action.

Deena: But it’s all from above. Like with the penny harvest, it’s more embedded. They choose
where the money goes.

Belle: Like with the Haiti fundraiser we did. We initiated it, and they took ownership of it.

Deena: Like character education, if we continue to focus on it, that’ll grow across the year.
Jimmy: There are going to be times when we do bits and pieces of it. When I read this last time I was thinking that there was no way we could do 4, but after rereading it now, our kids have done some of this stuff, but how do we make it more unified. As you were talking about the biographies, I was thinking that that was level 2. So essentially, what’s the difference between a level 2 and a level 3? It has to do with a lot of things about point of view.

Shelly: In December in social studies, first grade we do family, culture and traditions. But instead of Christmas and Hanukkah, we do New Years. How it’s celebrated across Judaism, Diwali, Chinese New Year. Family New Year’s traditions. Would that be a level 3?

Marlo: But that’s level 2 and if we want to do level 3.

Deena: Level 3 is digging deeper into one thing.

Marlo: Not necessarily.

Jimmy: What made this a level 3 was that it started with comparing Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico, and Puerto Ricans from New York… then comparing them to Cubans. I do think that the New Years idea is a 3. I think it just depends on how those concepts of point of view are brought down to a second grader.

Diana: Right. We’ve been trying to transform it in a certain extent. It’s just when. I think we can have multiple perspectives, we just don’t know how.

Michelle: We’re not experts in it either. In order to do a level 3. I know for myself. I have to learn a lot of stuff for myself. I had to do that this year, but in order to be a level 3, you have to be an expert, and I think we can get there as we teach it and get there and build on it.

This conversation around the Levels of Content Integration shows teachers sticking to a discussion centered on making sense of their teaching practices and using the continuum to “rate” themselves; the conversation did not veer off to a related topic, but remained squarely on the continuum. I believe that the teachers in the MEPAR group gravitated to this text because it
approximated a common teaching and evaluation tool that they see and use every day: a rubric.

Teachers know how to use a rubric and how to apply a rubric in order to assign a score; teachers use rubrics every day either for reviewing student work, or for reviewing their own practice. I believe that because the theory was so concretely presented in this diagram in the form of a staircase, that teachers felt comfortable directly referencing it and discussing it; the staircase was a practical scaffold that lent itself to direct application in instruction.

Meanwhile, the readings on Banks’ dimensions and Black History Month sparked wildly different conversations. This probably has a lot to do with the theories themselves. If the theories were so easy to interpret and put into practice, then multicultural education would have taken root in schools a long time ago. Perhaps the power that the theory has to inspire dialogue is also its own enemy; the dialogue seems to go on and on, and diverges so much so that it is difficult to come to conclusions or decisions. Once I noticed that reading and discussing theory was not something that the group was interested in, or helped the group focus, I went with what the members of the group wanted, which was to “deal with curriculum and how we’re going to bring multicultural education into it”. As the facilitator of this participatory action research group, I could not impose more theory on them, and instead followed PAR protocol of having the group set the course of the research. The MEPAR group had decided that they wanted to be “practical”
and wanted to work on how multicultural education would be present in the school at the curricular level.

**Establishing a Plan for Multicultural Education**

I learned from our time talking about theory that the MEPAR group was not interested in discussing abstract theory, but instead was interested in making concrete and actionable decisions about what multicultural education would look like at Queens Multicultural. Coming to those decisions was not an easy task. Teachers came to MEPAR with a desire to establish a plan for implementing multicultural education at the school level, but teachers also brought with them different ideas, experiences, and areas of expertise about pedagogy, curriculum, grade levels and student ability levels. This posed a great challenge for the group.

*Jimmy:* We’ve talked for a few sessions. We’ve explored different ideas, purposes. I want us to decide. What is important to us? We have talked but if we don’t reign ourselves in, we’ll be all over the map.

*Jane:* So what’s important or what do we want to happen?

*Jimmy:* What do we want to keep in mind, or even what we want to happen?

*Marina:* I know the contributions approach gets a bad wrap and that it is more appropriate in the younger grades... but, I don’t even think the contributions approach is happening nearly enough in the school. And that’s why I was interested in doing this in the first place, because I think its better for us to at least know that there is Chinese New Year and maybe make a Chinese flag then to not touch upon it at all. Because we’re doing some unrelated social studies. We don’t have time and so it doesn’t get touched.
Pat: I think time is important. Trying to figure out what we think is important in a way that it
doesn’t get ignored... in a way that’s feasible within the restraints that we have.

Jimmy: This is for us so when we start making decisions we know exactly what. We are here
because at the end of this process we’re putting multicultural content into the curriculum.

Belle: I think that time is important, but it’s also about not duplicating what somebody else did.
We want to build on what they did last year. We don’t want to start from just anywhere. We want
to know what will be learned in first grade, and what will they learn in second grade so by the
time they are in fifth-grade, What do we want them to know? What is the ultimate goal? What do
we want them leaving with?

Jane: I think whatever it is, it needs to be realistic.

Deena: Achievable.

Pat: Yes, achievable within the time you’re given.

Jimmy: Can you expand on that?

Jane: Like I said last time about the cooking thing. It’s just one more thing. I want something
that’s incorporated.

Pat: Incorporating it into the curriculum, but we’re not just trying to add on.

Deena: Looking for those opportunities, like on demand writing.

Marina: Like morning meeting.

This short exchange solidified for the group the course that would be taken. While there
were many issues surrounding multicultural education that were brought up in the previous
sessions, the first steps to trying to figure things out for the school were to focus on curriculum
and time. The What and the When were the items of most importance for the teachers to need to figure out. Marina raises the issue that as a school we have not been teaching enough multicultural content; even though some activities are superficial and would fall under the additive approach, some teaching of multicultural content is better than none. Belle picked up on this concern and added the need for a comprehensive plan for what is expected of children at each grade level. Both Marina and Belle are indicating that the school needs to have a concrete plan that maps out what multicultural content gets taught to students, and at what grade level do they learn these concepts. This would satisfy Marina’s concerns that students are being exposed to learning about other people and customs, while also addressing Belle’s concerns that there is cohesion across the school. Both of these issues are rooted in concerns about time and also about clarity of expectations.

Both Belle and Marina understand that at Queens Multicultural only items that are specifically mapped out on the curriculum calendar and are part of the expectations of the instructional program get done. No one questions what should get taught in reading, writing or math because it is all pre-planned and prescribed by New York State, the new CCSS standards and the principal. However, multicultural education is not scripted, and the teachers in MEPAR know that establishing clear plans and expectations for teaching multicultural education will be the only way to ensure that it gets implemented. This emphasis on establishing clear guidelines
in also echoed by Jane, Pat and Deena; they are concerned with receiving clear guidelines for when multicultural instruction will take place. Their preoccupation at the moment is not deciding what will get taught, but how time scheduling will work. Knowing that the instructional program is already jammed packed with other expectations for math and literacy, Jane, Pat and Deena are recommending that we find *time* and/or *opportunities* for multicultural education to be brought into classrooms; they are also recognizing that multicultural education can not be presented to the staff as an add-on, but that it must be brought in by seizing opportunities in the already prescribed curriculum.

And so the challenge for MEPAR became very clear four sessions into their work: MEPAR had to establish guidelines for the entire school that would include what multicultural content should get taught at each grade level, and when in the day would teachers be able to bring multicultural education to their classes. It should be noted that at this point in time, the MEPAR group is focusing solely on the content integration portion of James Banks’s dimensions of multicultural education. While the group demonstrated having collective knowledge of all of the dimensions, the only one that is specifically being addressed in these conversations as to what needs to happen, is content integration.

I attribute this preoccupation with content to come from the need of working with the concrete. Just as when the teachers in the MEPAR group were attracted to the rubric for the
levels of content integration, the teachers are now concentrating on the concrete aspects of multicultural education that they can grapple with easily. From a critical perspective, it may be said that teachers are engaging in low-level work for not aiming for the highest level of content integration and for not trying to change the entire school structure.

While it is true that the goals of the group at this point do not exemplify the entire spectrum of multicultural education, or the highest level of content integration, it must be said that it is a highly practical approach. They are choosing a specific point of departure to try to deal with the giant, amorphous entity that is multicultural education, and they are moving forward with a particular focus. From a PAR perspective, this group of teachers is functioning exactly as it should be. They have been working to understand the specific dynamics and specific constraints that they must operate under as a school community, and are trying to develop self-determined solutions to those problems.

**Looking for Opportunities**

Once the MEPAR group decided that they were going to focus on establishing a plan for determining what content would be taught at each grade level and when in the day it would be taught, attention turned to finding those opportunities to incorporate multicultural education into the already existing curriculum. This was an important decision for the group because they could
not start from zero. Despite the underlying belief and understanding that multicultural education is an extremely important and worthwhile endeavor, there is also an understanding that any of the changes that would take place to the curriculum could not displace or interfere with the already established expectations for core subjects like literacy, math, social studies, science and the arts. Even though the group has only met five times so far, there is a clear notion that the function of MEPAR is not to significantly change or re-establish the curriculum, but to refine and modify.

This refinement notion is never specifically addressed, but is evident in the exchanges that teachers have with one another, and even in the plans for how to move forward. Teachers talking about “needing to find time” and wanting for multicultural education “to be incorporated into the curriculum” shows that teachers are looking for ways to refine and modify as opposed to completely restructure. Although the MEPAR group was given freedom to operate without being under the direct control of the principal, the teachers understood that there were certain non-negotiable aspects of the school’s culture and curriculum that could not be altered. Before they were MEPAR members, the teachers were a part of the larger school structure that made decisions about curriculum, planning and instructional decisions; they played a part in building the structures that were already in place, and they knew that despite the limited opportunities for multicultural education. The school-wide curriculum was a solid one. Throwing out the baby
with the bathwater was not the solution, and so finding the opportunities for multicultural education to be incorporated into the already existing curriculum seemed like the only available choice. The curriculum was not weak; the only weakness that we found was that it did not promote multicultural education.

Finding the opportunities for incorporating multicultural education was accomplished by analyzing the already established curriculum maps for each grade and thinking about how to insert multicultural content into the fold. To accomplish this task, the MEPAR teachers broke up into teams to look at grade level maps to identify areas where multicultural education already existed, areas where it could be enhanced, and topics that were not addressed at all. Below are some excerpts of the types of ideas, solutions and level of thinking that teachers put into this analysis of their curricula.

**Third Grade Social Studies**

*Deena:* In third grade we study Mexico. We realized we had to start with what do we know about the United States so we would have a commonality, really trying to think about how we can get different perspectives in the trade books. In the book *This is Mexico* which has different days in the lives of people from Mexico. So we start talking about having students in the beginning of the year write about a day in the life of a third-grader in America since they have a life of the kid in suburban and urban situation from second grade. We want to try to embed the idea of studying people from different countries and subcultures and to try to get a take on that other perspective.

*Marina:* I’m thinking about the stuff that we talked about in terms of misconceptions and stereotypes. The curriculum says people in Mexico do this, and people in China do this. But just
trying to get the mind-frame that even within that culture, like Deena said, there are subcultures and that there are similarities and differences within cultures and across cultures. So it’s not cookie-cutter country to country.

Jimmy: That’s really good example of where the content is already there; it’s just taking how you do it- the presentation. You can just read a book, but it creates a one-dimensional view, But if you’re cognizant that not everyone in Mexico is going to be the same. I think that starting with a day in the life of Queens Multicultural is a great idea.

Marina: And not even everyone in your same class does the same thing.

Deena: And in character education, there’s empathy; being able to take on the perspective of the group and see the similarities across peoples and cultures.

Jimmy: I didn’t think of that. You can’t have empathy unless you can empathize. And you cannot empathize unless you can relate.

Deena: There are people that don’t learn to do that until they’re adults. We can start making better citizens.

Kindergarten Social Studies

Marina: Our communities unit, we decided to change it up a little bit. We want to do our local community and talk about the different cultures in the community. Maybe even taking a walk to the restaurant on Jamaica Avenue. Exposing – that’s what they have right here. We had neighborhood and community as a unit, but not much about the different cultures in the community. We also talked about having maps in the classroom next year, so that as we go talking about different places we can show them and map out and put different symbols so they can visually see where precisely that is. And also we do flags to expose into different types of things and not just the US when we do symbols. And when we do holidays, do more holidays around the world and just holidays that we see around us where we live.

Pat: Exposing them. We are talking about doing the whole map thing. The idea that there’s another school down the block is so over their heads. Where they live right now, and where they are right now is their level of understanding. It’s hard for them to understand that there are people out there that live other lives. It has to start with where you are, and that this whole other
world out there. So for us it’s just exposing them to the fact that the United States of America is not the only place, or our neighborhood is not the only place out there. And luckily there are people that come from other countries or maybe some of them have gone to other countries. But a lot of them haven’t by the time they’re five.

Second Grade Reading

Belle: In reading, in beginning we have Establishing a Reading Life. We have to establish ground rules for turning and talking for discussion and what they’re supposed to do during reading. So we were going to bring it a little further and talk about what you do at home; when you’re sitting on the table, what are the rules at home for how you do things? How you communicate with your family? Is it at the table, or do you do it in the living room? Just basically bringing it back to what they do with their families first, and in the next unit is building connections.

Nasreen: We said multicultural education was already embedded in the unit for building connections.

Belle: Making connections themselves. Then unit three was Visualizing. And that’s what we’re putting the pictures and the paintings. And each person would have their own interpretation of the paintings. We’ll talk about how you’re different, and that everyone’s different. So your visualizations and interpretations of paintings and your thinking is based on your culture and your experiences.

Each of these interchanges show how teachers looked at their curriculum maps and systematically analyzed the multicultural issues in their units, and made specific determinations that would improve the units to include a multicultural content, ideas or perspectives. Curiously enough, although the emphasis so far had been on content, the teachers did not just make modifications to the content of their units. In the case of the third grade example, teachers actually did not make any changes to the actual content of their Mexico unit. They were still
going to address the expectations of the NYCDOE Scope & Sequence for Social Studies by learning about Mexico, but the changes that they made related to Banks’s dimension of the Knowledge Construction Process.

The teachers did not mention James Banks at all as they explained their changes, but it is evident that they were thinking about how they needed to help their students understand things from different points of view. The changes that they were making to their units of study were not changing the content, but they were changing the form in which the learning would take place, and the learning outcomes of the unit. Their Mexico unit had changed from expecting students to know facts about Mexico, to being able to understand that people in Mexico do things differently from people in the United States, and that people within Mexico do things differently depending on their region specific culture. Developing student’s empathy for others was also a value that was going to be infused into this unit of study. These changes also reflect Banks’s other dimension of multicultural education, Prejudice Reduction.

This same shift in outcomes of a unit was also visible in the Kindergarten discussion about their neighborhoods and community unit. The Kindergarten teachers realized that at five years of age it is difficult for their students to see outside of their own lives. Teaching about neighborhoods and communities is a typical way to help young children transition out of their egocentric mind-frame, but the Kindergarten teachers wanted to take it a step further. They did
not just want to teach about what is in a community, but they wanted to help their students understand that there is great diversity in a community, and that communities exist beyond their local community. To accomplish this newly adopted emphasis, they changed the lessons in their units to include the use of maps and trips to help the students come to these complex understandings. Through these changes in their unit, Kindergarten teachers addressed three dimension of multicultural education: content integration, equity pedagogy, and knowledge construction.

The excerpt from second grade also shows changes to their unit, but it is worth noting that the second grade example is not on social studies, but literacy. The MEPAR group did not just do the obvious and focus on the social studies curriculum, but also looked at literacy in order to find ways to incorporate multicultural education into the curriculum. The changes that were being made to the reading curriculum included aspects of knowledge construction, equity pedagogy and prejudice reduction. Once again, the changes were not to the content of the unit, but on the format of the delivery of the instruction and the instructional outcomes for the unit. The second grade teachers would rely heavily on the students’ own experiences to make connections to texts, and to one another. They would also rely heavily on visuals to prompt discussions and to support the understanding that perspective plays a major role in understanding what you read and how comprehend. They would do all this while at the same time not changing
or interfering with the originally established outcomes of their units, which were aligned to meet the mandates of the new Common Core Standards.
Chapter 7

Moving Beyond What We Already Do

We’ve already worked on our maps as teams and looked at things from a perspective of ‘How can we bring up the level of what we do?’ But it’s different to look at a curriculum and check what you are going to teach, versus, having gone through it yourself and doing it themselves. Now that’s another layer we have to discuss in order to get everyone involved in this. (Deena, 2011)

Everyone in the MEPAR group was happy with the revisions and the modifications that were made to the curriculum maps; they felt that they had accomplished much that would allow teachers to infuse multicultural education into their year-long teaching plan. But modifying the curriculum was not enough because the changes were primarily being made to grade-level plans. From the onset of this team’s work, there has consistently been a desire to develop a school-wide plan of action. Modifying each grade’s curriculum was not going to bring cohesion to the school, or to the curricula across the grade levels; more work needed to be done to accomplish unifying the entire school under one banner.

Marlo: We want to build the curriculum up vertically. We have to make sure that the things that are family-based are different for the families every year even if kids are new to our school.

Jane: It’s tradition and they’ll know... Festival. I’m going to keep pushing for the festival.

Deena: At Richard’s school they do the Thanksgiving feast in school. They set up the tables and the whole school celebrates Thanksgiving as a school. I personally think it’s nice to have things
that you do in different years. When I moved to Brookline in the middle of the fourth grade, I missed that in fourth grade you did colonial life and you churn butter in class. And that was so cool. And then in fifth grade we did this, and in sixth grade...

Marina: But our kids have been here long enough.

Deena: But we’re starting a paradigm as each grade is growing. What are the fundamental experiences that we have? And as we grow, and as we align with the common core state standards, and as we have our curriculum and things really gel. What’s the big thing you are doing in each grade? What’s the big thing you do in third grade? We can think of this as time goes on, but we can also have things that we do every year no matter what.

Jane: It would make it more memorable. We need to make it exciting and fun.

This excerpt exemplifies the desire to promote unity across the school. It’s a given that everyone should be a part of teaching and celebrating multiculturalism, but the group continues going back and forth between two different options for integrating multicultural education: one option being everyone in the entire school participates in one experience, and the other option being matching experiences to specific grade-level. In both cases, there is this idea of establishing traditions for the school. Whether the school-wide cohesion came from school-wide events or carefully crafted developmentally appropriate grade-level experiences, Queens Multicultural would still gain a concrete identity that would define how we approach multicultural education at the school-wide level. The strategy of wanting to align special experiences with grade-levels is partly a carry over of the work the participants did to revise the
curriculum, but it is also a response to the same pressure of not wanting to have something extra to do.

Vincent: I think we should do a multicultural fair.

Jane: A festival.

Marlo: I like the multicultural festival idea where every class takes a country. To let them choose something themselves.

Tammy: But then what do they do with it though? If they only know about one country?

Jane: But then they visit other classes and then they get exposed other countries. Think of it as a little like, poof, you know.

Deena: I think it’s a pain in the ass. I’m just got to come out and say it.

Jane: I’m not lying. It’s work, but it’s worth it.

Marlo: Maybe we can do it at the end of the year.

Jane: That’s what I had said; like in June.

Marina: In June!

Jane: We need something exciting.

Marina: I don’t know about you, but in June I was testing for five weeks straight, and I wasn’t being pulled out of my classroom to plan.

Belle: It’s just a busy, busy month. What about May?

Jane: It’s got to be towards the end, can we do the work first and then have the celebration in June. So the work is done in May, but then you have to think in June. Just saying.
Marlo: And they have to do their own research on the country and make something.

Jimmy: Let’s think about where does this fall in in terms of the curriculum, because everyone’s expressed how they want it... Where is it? It’s not going to be an add-on. I think there is a way to do it, but we might be talking about two separate things here. One of them is to have a family thing, and now we’re talking about doing a festival where we represent or learn about culture.

Jane: All about books unit in second grade.

Marlo: That’s cultures around the world in first grade.

Jimmy: Both of those are good ideas. The question is: How do we build that in so that it is not an extra, so that it’s not a burden. So that it’s not an additional thing. And you mentioned that if we do the work in one of our units, then the fair becomes an expression of that work and not an additional item.

This back and forth dynamic of trying to negotiate the best approach for the entire school consistently follows the same pattern: Think big and then rein it in. Teachers share big ideas about exciting activities that could be done at the school level, and then others raise issues that would make the possible task impossible or difficult to achieve within the constraints of time allocations for mandated subjects or the curriculum calendar. This dialogic procedure became a staple of the MEPAR group as they worked to find the best approach that would allow multicultural education to become part of the greater school culture and the curriculum, but that would also not destabilize the already established school culture and curriculum.
The constant positing of ideas and negotiation of those ideas within the group was like a double-edged sword. On the one hand it produced extremely high levels of critical thought in regards to multicultural education, its importance in the school, and its value to our students. On the other hand, the constant discussion failed to produce a concrete sense of consensus amongst the group. As shown in the excerpted dialogue, as the group leader I consistently made the effort to synthesis and summarize what members in the group were saying. This served the purpose of keeping the group focused, but also to help members realize when they had unknowingly come to a common conclusion. My role was that of a moderator/discussant who tied everyone’s thoughts together.

A Tentative Plan for the New Year

Up until this point, the MEPAR group had met five times over the course of the summer to discuss theory, to analyze the current curriculum, and to come up with a plan. The group knew that by the end of their fifth meeting, they would not come back together again to continue their work until school started again in September. The constant discussion on their fifth full day of work slowly gave rise to the tentative plan for the upcoming year. The curriculum calendar was revised and completed. The discussion about what to do at the school-wide level was only halfway settled with a decision to do two school-wide events through the year. Since there was no
consensus as to what those two school-wide events would be or what they would look like, that
decision was tabled and was left to be decided the following school year. But the group was still
searching for a way to have a yearlong school-wide focus yet to be determined.

Jimmy: Are there any ideas or concepts so far that are missing from the curriculum? What are
you feeling is missing?

Marina: I think Black history is still a question.

Deena: I thought there was nobody in favor of doing Black history month.

Marina: Yes, we said we didn’t, but we also didn’t discuss when we were going to do it; because
black history is still part of American history. It’s still up in the air. How we can do it?

Jimmy: If we don’t want Black history month per se, there still is the question of how we’re
going to incorporate it into our teaching so as not to ignore it.

Diana: Well then there is also the issue of Asian American history.

Marlo: And all other multicultural people that are within the US. Within world events and US
events, multicultural people have played an important role.

Jimmy: But we don’t really teach history.

Deena: Not until fourth grade.

Marlo: But you have Memorial Day, what did you guys write on the curriculum? Honoring your
community for Memorial Day. People honoring people, that had an impact.

Nasreen: Like cultural heroes.

Jimmy: I think this does bring up an interesting idea here. That it might not fit because most of
our teaching is thematic. And when you just throw things out there, tidbits, it doesn’t really help
see the larger picture. But maybe that is a way to just show some of the things we are talking about. In first grade you might show how people are not all white and mainstream, but how do you do that across the year. That’s the question! Is it in the read aloud? Is using multicultural read aloud for on-demand writing, or for your reading units and your writing units? Does that eliminate the need to talk about African-American heroes and Latino heroes and all the stuff?

Marlo: But what about the book The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson? That is a narrative text, but it brings up a lot about conversation.

Jimmy: That’s a character education book too. I actually did a whole social justice project with my class based on those books.

Marlo: It’s a great book for conversation. It’s also historical.

Jimmy: If we did that. If we took the time to identify literature, good literature, that we would not need to do these fake little things like Black history month.

Deena: But the thing is they don’t have a lot of background knowledge for that stuff. Like is it better...

Marlo: But they don’t need a full scope, just a little background knowledge.

Jimmy: And they wouldn’t get a lot of background either if you just did Black history month

Deena: Yeah.

Marlo: Just little bits and pieces here and there is building background knowledge. So that when you get to fourth and fifth grade, and you study more in depth, they’re like, ‘oh yeah!’

Jimmy: I think that every time they learn about an individual, they can relate. I mean you can mention any hero and do contributions without mentioning segregation or racism or slavery. And so the reason for choosing specific people... Harriet Tubman, because of slavery. Martin Luther King because of civil rights. Jackie Robinson because of integration and segregation. So their personal triumph has the background; it is already built-in. I guess then that what might be first on our list to do when we come back is to start identifying good literature. And Deena’s a specialist in that. Marlo too. Pat you’re good with books too aren’t you?
Marlo: We’re talking about revamping the books for character education though, no?

Deena: A lot of the books are great though.

Marlo: But we need to add more to them; it is not enough.

Tammy: You know that those character education binders have a lot of things in them; lists, and we can use them to choose more books.

Jimmy: I have a fabulous idea. We can have a mini project over the summer. If you could get your hands on a few multicultural books. That would be a good place to start, and then in September that can be a project that we undertake.

And so, as the MEPAR group ended for the rest of the summer we decided that we would take some time over the remainder of the summer to look for quality multicultural books that we could employ. The desired outcome for the book search was twofold. First and foremost, to find books that we could use in our instruction to supplement our not very multicultural curriculum. And, second, to become more knowledgeable about the books that were available in order to make good decisions about which ones to choose and use.

It is worth noting that there is a difference in the work the MEPAR group did pre-September versus post-September. The discussions that were enjoyed, the decisions that were made, and the revisions done to the curriculum were done at the time of the year (Summer, pre-September) where renewal and planning for the future typically take place. The remaining portion of the work that MEPAR did occurred during the traditional school year from September
through June. There are different dynamics that happen during the school year that color and change the way teachers work. Frustration, exhaustion, inundation with work, managing one’s time and a whole host of other daily grind issues that teachers face during the school year had some impact on the MEPAR participants that made a difference between pre-September MEPAR and post-September MEPAR. These differences will become more apparent as the story of the MEPAR journey continues to unfold.
Chapter 8

Beginning a New Year and Establishing a Mission

Multicultural Education recognizes that people are diverse and unique. Multicultural education breaks down stereotypes and allows us to recognize people’s differences and their similarities. Our mission is to expose our students to diverse experience and sources of knowledge; to encourage them to broaden their point of view, and to learn to appreciate and respect all people. (MEPAR Mission Statement)

The entire staff at Queens Multicultural started the 2011-2012 school year well-prepared to provide quality instruction and move all students forward academically, but in terms of multicultural education, the school year began with only a few minutes of attention paid to multicultural education or MEPAR. During Queens Multicultural’s traditional four-day summer institute, the MEPAR group was allotted twenty minutes to share with the staff what they had been working on over the summer. In those twenty minutes we were able to launch a small whole school initiative where each classroom teacher was to create a multicultural literature basket from which they could pull books to use during their read alouds. MEPAR also shared their revised curriculum maps that showed how multicultural content would be incorporated into different units of study.

Beyond these small initiatives, MEPAR was unable to share the knowledge that they built, or the process through which they came to these initiatives. The rich discussions and
understandings that MEPAR members came to and that lead up to these two changes to the curriculum belonged only to the MEPAR members. The lack of a common experience and understanding of multicultural education across all staff members of the school created an invisible rift between the MEPAR members and non-MEPAR members. This rift was essentially a knowledge gap that prevented teachers from working together towards a common goal. I characterized this rift as an invisible one because there was no animosity or resentment between MEPAR and non-MEPAR staff members, but simply a disconnect between them that would continue to isolate MEPAR members and their desire to implement multicultural education to a peripheral goal for the school. Because neither the principal, nor the remaining twenty-five staff members of the school had the shared experience of MEPAR, they could not relate to the their efforts, and this created a dynamic where MEPAR and their work was a subset of the school’s primary work. Therefore, MEPAR’s findings and recommendations were “additional” and “optional”.

Hoping to unite the entire school, and to focus MEPAR meetings themselves, the MEPAR members set their task on defining a multicultural education mission for themselves and the school. This realization was precipitated by what Deena called in her exit interview, “Jimmy dropping down the hammer”. I will provide further details about that incident in my autoethnographic section, but mention it here briefly to emphasize that the MEPAR group was
struggling to re-establish itself after the summer break. For all of September the group did not formally meet due to difficulties scheduling, and the very first formal meeting on the last day of September was chaotic, unfocused and unfruitful. This spurred me to serious conversation with the group to emphasize that everyone’s focused participation was necessary if the group’s future was to be successful. After this incident, the MEPAR group’s focus turned to deciding on a school mission in order to get us back on track for the school year.

Jimmy: Last week we were talking about solidifying a mission statement for our group and for the school, and that that would probably help us to refocus us and keep us on that track in terms of implementing something. So we are going to think about some ideas for what we want for a mission and then we are going to share them to try to craft something to be our head mast so it could lead us into what we are going to jump into next.

Pat: Mine is very basic, because I just can’t think of doing anything more than the base for my students. I was thinking in terms exposure. Exposing children to other cultures. In my class I have this child who lives in a family where they are deaf. So that’s different to the way things are for others. I don’t want to incorporate that along with intense information about cultures if we’re just talking about...

Jimmy: Diversity.

Pat: And yes; that it’s nationality versus diversity. And just the understanding that people are different. But going any further than that is a lot for me for what I’m doing.

Shelly: And then to build on kindergarten and first grade; right now we’re doing friends in the world, and searching for them to know that they’re not the only ones in the world. Open their eyes little more. To build on what Pam said, and then learn more specifically about the cultures. Just showing them a lot of pictures of clothing and food around the world to raise awareness and open their eyes a little bit. So that’s my vision for first grade to make them realize that there are other places around the world.
Jimmy: So we are talking about what the end result would be. It’s two things: the process, which is what Pat is saying, and then the outcomes, which is what Shelly is saying. So exposure to diversity and difference is the process, and the outcome would be to broaden point of view.

Tammy: Tolerance.

Jimmy: So... Tolerance is a hard word to swallow.

Deena: Appreciation.

Jimmy: That’s actually one of the key words I was thinking. So that will inform the outcomes. What other important ideas are there?

Deena: For me, I just don’t consider different cultures. But difference in experiences like different types of families, ways of living. Like even something as simple as vegetarianism, or different religions.

Marina: I know in inquiry last year we talked a lot about not stereotyping. Like Thanksgiving; you’re in America you have a turkey on Thanksgiving. Deena talked about using the word some, and I started doing it and it makes a huge difference. Someone can say I don’t eat turkey or I don’t celebrate Thanksgiving. And then some people are not going to eat meat at all.

Jane: Just changing the wording.

Marina: Yes, some people don’t eat meat at all. They are vegetarians like Ms. Deena.

Tammy: It brings up one of the things, like one of the books Fly Away Home, which is a book about a homeless child. So it’s not culture, but it’s people that have less privileged access. Like Food Thursday, to take a poor family where the mom gets paid on Wednesdays; they have to wait until Friday to get it, and everyday they have to wait makes it a little bit harder.

Marina: That brings us back to the book list idea.

Marlo: And we need books. We don’t have enough.
Marina: Even if it’s for people to have choices.

Tammy: I was just thinking of another really good book *If Only She Knew*.

Deena: Is that the emotionally responsive book? The one where the kid says, ‘She wouldn’t yell at me if she only knew I didn’t have breakfast this morning.’

Jimmy: We can say that our definition of multiculturalism is bigger than just culture. The thing with multiculturalism in multicultural education is that it’s a huge word that can encompass anything, and it can encompass what we want it to. And I think it makes sense, especially since we have a very diverse population in all of the senses. We have some privileged, and some not privileged. We have some deaf parents. All of those things are things I think that we need to deal with.

Vincent: Do you want the students and the parents and the school to understand what multicultural education means?

Jimmy: Well, what do you think?

Vincent: Well, if that word is too difficult to understand, then maybe you can use another one.

Marlo: This one is really more about socioeconomic status. So it’s diversity...part of the world you’re from, the diversity of how you live. Select themes of diversity.

Jimmy: Well that ties into what Jane was talking about in teaching things thematically, that that would make things easier.

Vincent: Use the single simple word differences the kids would understand. I’m just thinking about types of words that can be easily explained for this to make sense.

Deena: Give me my diversity!

Vincent: Diversity is a hard for the children.

Deena: People are different, people are the same.
Jimmy: Let’s go back to the goal, or what we would want. So if we want to craft the statement. The purpose. ‘We want to provide multicultural education to our students to expose them to diverse peoples and a variety of experiences that will broaden their points of views. And will allow students to appreciate others’ ...I’m just stringing along everything that everyone has said.

Diana: Encourage instead of allow.

Jane: Respect.

Jimmy: I am going to start writing this down in statement form... and adding the part that Marina added about multicultural education breaking down stereotypes. And that everyone is individual.

Jane: And that’s what makes them special. Maybe we should start with that...

This exchange is an excellent example of where the back and forth discussions during MEPAR sessions led to highly critical and practical outcomes. Through this dialogue, MEPAR was able to express and articulate a common outcome to summarize why multicultural education was going to be necessary and important to Queens Multicultural. This is not a conclusion that they could have come to prior to this research project because they did not have access to the knowledge that they developed through the rich discussions of their summer meetings. By the end of this meeting, MEPAR had crafted a mission statement, and at the beginning of their next meeting they formally adopted the mission for the entire school:

*Multicultural Education recognizes that people are diverse and unique. Multicultural education breaks down stereotypes and allows us to recognize people’s differences and*
their similarities. Our mission is to expose our students to diverse experiences and sources of knowledge; to encourage them to broaden their point of view, and to learn to appreciate and respect all people.

Being able to create and adopt a mission statement for multicultural education was both an important milestone and turning point for MEPAR members. It was a milestone because it was the first truly concrete product that came out of their work together. Prior to this, MEPAR had only modified curriculum maps and developed a preliminary plan to search for multicultural books. Creating a multicultural mission validated the work MEPAR was doing and also legitimized them as a group that had power to make school-wide decisions, at least in the eyes of the members. Creating the mission statement also was a turning point for the group because it signaled the end of looking for an answer to the question of why we were doing multicultural education and shifted the thinking towards deciding how to do multicultural education.

From this point on, MEPAR members enjoyed a self-identified mission to bring multicultural education into their classrooms; from this point on, all MEPAR participants implemented multicultural practices into their personal classrooms with fidelity, curiosity, and with a desire to figure out what worked best for them. But this was also a big turning point for what MEPAR was supposed to mean to the rest of the school. The divide between the MEPAR and non-MEPAR members had already been created, but the struggle to make the work of the
group meaningful to the rest of the school’s staff had only just begun. As MEPAR members thought about multicultural education in their classrooms everyday, when they met for MEPAR sessions, they were trying to figure out how to lead the rest of the staff in integrating multicultural education into their classrooms.
Chapter 9

The School-wide Initiative: Multicultural Read Alouds

I have an idea. What if it’s not month-by-month but it’s just different themes across the years. So that it’s not that we can’t read The Empty Pot to the class until we get to our China unit. You know what I’m saying; a book fits a theme but it might not be the theme of the month. It’s just annoying to think that we can’t read good books because we have to wait until it fits in. Know what I mean? (Marina, 2012)

It was now October 20, 2011 and MEPAR had a mission and purpose. The objective that was still left untouched by the group was to unify the entire staff under this new mission. To accomplish this task, everyone knew that they needed to provide teachers with guidelines and suggestions. The teachers in MEPAR themselves were trying out new things in their personal classrooms; they did so cautiously and carefully, because they still were looking for a concrete plan or initiative to follow.

MEPAR members also knew non-MEPAR teachers would not be willing to join in on the initiative if things were not clearly spelled out for them. If they themselves were nervous about implementing multicultural education after the professional development they received, then their colleagues were going to need even more nudging and support to do it than they did. And so the concrete idea of multicultural books resurfaced; the best way, and easiest way to insert
multicultural education into the curriculum for every teacher was to do it through incorporating multicultural texts.

Queens Multicultural, as reported above, adopted a character education program the year before. The *Heartwood Program* was a trade book based program organized around a few core values: Courage, Loyalty, Justice, Respect, Hope, Honesty, and Love. The program provided teachers with a two books at each grade level band that exemplified each of the values. Along with the books, there were lessons and activities that were all geared towards explicitly addressing each value. Queens Multicultural adopted this program and assigned each of the values as a value of the month. Since the previous year, teachers were told to dedicate one to two periods a week for character education read alouds and activities. Teachers in the school liked the character education program, but they also felt that it was not substantial enough to teach for an entire month. Teachers in MEPAR saw this as an opportunity to improve the character education program and bring multicultural education into the curriculum.

**Marlo:** How can we incorporate multicultural education in social studies, or is it just going to be it’s own thing? Because we’re kind of going into this thing... and then in social studies... I’m like, where do we put it?

**Jimmy:** Well, that seems to be the easiest place to put it, and according to what we discussed in the summer, that’s one pattern that people can follow. The only issue is that it just takes into account the one dimension of multicultural education, which is that multicultural education involves teaching content.
Deena: It might also link to character ed. Two weeks of doing the character education allows plenty of time, and then two weeks of doing a related multicultural read aloud would work. Because right now we already have a separate time. You can then take the opportunity to go about doing the multicultural real loud.

Pat: You can connect the character education to multicultural education pretty easily, whether it’s a value like Courage... it could be linked.

Deena: But depending on how we structure what it is that we want to do, it might not link to social studies.

Marlo: But is the talk during that time going to be on courage, the trait, or is it going to be based on the multicultural?

Jane: I don’t think it needs to be, like, you spend the whole month talking about courage. That you don’t always have to say, ‘Look at how courageous they are.’ You can just touch on it.

Marina: But maybe instead of beating up every book like we do in Making Meaning, We can do like what we do in the summer; reading the book for enjoyment. You know. We don’t have to explain to you in five different ways why we’re reading the book like we always do. This is a story, and let’s read it and get something from it.

Jimmy: We have the freedom not to do that. It can be, this is a multicultural text, but my conversation doesn’t have to be, ‘These are the multicultural aspects of this book.’ It could be instead, ‘We’re talking about a text with these real-life situations, and are making connections to it. How do you feel about it?’

Jane: They’re going to share no matter what. They’re going to jump at the chance... they want to. They’re going to just do it. It’s going to happen.

Marlo: Having them talk about the central themes within the story. Letting them dig deeper and deeper into their own lives just helps them build their understanding.

Jimmy: I think we push what we think the central theme of the book is too much on the kids. And this might be a really great opportunity to let them show us where they’re coming from.
The underlying issue in these exchanges is yet again time. Finding the best time within the weekly schedule to implement multicultural education is a great struggle. The teachers in MEPAR are trying to figure out what works the best for them, but they also have the added burden of figuring out how other teachers can also incorporate multicultural education into their schedules. As Deena points out, the time to teach character education has already been allotted to every classroom teacher, and every teacher is expected to comply with that directive. This discussion, and many subsequent discussions during MEPAR sessions always come back to the question of when it is best to address multicultural education. Connecting to character education is a way to circumvent the issue of time. It also is an expression of the great difficulty of matching multicultural education to the existing curriculum.

Over the summer, teachers already modified the curriculum maps, but that was still not a significant enough shift that would lead the group towards reaching their new mission. In order for students to “recognize diversity… to expose students to diverse experiences… and to learn to appreciate and respect all people”, teachers had to be able to explicitly teach and provide students with an opportunity to learn about how people are different. This seems easy enough theoretically, but elementary school teachers know that it is not as simple as coming to class one day and teaching about the slave trade in their second grade class. That is why MEPAR was leaning towards using multicultural texts for read alouds. This solution would work within the
constraints for time and would also facilitate addressing multicultural issues and ideas through small and controllable burst of knowledge that could either be linked to other aspects of the curriculum, or left isolated to the read aloud block. In either scenario, this initiative would satisfy the new multicultural mission. The teachers in MEPAR simultaneously discuss the different options for implementation, as well as the issue of how to ensure that other teachers in the school also take on this new initiative.

Vincent: Can I just say a few things? I wrote them down; it might be obvious but I wanted share: food, clothes, families, flags, symbols, holidays, music and art. I think those should be the themes.

Deena: Are those going to be our themes for multicultural? Are those going to be our themes for the year? Because I guess you can deepen that. Because we can choose which ones to do if we wanted to, because I know those are the different elements of culture.

Nasreen: Different grades can choose different things.

Deena: I do think that with the character ed., not having them be different. The common thing across the school means we’re actually doing them.

Jane: We’re held accountable.

Nasreen: I think using literature has to be the base. And then the themes come from the literature.

Deena: But are you saying not to have themes?

Marlo: I don’t know.
Deena: Because that’s what we have.

Marlo: There are so many things, but exactly, we have all these things.

Vincent: And then there’s all the tedious structures and the clashing structures.

Deena: So it means that we actually do it.

Marlo: But you have a great bucket of books with things that are appropriate, and then as it gets moved on through the years, through the school, then these become the books we use.

Marina: There could be a structure through the books. Maybe as much as one theme. This is the third grade basket, like the character ed books.

Deena: But, I guess my only concern is actually doing it. Like I know that Tammy’s been doing it. I walk into her room, and she’s reading multicultural books. And I can say I’ve been reading multicultural books, which I have, but the other teachers are not! But I like having a time and a purpose that I know is sacred. Like I know we have to do that; I think themes help people with structure.

Marlo: Sometimes if you go with themes, then you have to find books that go with that theme. You risk giving up using a quality text for something that’s just giving an option.

Jimmy: I think the problem is we won’t know until we try it. If we think about what happened with character education… I think a lot of things went wrong with character education because I think that people felt too much pressure from extraneous things. But having a theme at least made the teaching clear. Everything surrounding what else to do for character education on top of the teaching was what was so unclear. We won’t have the same problem here. So far what we’ve seen is people here have been doing it with no specific theme. Maybe we want to try themes and see how that goes, and then revisit - which is kind of what Marina said last week. We need to start trying things and figuring out what works. So we can say that September and October has been the trial period for pick-your-own theme, and then we can say November-December will be a trial for us to follow a specific theme. Then at the end of December we can revisit which approach seems to be working better. Does that sound like a good idea?

Jane: That sounds like a good idea.
Marina: That’s smart because we’re not telling the whole school this is what we’re doing from now on. And then if it doesn’t work people won’t be so upset about the change.

Figuring out what to do and how to do it was just as important to the efforts of the teachers in MEPAR as it was for leading non-MEPAR teachers on this journey. MEPAR teachers were looking for a structure to support them in their efforts and that would also allow others to follow in their footsteps. On the one hand they showed leadership in designing this initiative and in negotiating possible solutions to the issues that were raised along the way. On the other hand, they identified the issues and concerns that others in the school would have also. This special dynamic allowed for critical discussions and for real-life decisions that were in the best interest of the school to take place. It also considered the different needs of the school. This back and forth dialogical process was an element of great use for the MEPAR group as it allowed them to discuss many different multicultural issues of significance to the school, craft a mission that addressed the values of all the members, and created a basic structure for organizing the implementation of the read aloud initiative.

This collaborative process of identifying problems and finding solutions to those problems as a group is exactly what participatory action research exemplifies. MEPAR members were able to engage in careful and informed discussions rooted in both knowledge of
multicultural education and situational/indigenous knowledge of how things work at Queens Multicultural. Because of these exchanges MEPAR members were able to identify a possible solution to the problem of the lack of multicultural education at the school: the implementation of a read aloud initiative. MEPAR would then monitor the initiative by collecting both concrete and anecdotal evidence to determine the impact of the initiative on the school community.

A great irony developed in this study as a byproduct of the careful discussions and participatory action research approach that MEPAR took as they sought to improve their school. As mentioned earlier when describing how the group interacted with multicultural theories, the back and forth discussions also kept MEPAR members off task and allowed them to engage in tangential conversations that, while worthwhile in and of themselves, did not move the MEPAR initiate forward. Coupled with other normal daily teaching issues, the months of November and December, as well as February, March and most of April were months were very little was accomplished at MEPAR meetings. Discussions hardly ever came to any concrete conclusions that were directly related to the macro goals of the PAR aspects, which was to monitor the initiative and draw conclusions about the efficacy of the intervention.
Falling Off the PAR Wagon

The months of November and December were spent focusing on implementation issues surrounding the multicultural read aloud initiative. While MEPAR had identified both initiatives, bringing multicultural texts into the classroom and finding time when teachers were going to be able to teach, there were still many questions left unanswered. What books should we read? What themes are we addressing? What should I be doing as facilitator of MEPAR? These were important pedagogical questions that needed to be answered in order to both move the initiative forward, and to be able to move forward with PAR to collect data and determine its effectiveness.

At this point I would like to clarify that I am not saying that MEPAR was failing in its work, or that they were not doing good work. My purpose in telling the “story” of MEPAR is to highlight how the journey, when looked at piece by piece, shows that some portions of the journey could be viewed as sections of wasted time that did not help the group move towards its overall PAR goal. “Failure” is too simplistic and doesn’t take into account the complexity of the work that MEPAR members had to do in order to make things work. What I am postulating is that every part of the MEPAR journey was valuable and added a layer of knowledge and success to the entire journey. Ultimately, what I am trying to portray is that the journey was frustrating due to the lack of visible and measureable progress that the group could not make because it was
busy working out micro details related to instruction and implementation. The tangential topics and discussions, while they did veer the group off course and delayed them from making quick and actionable decisions, were necessary for building the base of knowledge from which to make those ultimate decisions.

In addition to the efforts that MEPAR managed towards improving the microstructures of the read aloud initiatives, there were other issues that also prevented teachers from moving full steam ahead. Lack of time and frustration with daily teaching issues only allowed MEPAR members to focus at the micro-level and did not allow them time to move past that immediate level of thinking; it was difficult to focus on the long term goals when what they were supposed to be doing now was difficult to get a handle on.

*Jimmy:* Did you guys make a list of possible books?

*Belle:* For second grade. Yes, we made a list. But we are trying to figure how we’re going to categorize them in terms of theme. When? Which month of multicultural books, and stuff like that? Are we going by themes?

*Jimmy:* Let’s just do a quick update on the books before we discuss that. You guys, Marina, I know you made a list.

*Deena:* They were mostly the books that we had.

*Jimmy:* That’s fine. The idea was...

*Marina:* It wasn’t a list of books to order.
Jimmy: But you have the themes? How’s it going?

Marina: Yeah, we read *A Day’s Work* for honesty.

Deena: But we were already supposed to read it.

Jimmy: For character education?

Marina: Yeah, but it’s part of the Mexico study, and it’s about Mexican immigrants and out after work here in America. And it’s a whole story about a boy and his grandfather. And at least in our class it went really well. And they had to write letters in response to the book in the perspective of the character in the book.

Jimmy: What decisions did you make in terms of the connection to the curriculum? Is it the social studies visit to Mexico?

Marina: It’s in the character ed, but it’s connected to Mexico now because we’re starting Mexico. I mean it takes place here, but this little boy’s grandfather comes from Mexico to come work in America.

Jimmy: What would the next book be in that theme? Would you do something that is related to Mexico?

Marina: Um, I don’t know if it has to be. I don’t know. We talked about *Fly Away Home*, because of the whole economics conversation. Like socioeconomic status and how they were poor.

Deena: I don’t think we really settled it.

Jimmy: That’s what I want to know. Because we talked about the theme to go along with the read alouds. Once we have the theme, if we don’t have enough books, then we can try to get them. Let’s go back to second grade for a moment. What about your list?

Belle: We made a list; I think it’s on Jane’s computer. I think we did a little bit of the same things like third-grade. Putting them into themes and months. Like in December we’re going to
do this book. In January Martin Luther King, February we’re doing Chinese New Year. We are working to read more books about Asia. I think we are on our way. We already started reading some of those books because of character ed., and also our multicultural slot— it’s in our day.

**Deena:** What books have been really good?

**Belle:** We read *Abuela* and *The Name Jar*. *The Name Jar* was really good. It was a good like first day of school type book.

**Jimmy:** I’m thinking to myself that it might be helpful to keep track of the books. Would you guys mind keeping a list of every book that you read. Every time you read something, write the date and the name of the book. This way we have a record of books that were good, so that this way we don’t always have to think about finding them, or what we could use them for. Basically it would be running list, and this way the running list can become a book list later on for suggested titles.

The members of MEPAR all knew that they were supposed to be doing multicultural read alouds, and they did in fact stay true to their word. They were choosing books, reading them out loud to their students, and engaging in class discussions around different multicultural themes. The above except proves that MEPAR teachers were implementing their initiative, but it also reveals that the work around the implementation was limited. When Marina, Deena and Belle share out their progress with the rest of the group, it is clear that not much has been done besides dedicating time to multicultural read alouds with the students. Deena and Marina admit that they have talked about some things, but that they didn’t make any decisions. They also didn’t make a list of books like they said they were going to do. Belle said they made a list for second grade, but the list never materialized; she did, however, show that she and her grade were also reading
books to their students as she presented titles and spoke about what they did. MEPAR members were working on their initiative, but the extent to which they developed the initiative and planned out their next steps was haphazard. The excerpt shows that teacher were selecting texts that were directly linked to their ELA, social studies or character education curricula.

The strategy to use books that directly linked to their curricula was probably chosen due to lack of time. Not having a list of books prepared is not necessarily evidence of people not taking the initiative seriously. Instead, I would attribute this lack of efficacy to be a result of not having time to properly plan and search for books. The group had agreed that they would test out both options of matching books to the curriculum as well as branching out towards other topics not covered in the curriculum for the months of November and December, but teachers never moved on to that other phase. Analyzing student work, completing report cards, parent-teacher conferences and Thanksgiving dominated all of teachers’ planning time and did not allow them to do much more than their multicultural read alouds. Teachers were not able to do much planning to move MEPAR along to the next stage of the initiative, but they were definitely implementing multicultural education into the curriculum. MEPAR teachers took advantage of the read aloud opportunities and addressed concepts of diversity when discussing families, countries and religions.
Chapter 10

Frustration with Non-MEPAR Teachers

It’s better than teaching nothing because you don’t know what you’re supposed to do. You know it’s easy to say, ‘do multicultural education’ but multicultural education is such a huge thing. So it remains untouched because it’s such a huge thing. But like we said, if you just grab any book it’s better then not reading any book. (Marina, 2012)

While the macro-level analysis of MEPAR might show that little progress was being made, the actual members felt very proud of the work that they were doing; those small opportunities to address multicultural education sparked wonderful discussions with their students, and the teachers were starting to feel more comfortable about what they were doing.

The frustration that they did feel stemmed from their inability to bring other teachers in the school on board.

Vincent: I see you in your classrooms. You guys are walking around with a timer. Jane is walking around with a timer. I watch you guys, and you don’t miss a beat. You need a group of people that will make a decision for you, to give you the stuff, and that’s it. And honestly, the people that are going to get upset are going to get upset either way.

Deena: That’s true.

Pat: And then you have the people that will appreciate the material. All the people that say this makes it so much easier for them.
Tammy: You have a point though. Even with character ed., we have the books there. And if no one told us to read them, we probably wouldn’t even have known we had the books there.

Pat: Exactly!

Tammy: But it’s right there. All I have to do is go to the box, and that’s it!

Marina: We all have books in our classroom that are socially and culturally responsive. It would take 5 minutes to look for one. I’m sure everyone could tell us at least one. All they had to do was just shoot a book out. It’s just disheartening not to get any feedback, like you know. I know that everybody is busy and tired, and that they have things to do, but come on! We are trying...

Pat and Marina: …to do something better!

Marina: To better the school. And it’s just you know...

Jimmy: People probably have created a basket at this point, but the problem is in the share. There’s no way for us to know what’s in other people’s baskets.

Marina: Or like a holiday book basket. Everyone has that.

Jimmy: Maybe we can encourage teachers on each grade not to read a book from their own basket, but go into somebody else’s room and force yourself to look at what they have. Then plan from that basket. It might be an incentive.

Deena: But it might be a good idea to send out an e-mail to remind everybody that they should have a multicultural basket; because I haven’t heard any follow up about that since September, Except for here.

Jimmy: I feel like we’ve assumed that people are doing this just because we said that it was going to be the initiative. That’s what we want to do, and in our MEPAR group we know who’s doing what; but we don’t know who’s doing what outside of the group, and that’s tough.

Katerina: We can bring this up at the next faculty meeting. People always respond better in person.
Jimmy: Because we are not administrators, we are not the enforcers. We are not supposed to be doing that. We can ask but...

Marina: But I feel that every time we try to throw something out as a school to the staff, I feel like if it’s not coming from an administrator, it’s not taken seriously.

Jimmy: We’ll request time from Ms. Samberg to address everyone at the faculty conference.

Marina: I mean, if this is really something that we want to do... We do find the time for character ed.; we do find the time for all this other crap! So then we can find a time for multicultural read alouds.

The MEPAR members try to figure out why others teachers are not joining them in implementing multicultural read alouds. They personally accept some of the blame by admitting that they failed to follow up with teachers to “remind” them that they should have a basket from which to choose multicultural books. The rest of the blame is being spread out to include the rest of the teaching staff for not following suggestions and for not being forthcoming when they are asked for suggestions and feedback. The remainder of the blame is also indirectly being placed on the principal, Ms. Samberg. When the MEPAR members say that they are not administrators and they are not supposed to tell people what to do, they are pointing to the absence of leadership from Ms. Samberg in terms of moving MEPAR’s agenda forward. In all fairness it is important to mention that Ms. Samberg was out on maternity leave from November to December.
However, even when Ms. Samberg was at the school there was a sentiment that she was not
doing enough to support MEPAR when it came to getting everyone to implement the initiative.

*Jimmy:* Not for nothing, *I think that we are the only group last year that didn’t make people do
stuff. The writing inquiry group made everybody do what they were working on.*

*Marina:* We didn’t enforce anything.

*Jimmy:* It was imposed on everyone.

*Katerina:* Ms. Samberg was a part of the writing group. She made everyone do it; she enforced
it.

Having the principal enforce an initiative last year made every staff member participate.

Not having the principal’s backing this year definitely made the group feel a little frustrated and
lead them to want to address the entire staff at a faculty conference. There wasn’t a strong
resentment against Ms. Samberg at all, but a definite awareness that we lacked the power to
make everyone come on board with us on this initiative. Ms. Samberg’s hands-off approach
towards MEPAR itself is something worth discussing. Although MEPAR did not have Ms.
Samberg’s authoritative weight behind their work, MEPAR did enjoy *carte blanche* freedom to
operate on their own terms and come up with whatever approach they deemed might be
beneficial to the school. Of course this freedom was tempered by the knowledge that the
MEPAR group would never do anything that would go against the schools culture, or the
principal’s previous directives. Ms. Samberg trusted MEPAR and gave them the freedom to operate as they wished, but within this freedom there was also a great level of ignorance as to the work that MEPAR was doing. This ultimately resulted in the inability of the principal to support the group in reaching their goals for school-wide transformation. I will discuss this further in the conclusion of the study.

**Time for Decisive Action**

And so the deep frustration that MEPAR felt about being ineffective in building school-wide momentum for this initiative finally led them to make some decisions. They came to the realization that worrying too much about not having the “authority” to make other teachers do something was keeping them from making decisions, and by extension, was keeping them from having the level of impact that they desired.

*Jimmy: We are trying to set a standard. I mean - it’s not going to be perfect. I want to share something with you that I found in one of my readings about curriculum. I found that it was really freeing, and I wanted to remember to share it with you. It was something along these lines... ‘You are never going to make the perfect choices about what you’re going to do, but making a choice, and being purposeful about what you’re doing is better than trying to teach everything.’*

*Marina: Or, it’s better than teaching nothing because you don’t know what you’re supposed to do. Multicultural education is such a huge thing, so it remains untouched because it’s such a huge thing. But like we said back in the summer, if you just grab any book, it’s better then not reading any book.*
Deena: If you know they’re good... Sometimes you run into trouble when they’re not.

Marina: But that’s knowing your book basket.

Deena: But not everyone knows what books are in their book basket. And that’s just a reality.

Marina: That’s why we’re trying to get a list of good reliable books.

Jimmy: Dammit! We keep going back to that!

Marina: I might have some, you might have some...

Jimmy: We are trying to include people and we’re not getting anything!

Marina: So moving right along...

Jimmy: Then maybe we just have to do what you said before. We do it and that’s it! We just give it to people. So maybe these are a bunch of books for this unit/this topic. Kind of like what you guys are doing in third Grade. You’re doing a Peru unit. Here are six books on Peru – Go! Here are six books on people with special needs – Go! So we’ll put it together, and give it out to people.

Pat: I think that’s the best way to do it.

Tammy: As a starting point.

Pat: It’s the best way to do it at least as a starting point- You know? And I think people will be more appreciated than having to figure it out for themselves. I think so. I would appreciate it.

From this point on, MEPAR stopped worrying about not having the authority to tell people what to do, and started seeing all of their work and suggestions as something that we wanted all people to follow. We would not present anything as a choice, but would present it as
something that needed to happen. This attitude also began filtering into the different grade level teams. Now that the MEPAR members felt empowered to lead others, they brought the weight of the expectations to do multicultural education to their teams and explicitly addressed this with their colleagues.

This newfound confidence was born both out of the frustration of seeing teachers not implement the initiative as it was recommended to them, as well as out of the belief that giving teachers materials and instruction for implementation would be appreciated. And thus the MEPAR group would not be like the other inquiry groups that the school had experienced; MEPAR was not only going to tell people what to do, but was going to support them in the initiative. The support would come in the form of books and lessons, but also from removing all of the obstacles that would stop teachers from implementing the multicultural read aloud initiative. Since MEPAR had already wrestled with the challenges during their meetings, all non-MEPAR teachers had to do was read a book to their class and have a discussion.

**Professional Development for Teachers**

MEPAR teachers had gained a newfound confidence in themselves and a newfound clarity about their role in the school; they had to get non-MEPAR teachers to follow the school-wide initiative and to support them in doing so. In order to initiate this task, MEPAR decided to
ask Ms. Samberg to allocate time from the monthly faculty conference for some professional development on multicultural education with all teachers. MEPAR knew that they had to address the entire staff at a faculty conference in order to be able to assert that this was in fact a school sanctioned, and principal-sanctioned, initiative that everyone would follow. But MEPAR was not only looking to stand in front of the staff and force them to follow the initiative; the idea was to create an authentic professional development session that would inspire teachers to want to do multicultural education and to understand why it was important. MEPAR members thought about what outcomes they wanted to have come from the professional development session and then crafted activities to achieve those outcomes.

Deena: I think we need to think about how people are saying a lot more inappropriate things.

Jane: Oh? I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Deena: As it relates to multicultural education. Just a lot more ignorant comments that I am surprised to hear from my colleagues... I’m sorry if this is inappropriate.

Jane: No. It’s not.

Belle: We can do an activity, where they can do this within their own classroom. An activity where they can see what another person would feel.

Jane: We need to start from an adult level and then trickle it down to the kid’s level.

Deena: I’m just bringing up a larger need that to me seems related to this. Framing the discussion as, ‘this is who we are already’ and being a little bit of an elbow to people who have forgotten, or never knew who we are as Queens Multicultural.
Belle: Well, we have some new people coming in the building so it’s like everything changes.

Jane: I don’t really know where you’re coming from. Obviously something has happened that you’re thinking this way, which I don’t know anything about. So I’m just saying that you are suggesting we should start with adults and then come to talk about kids... because we will only have an hour to do this.

Deena: I don’t know, maybe. If we can work on an adult level and sort of address our own prejudices.

Jane: And then connect to our students.

Deena: Yes, to talk about our own suppositions that we don’t know we have, or our own prejudices that we don’t know we have, or maybe do realize that we have...

Deena’s concern in this excerpt points out that there is a much greater divide between MEPAR members and non-MEPAR members than was suggested before. Although Deena never discussed all the details of the incident she was alluding to with the full MEPAR group, she and I discussed it in subsequent interviews. Deena was deeply disturbed by a random joke that a teacher made about Hassidic Jews. Upon hearing this joke, she was shocked and felt that this teacher had crossed a line that violated the values of that Queens Multicultural had established when it first opened. This is why Deena is advocating for MEPAR’s professional development session to address, at least in part, that we need to work on ourselves to reduce our own prejudices and stereotypes, as well as with children to reduce their prejudices and stereotypes. At
least two other MEPAR members were present when the offensive joke was made, and supported Deena in wanting to start with a focus on adults; even members like Jane that did not know what happened understood where Deena was coming from and also agreed that we needed to professionally develop the adults about multicultural education.

The goal of this professional development session was not simply to roll out specific directives about what was expected of every teacher in the multicultural read aloud initiative, but to try to establish a rationale and point of reference for the teachers in the school. Multicultural read alouds and multicultural education were not random things that we wanted to add to our curriculum on a whim; there are real, concrete reasons why multicultural education is particularly valid to our school, and we wanted to develop that understanding with the teachers that were not in MEPAR. Creating an experience that teachers could connect to personally was key to winning the staff over and to inspire them to improve themselves and their teaching practice.

MEPAR’s agenda for the professional development period included an ice-breaker activity where staff had to write down the worst insult that they were ever called. This created the context where teachers were able to connect to the session at a very personal level. After the ice-breaker, MEPAR read aloud the book *If She Only Knew*, shared the multicultural mission statement and involved all the teachers in the task of reviewing multicultural books to determine
how they could be used in a classroom. A few days after the professional development, MEPAR discussed the session and talked about how they felt everything went.

Jimmy: How do you think it went Monday? Overall? Any details?

Vince: I think it was definitely something everyone could relate to.

Pat: Did you at all get to look at any of the stuff that people wrote about the books?

Jimmy: No, but I can bring it up.

Shelly: That would be interesting.

Nasreen: I think that by the time we got to that part, a lot of people were tired.

Pat: I think so too.

Nasreen: It might not be their best work.

Shelly: But everyone was really quiet and looking at the books; they seemed pretty interested.

Jimmy: That’s the part they seemed to like the most.

Pat: Looking at the books.

Katerina: There are some great books here now.

Jimmy: So did you think it was good? I guess sometimes I get upset, like when the meeting didn’t go the way I wanted it to.

Marina: Well, I thought it was going to be like boring and that we were going to look dumb because I wasn’t here when you guys planned it, but it wasn’t. It was paced just enough. And everybody was on board. And I think it showed everybody that we’ve been actually doing something all of this time. That we’re not just...
Jane: Eating cookies!

Marina: That we actually followed through with a plan.

Katerina: How do you feel it went?

Jimmy: Like I said, sometimes I feel like I’m overly critical because I’m anal. At first... and even Jane said to me, this is not going well.

Jane: In my opinion, I felt, cause I’m a control freak. So I was modeling, ‘I am fat ass’, and I feel like towards the end it got to be more powerful. But at first people didn’t really know what to do the activity.

Pat: Agreed.

Jane: ‘I’m fat ass, and it makes me feel like...’

Katerina: However, Marina and I were not there last meeting, so we had no idea what was going on before hand. But the directions were very clear to follow, and I think I agree with you, some of the answers...

Jane: People didn’t know.

Katerina: Get it! They didn’t get the whole point of the exercise. It wasn’t...

Jane: When we were talking about it, we were like ‘Oh My God! That would really be WO!’

Katerina: But I think it’s just the people who answered. I don’t think it was... We got it. I got it right away. We are all adults, professionals, we should be able to follow directions and understand the meaning behind the activity. I think of it more like an individual thing.

Belle: Jimmy was saying that maybe if we had them hold on to their individual thing, and their names, so it would be more personal to them, because they had other people’s names, and they were like, OK I don’t know how to relate.
Katerina: But the point was to try to put yourself in their shoes.

Belle: I think they would have gotten more out of it if they just had their own name and I was called this, and when I was called this, you know what I mean. The whole point was to say how these words that you wouldn’t think would be hurtful, are actually hurtful.

Jane: What hit me was that some people were just like, it blows my mind that someone would call someone this word, like slut. To know that someone called someone a slut was like...

Jimmy: I think there was one person... I think overall it went well, but in the beginning, I was like this is not going the way it was supposed to... because people were like I feel sad... and then all of a sudden, it took one person who really thought about it, and they said this is disgusting. I can’t believe that anyone would ever say this. I think they said, ‘I want to cry right now to know that somebody was every called this.’

Jane: There it was!

Jimmy: And after that one person said it, Boom! Everything else...

Pat: Took off with it.

Jimmy: I guess I’m idealistic, and when we were planning it...

Jane: That’s what we thought.

Marina: Maybe it would have been helpful to say before hand, think of the worse thing that you were ever called that really stuck with you your whole life, and was the worse, just to kind of, to let them know where we were going to before we started.

Katerina: But even, but still. I think we’re being too critical of the group and the activity. It wasn’t the point of what we were supposed to do. I think you guys are being too critical. The directions were clear cut. I think it was great, fantastic, well presented, directions were clear. I’m just going to say that that’s how people interpreted it.

Jane: I thought it was good to come up with those lessons from the books. I think that we left with something.
Katerina: I think it was fine.

Marina: And I think it was good to show everyone the books and to get them to look at them and make the questions. Because if we would just have handed it to them, it would have been just another thing.

Jane: It was choice.

Jimmy: I was surprised at how engaged a couple of random people were. For example someone said, ‘I wish I would have known about it.’ I think everybody participated, but there were a few people who were like, you could see that they really liked what we were doing, and I guess in a way it made me think about how in the beginning of the year we wondered about asking more people to join. I think it’s good that we did it the way we did, but it brings up the question of, so the new people, how are we going to bring them on board.

Marina: You said it to them. Everybody is a part of what we are doing.

Jimmy: We just have to see how that turns out. Because that is really the whole point. It’s great if we do it, but we wanted everyone to do it. So how can we bring everyone on board with that?

Jane: Maybe by giving them things to do. Anyone that want to continue coming up with lessons or ideas from the books, like branching off or something. To get them involved, so those that want to get involved can. Maybe they don’t know how to get involved, so if we give them things or ways to get involved, than they are more likely.

Marina: Responding to the e-mail survey is a great way to start. [Everyone Laughs]

The reviews of the professional development session were mixed, but for the most part everyone felt that MEPAR was able to convey the overall intent of the session to the staff.

Perhaps the staff was tired after a long day, and didn’t really think that deeply about the ice
breaker activity, but after a rocky start, they got it. All it took was one person to get in the right mind frame, and then what followed was a domino effect. Several teachers shared personal stories of how they were teased because of their hair, weight, skin color, perceived sexuality and religion.

The first ten minutes of the activity were painful to facilitate because we had such high expectations for the session. Our disappointment that the activity did not grab the staff as strongly as we had envisioned colored our perception of how the session went, but in reality, it was very productive. Teachers saw how to take a book and build a read aloud around it using questions to engage the class. They saw how to facilitate the discussion so that the students would be in charge of moving the discussion with their comments. But most importantly they saw how MEPAR had acquired around fifty more multicultural books on a wide variety of topics that they did not have before. These new books were going to be made readily available to them, and after seeing how easy it was to come up with plans for their read alouds by thinking about a few questions on the summary sheets we created, all teachers had to do was check the books out and use them.
Chapter 11

Organizing the Books!

Why don’t we just use the system I mentioned the last time. We number all of the books and create a sign-out book. It’s not a big deal – we just have to do it. It’ll be quick.

(Katerina, 2012)

MEPAR felt it had reached another milestone. First they modified the curriculum, and then they thought of a school-wide initiative, created a mission statement, implemented an initiative, and now they were stewarding the multicultural read aloud initiative for the school.

Since the heart of this read aloud initiative became the actual books that were going to be used, the source of the books becomes important. The books that MEPAR members had initially been using came from their personal book collections, their classroom libraries and the Heartwood Program’s character education books. Identifying books already in the school was the first step, but we knew that what we had was not enough; tapping into more resources for additional books was a need.

But looking for those resources in the school turned out to be fruitless. MEPAR lacked the manpower hours needed to seek out, sort and organize the multicultural books in the school. We tried from January through March to create our multicultural read aloud library, but we never succeeded in being able to gather materials in a central location.
January 12, 2012

Tammy: Jeanette said she didn’t touch the books.

Marina: She did! But she told me she touched them after I had already looked at them. She did put the books away after I organized them.

Jimmy: Where did she put them?

Marina: She put them on the shelves.

Jimmy: But they never....

Marina: Cause I came in the morning looking for the books, and Jeanette had fixed up the library, so they were already gone.

Jane: So the books are still missing?

Pat: Someone has to know where they are!

Jane: OK, I took ‘em home.... Just kidding.

March 8, 2012

Meeting starts. Tammy, Jane, Nasreen and Pat are leveling books. Tammy had worked with Diana to level the books that we had gotten. Apparently, I moved the books and messed up the system.

Jimmy: So what is it that happened?

Tammy: We’re leveling. We are dividing, because we are going to number the books. So we’ll number each of the books to put into our new system. You messed up all the books we already leveled and organized. We have to do it over again.
Jimmy: I’m sorry. I didn’t know that you guys had done that. I just moved everything into the boxes so that the books wouldn’t disappear like the last time.

Nasreen: This one has a star.

Jane: That means we can’t find the reading level on scholastic.com.

Tammy: Put it into the “All Grades” basket.

Jane: Put that in the K-2 basket.

These two scenes, two months apart, show that very little was accomplished over the course of those two months to organize our books. Once those first sets of books disappeared from the library, MEPAR gave up on trying to gather and organize in-house books. Not only did books disappear from the library, but classroom teachers were not forthcoming in sharing the multicultural books in their classrooms. Physically going into other teachers’ classrooms and searching through their libraries was just not an option, and so MEPAR turned its attention to new acquisitions.

Once it was official that Ms. Samberg was going to allocate some money from the budget to purchase new multicultural books, I set myself to the task to research, choose and order books. As I mentioned earlier, teachers had said that they were making lists, but when it came to producing lists in order to place orders, the lists never materialized. Instead, with the help of a couple of MEPAR members, we sat in front of a computer and filled a shopping cart with books.
on topics we had discussed throughout our meetings. We ordered books with themes such as Islam, physical handicaps, poverty, racism, self/cultural identity, Latinos, and Asians; the books varied according to their reading levels, and covered themes that would make them useful to all teachers from Pre-K to third grade. The first set of books came in early January just in time for the school-wide professional development, and the rest of the books arrived in mid-January. It took two months to organize those hundred or so books.

Part of the delay in preparing the books for teachers was due to our inability to decide on how to sort the books. Would we sort them by theme, by grade level, by topics, or something else? Finally we decided that the most important factor was age appropriateness. When teachers were going to choose from the book basket, the most important characteristic they were looking for was the level of the text: Would my class comprehend this book, or was it too difficult for them to understand? Ultimately the decision was made to organize the books into the following categories: Books that were appropriate for grades PK-2, books for grades 3-4, and books that could be used in any grade PK-4. Two months after our school-wide professional development session, the books were ready for teachers to start taking out.

Upon an end-of-year examination of the sign-out that MEPAR created, five signatures from teachers were found – all from MEPAR teachers. It is possible that people borrowed books without signing them out, but the most likely explanation is that no one other than MEPAR
members used these books for their read alouds. By the time the books were ready, teachers across the school had either found different sources for their read alouds, or they weren’t doing them at all. MEPAR teachers share their thoughts about the impact they had on their colleagues in my concluding chapters.
I know everyone is exhausted. I think the first thing is roll call. Jane is on Jury duty, and Shelly just went downstairs. Besides that, everyone is here right? Vincent and Marina are probably coming back in May after she is finished with grad school. In the e-mail that I sent you guys the other day, I think we are kind of loosing momentum. Probably because we don’t meet as often, or it seems like it’s not as often. It’s supposed to be twice a month, but because sometimes it’s two weeks, or sometimes three weeks between meetings, I feel like every time we get together, even now, we are like ‘I don’t know what we’re doing!’ [Everyone giggles in agreement.] (Jimmy: March 22, 2012)

By late March, MEPAR knew the end of the year was quickly approaching, and they needed to do something to “put a bow around” our work and wrap up what we have done in a way that brought our initiative full circle. Ms. Samberg had given us carte blanche to complete our project as we saw fit, but MEPAR knew that they were going to be held accountable for the per session funds they were receiving for their time and participation. At Queens Multicultural, every staff member knew that being paid per session (overtime) came with the expectation that there would be some sort of tangible, and/or visible product to show that each staff member had merited that extra pay. Ms. Samberg had very high expectations of the staff and made it clear that any per session activity had to be justified with proof that funds were being used to positively contribute to the betterment of the school. Thus MEPAR had only three months to make MEPAR’s impact felt on the school.
As the evidence has been presented so far, MEPAR operated in bursts with short-term goals being achieved along the way. This pattern of dealing with small issues one step at a time was born out of necessity; the seemingly small steps that had been accomplished were actually small tangible steps that required large amounts of intellectual, philosophical and pedagogical discussion to inform them. The big picture was now the focus. A multicultural education mission had been established for the school, and MEPAR had to make sure that their year’s work was a reflection of that mission. To do this, MEPAR had to do some reflecting about their year’s work so far in order to determine their successes, and identify the shortcoming that they would then address from then until June.

Jimmy: If we summarize what we’ve done this year, we tried to first just figure out for ourselves what things meant—what multicultural education meant. Then we came up with our philosophy, and then we tried to figure out a way to bring into the classroom. We did a lot of work around that, but I don’t think we ever evaluated how that went. So maybe we can take some time to talk about that now? I guess the best thing is for everyone to speak personally about themselves, how they’ve actually seen it happening in their classroom, and then maybe you could talk about how you see things on your grade; because those are two very different things. Because what you do as an individual is different. So I would like to start?

Nasreen: I can start because I’m not really doing it. I mean I’m doing math most of the time with the fourth-graders, while Lani does the reading. I’m not sure if she does, you know. We do cover some multicultural texts in the reading, but I’m not sure if she focuses on multicultural themes as part of the reading.

Jimmy: And you guys don’t really talk about social studies then together?
Nasreen: We do, social studies yes. Social studies we do together, and the writing. But we really don’t, at the fourth grade level, put a lot of effort into the multicultural part. I did speak to Lani about it, but for her it’s something else in addition to do in the fourth grade curriculum. We’re trying so much to bring everything into the social studies.

Pat: The good thing about that is that in social studies alone, you touch on different multicultural things. Whereas our kindergarten social studies is transportation, community... things like that- So we bring it in when we can. But personally, I do it mostly in read aloud when I have a spare five minutes, which happens throughout the day. But I don’t know about the rest of kindergarten. I don’t think they’re taking it seriously, like really pushing it.

Jimmy: Do you guys talk about it during your PLC time?

Pat: I’ve mentioned it, but not really. Not so much. And when I do, I don’t really get much of a response, so...

Belle: In second-grade, we do a little bit of that, like in your spare time, we do a read aloud, a quick read aloud. And there are times where we plan for it, and we’ll talk about it during PLC or during lunch. Something that we have been doing, and will have a follow-up, is where we have an activity that they do after they read the book. It can be a writing response, or it can be something else like a discussion. We’ve been doing all the different class discussions to see how we can use different techniques to promote the students building off of each other. I guess she (Ms. Samberg) gave us reasons to talk about more multicultural issues and topics. I know we started out strong in the beginning. We were having a lesson plan with the writing response, but now it’s like we have all these other things that we’re doing now, and we do it when we have some kind of 10 to 5 minutes. We just do a quick read aloud and do a discussion.

Jimmy: But is it still multicultural themes, or is it just whatever is clever.

Belle: I mean in February it was more Black history. Now I know Raffi is doing women’s rights for Women’s history month. Like I do random. I meant to do themes, but I’m not into themes. So now I go back and forth. Whatever fits.

Tammy: I think we’re kind of like a totally different situation because our entire social studies curriculum is multicultural. We are doing different countries, so we are really getting into the read alouds a lot. It’s not just the nonfiction texts that we are reading. We just finished doing
China, so we read *The Seven Brothers*, and *Ruby’s Wish*; those kinds of things. And *The Seven Brothers* is also loyalty, so it’s connected to character ed too. And the character ed books, they are multicultural too themselves, so...

Deena: I feel like Project Cicero helped a lot too. I’ve heard a lot of people talking about finding multicultural books for read aloud. I found a lot of multicultural chapter books and things like that, so they’re just more embedded. I think the third grade as a whole, along with the social studies the last couple of weeks, we have a lot more of a focus doing read aloud versus test prep. So I read the book *Teammates* today, which was about Martin Luther King and racism. We talked about slavery meant. So I think we have had the multicultural emphasis, but we haven’t brought it back to the whole school. What do we want our kids to know or understand?

By March, MEPAR teachers had fallen into the routine of incorporating multicultural education somewhere in their curricula. Pat and Belle described how they were mainly incorporating multicultural topics through read alouds. Nasreen described how multicultural topics were only being incorporated during social studies. Deena and Marina indicated how third grade had developed a very integrated curriculum where reading, social studies and read alouds were all addressing multicultural education. All of the teachers were staying true to their missions, but it is apparent that they were not satisfied with the extent to which they were incorporating multicultural education into their classes; they were making do while still trying to figure out how to get around the barriers that prevented them from doing more.

Nasreen was in an interesting situation because her job was split between being a fourth grade push-in teacher and a math remediation teacher for the whole school; Nasreen spent half of her day co-teaching with another teacher in their classroom, and the other half of her day
working with small groups of students across the school. Nasreen describes trying to address multicultural issues during social studies, but not being able to have a say about what occurred during reading. As a split position teacher, she was subordinate to the full time teacher in the classroom and could not dictate what she should do in Nasreen’s absence. Pat also expressed difficulties of implementation in her classroom and her grade. She was unable to figure out ways to address multicultural education with her special education students during social studies, so she instead got by using read alouds as her vehicle. Belle showed that she had committed herself to doing the multicultural read alouds, but she found that she preferred not to follow a theme; following a theme seemed to hinder her, while she found being able to choose whatever she felt like reading in the moment enabled her to “fit it in”. “Fitting it in” had become the norm for teachers in MEPAR.

Despite the attempts to regulate their efforts for the implementation of the read aloud initiative, the reality was that multicultural read alouds were still not getting the priority that they were supposed to. Time in the daily schedule, and time for planning were barriers that were extremely difficult to overcome. Despite these barriers, MEPAR teachers still made things happen. While non-MEPAR teachers were essentially ignoring the initiative, MEPAR teachers were at least making it happen. They were addressing multicultural education and were determined to “fit it in”, even if it meant taking five minutes to read something and talk about it.
with the class. Out of everyone, third grade was having the most success; they weren’t squeezing
out time in order to do multicultural education, but instead were successfully integrating it into
everything they were teaching.

All of the examples, with the exception of third grade, show that MEPAR teachers were
going against the current. They were making every effort possible to improve their practice and
improve their curricula, but the vast majority of their colleagues did not follow suit. MEPAR
teachers were struggling to make things work in their classes because they believed in
multicultural education, but their efforts came at a high cost. While everyone else just went about
doing their jobs, MEPAR teachers had the added stress of figuring things out for themselves. It
was onerous for them, day-in and day-out, to make decisions that would take them away from
what their colleagues were doing. MEPAR teachers were following their initiative, but it meant
more work, more stress, more aggravation and less support.

This constant struggle affected the teachers in the group, and made them feel exhausted
and defeated. In order to try and counter this feeling, and to also analyze the dimensions of
multicultural education that MEPAR had been ignoring up to now, I lead the group in an analysis
of our practices that would look at equity pedagogy, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction
and changes in school structures. Knowing that teachers in MEPAR were in fact incorporating
the other dimensions of multicultural education into their teaching, I wanted them to discover
their accomplishments for themselves in order to boost their morale. In addition to making them feel more successful, PAR requires the realization to come from the collective group, and not simply from me as the facilitator. Thinking critically about their practices and having them participate in the analysis would be essential to the integrity of MEPAR.

*Jimmy: How do we promote prejudice reduction? What are we doing? What do we see in the work that we are doing that is trying to reduce prejudice? Are we doing it, or are we not doing it?*

*Pat: It’s honestly being done at the kindergarten level, the first grade level, and I know Pre-K also. We’re teaching about the self and others.*

*Shelly: And around the world.*

*Pat: It’s teaching that these people are different, but you’re the same. So I think that may be a good start of that prejudice reduction. Because people may look different than you, but you can still have the same interests, like the same things and do the same things. I just read a book the other day; I don’t remember the name of it off to talk my head. I live here and I go food shopping, and on the next page they live in China, and it shows the different types of markets that they go to in the picture. So it’s a totally different market, but they are still doing the same thing. That’s a good way to get the point across. I think that’s a good start in terms of reducing prejudice.*

*Tammy: I know that I’ve been doing character ed. It has a lot of prejudice reduction, because the books are multicultural, and then it also has a positive character trait.*

*Pat: So it reduces prejudice in itself.*

*Jimmy: So are we saying that we think we are doing well in this dimension of multicultural education?*
Pat, Tammy & Nasreen: Yeah! We think so.

Jimmy: Then let’s take a look at equity pedagogy. At its core it means that we understand that every child is different, and that because they are different, they are going to need a different way of learning. Whether it is because you come from a different culture, you speak another language, you are special education student, or because you have a different modality… So that in terms of that, how are we addressing the needs of our students in our daily teaching?

Pat: Tammy, I think that comes up a lot in your class when you do the test prep. Where there are stories like Red Riding Hood and Cinderella that lot of the kids don’t know. Culturally we know it here, but some of them never heard of that. We have to break it down for them. I think it’s a lot harder to do that when they get older.

Tammy: Because there are so many things. Even with the short articles that we are reading.

Pat: Like the baseball thing.

Tammy: You are 8 years old, and I am still acting things out for you. This is the first time you’re coming into contact with baseball. And I’ve been really acting out with them. Throwing the ball, creating a picture for them. I feel like everything that we’re doing, we’re always going back and building that background knowledge and making those connections.

Jimmy: So you consider that as a form of equity pedagogy?

Pat: Those teachable moments; those things that you don’t plan on. You don’t have a whole lesson, but you have to stop and revisit. Stuff like that. And I think that happens a lot more then we realize- more that we recognize it.

Tammy: We were just doing Harriet Quimby in some random Making Meaning thing; the first woman to fly across the English Channel. They don’t know the English Channel. They don’t know where France and England are. They don’t know all the tiny little things, and that this was all over 100 years ago. Just even what a plane looked like then and now. But then you have Simon who raises his hand and asks if this is like Amelia Earhart.

Pat: He made that connection.
Tammy: It just went on a whole tangent. So I think that those teachable moments... Trying to bring that background in and exposing them is how we do equity pedagogy.

MEPAR teachers came to the realization that they were in fact fulfilling the prejudice reduction and equity pedagogy elements of multicultural education; they just had to employ the right lens to be able to identify them in their practices. Pat and Shelly were able to perceive their efforts at exposing their kindergarten and first grade students to texts and ideas that showed differences and similarities across different types of people were the groundwork for prejudice reduction. They were able to deconstruct the concept of prejudice reduction into concepts and values that made sense in the context of early childhood education. Teaching kindergarteners and first graders directly about prejudice reduction would not be the most developmentally appropriate strategy, but exposing them and making them accustomed to “the normality of difference” at early ages paves the path towards reducing prejudice as the children grow older.

As a third grade teacher, Tammy felt that the consistent exposure that the students were getting with character education books was fulfilling the role of explicitly teaching prejudice reduction. Because the character education books had multicultural characters and social themes, they were intrinsically and explicitly addressing themes such as racism, respect, equality and justice. Our character education program tied right into our goals for MEPAR and was supporting our efforts.
In terms of equity pedagogy, the group was able to identify the many ways where simple teaching practices, or adjustments to their normal teaching practices, played out the essence of what equity pedagogy is about. A teacher doing whatever it takes to help students learn is part of being equitable because they recognize the individuality of each child and take steps to help that child as an individual. Teachers had a lot to say about equity pedagogy and showed how it encompassed paying attention to academic, cultural and social needs.

Tammy: Am I a little confused with this, or is it basically the way we differentiate? The way that we model? That kind of stuff?

Jimmy: The hard part about looking at the theoretical language is that it seems overly technical, and pie in the sky... But that is basically what it means. I agree- It is differentiation.

Nasreen: You might have children coming from different cultures. They don’t speak out unless you ask them to. So as a teacher, you are aware. So for example, a girl may not want to sit next to a boy because it’s...

Pat: Culturally inappropriate...

Nasreen: I remember once hearing from a teacher that there was a boy that did not want to sit in the chair, and that he would never sit. So I said to her that maybe we should find out where he came from. Maybe they sat on the floor.

Pat: And sure enough...

Nasreen: That’s what it was. He wasn’t accustomed to sitting in a chair.

Jimmy: Tammy, That’s like what you were talking about. What we call differentiated instruction falls under equity pedagogy.
Tammy: So then I think we are doing this all the time. If we are pulling guided reading groups, and we’re showing videos, and we’re doing hands-on projects, and we’re using manipulatives... You know?

Nasreen: And acting things out for the students.

Tammy: Supporting the boring test prep passage with a crazy teacher acting out baseball, and then reading another book about baseball and then showing a video. You know- whatever it takes!

Jimmy: I think the difference is that, as teachers we know what differentiated instruction means, but we don’t understand that it means equity pedagogy. The reason why we’re doing these things is because that’s what they need. So we are giving it to them because we want to be equitable. I think differentiated instruction is part of the puzzle, and then in order for it to be truly equitable, when it comes to things like Nasreen was talking about, then you have to understand not only the academic needs of the students, but the social needs as well.

Shelly: Yeah – and the cultural needs. I agree with you. I think that we, the school, does a really good job of trying to target that.

Belle: Culturally, I think it’s also like when you’re with a group of kids. They have these cartons that they watch, and computer games that they play. That to me- you have to consider that. Not just ethnic background, but what they do at home.

Shelly: What happens at home; their support.

Belle: Like what they’re exposed to. What they see on TV. Those shows that they watch and the games that they play. So that we can relate. Sometimes when I’m teaching and I see their faces and they have these puzzled looks, I break it down. I say it’s just like that TV show, Such and such. And then they’re like ‘Oh!’ You know; That’s the way they get it, because that’s what they are exposed to every single day of their lives. So bringing it down to their level, instead of like...

Pat: Trying to get them to understand something else.

Belle: Because they watch this TV show, they listen to this music, rap or pop or whatever. That to me is their culture. They have two cultures; you know what I mean? They have their home
culture with their parents, and they have that American culture where they are doing all the stuff that young kids do.

Shelly: I think that sometimes the parents don’t offer information too. I’m thinking of one kid in particular. Her parents are really, really hard on her. I didn’t know how hard they were on her; I found out at the last time parent teacher conferences. They were like, ‘Let us know if she gets anything wrong on her spelling test. She has to write it 20-30 times each.’ And the mother said if she gets it wrong, dad gets really mad. And it’s my fault – and I feel so sorry. And I didn’t realize how much pressure this girl was getting until half-way through the year. And so like, unless the parents come to you sometimes with that information, it’s hard to know what’s going on and how their home culture is affecting them.

The wide variety of comments that teachers presented in the previous two excerpts demonstrate an organic understanding of the necessity of providing students with equity pedagogy-centered instruction. *Equity pedagogy* requires being aware and building awareness of your students in order to be better prepared to address their needs. These ideas may seem like they are nothing particularly special, but they in fact reflect the notion that *equity pedagogy* is not about grand gestures or specific teaching strategies, but a way of approaching the education of children. The very thought of considering why a child might not want to sit in their chair, or speak in front of class, or not want to sit next to a boy is what any “good” teacher should do. But a teacher that believes in multicultural education makes it their business to always consider why students might behave in non-traditional ways instead of dismissing their behavior as insubordinate, defiant or petty. What makes these discussions important for MEPAR is the realization that teachers are already meeting multicultural education goals as defined by our
multicultural mission and Banks’s *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* just by doing what they normally do.

This great coincidence is a byproduct of the child-centered philosophy that Queens Multicultural established from its foundation. The school’s philosophy of discovery-based learning permeates school culture and curriculum in the school. All of the teachers hired by Ms. Samberg and the hiring committee were selected because they fit into the school culture, and thus the entire faculty naturally followed a student-centered approach to pedagogy. The power in the exchange during MEPAR is not only realizing that MEPAR teachers are equitable in their practices, but being able to articulate how and why their instructional choices reflect multicultural education ideals. MEPAR teachers were now empowered with the knowledge that they were not “accidentally” going to engage in equity pedagogy, but that they were going to be able to plan for it and think about it as part of their daily practice.

The two remaining dimensions of multicultural education, the *knowledge construction process* and *changing school structures*, were not adequately discussed by the MEPAR. Even eight months after first being introduced to James Banks’s dimensions, teachers in MEPAR did not fully understand what they meant, and therefore did not address them in the discussions we had to evaluate how we were addressing the dimensions at our school. MEPAR members never
did consciously grasp the concept that *knowledge construction* was about understanding that knowledge is situational and depends on the perspective of an individual or a group.

Despite my efforts to equate *knowledge construction* to point of view, the group did not knowingly connect to this dimension. Instead teachers conflated it with *equity pedagogy* and did not see that a teacher addressing a child’s cultural and social needs was a pedagogical strategy; a strategy rooted in understanding that a child’s needs are based on them not having the same beliefs or knowledge as the mainstream does. MEPAR teachers jumped right into figuring out how to accommodate the students, but did not think about how or why the child came to acquire that particular perspective or way of doing things. Their explanation is that in other cultures people do things differently. In order for teachers to acquire full understanding of *knowledge construction*, it would have been necessary to lecture them about epistemology and ontology, which would have taken them off the PAR course.

In terms of empowering school culture, MEPAR came to the realization that it meant doing things at a larger school-wide scale.

*It’s not just individual teachers. Equity pedagogy is what individual teachers do, but empowering school culture is what the whole school does. So how do we as a school make sure that we are providing multicultural education? That we are being equitable in providing opportunities for students?* (Jimmy: March 29, 2012)
Working things out at the individual teacher level and at the school-wide level was the major challenge all year long. MEPAR teachers were trying to improve their own practice while at the same time trying to lead the entire school in initiatives that would eventually lead to an empowering school culture where multicultural education was evident everywhere. The results of MEPAR’s self-analysis showed that we had been doing well in every area; now the only step that had to be taken was to continue to push school-wide initiatives. MEPAR had planned and implemented a school-wide multicultural read aloud initiative, which meant they had technically addressed *empowering school culture*, but MEPAR knew that Queens Multicultural had not yet achieved an empowering school culture.
Chapter 13

Building Multicultural Pride Week

*What you guys did at the year with the kids was awesome. I’m going to be completely honest. Throughout the year implementing it into the classroom, I didn’t really see anything. I didn’t see anything that stuck out outside the classroom. There wasn’t really a presence of multicultural education in the hallways, or throughout the school that was noticeable. Like, if I was a parent and I came into the school, I would have no idea what you guys were doing. But you guys pulled it off and pulled it all together in the end. It was awesome!*  (Vincent, 2012)

MEPAR came to the realization that despite their efforts to unite the staff in vision and practice for multicultural education, they had not been successful in moving the school as a whole. MEPAR teachers were embracing the vision and were implementing the read aloud initiative, but there was still a lack of cohesion across the school. The staff needed to be united under one banner, and MEPAR needed to “see” everyone else in the building doing the same thing they were doing in order to say the program was successful. Queens Multicultural had a history and track record for pulling off school-wide functions, activities and initiatives. It was now time for MEPAR to share in that success by figuring out a way to unite the school through multicultural education.

*Belle: Since it’s May and June, we don’t want to have too much for the teachers to do.*

*Tammy: Right!*
Belle: So maybe something where the children go home, wear your colors, like during spirit week. Bring something that represents your culture, where you’re from. It could be a piece of clothing, or something like an artifact from your country. Bring it that day, and each teacher will take 10 minutes, or maybe a half an hour to just let you share what you brought. Like a show and tell.

Deena: I love the idea.

Shelly: It’s a great idea.

Tammy: Even the culture pennants we did earlier in the year; they were cool!

Belle: And that is what we want. We want kids to get exposed.

Jimmy: We are obviously struggling with all the end of the year stuff we have to do.

Shelly: It’s crazy.

Jimmy: There’s too much shit to do. We all know that. But on the flip side... I’m not saying this as a criticism, but yes, it’s a tough time of year to do this stuff. But that begs the question then... We couldn’t do it in September because it was in the beginning of the year. And we couldn’t do it in January because it was after the break...

Pat: Then there will never be a good time. So then when are we gonna do it?

MEPAR teachers had learned a valuable lesson this year in terms of taking action. They learned a great number of things by having discussions after school in MEPAR, but they also took very long periods of time to make decisions about what they could do. It was now the end of the year, and all of the barriers that had been stopping them from pushing their initiatives had to bulldozed over. They were still going to have discussions about what would make the most
sense for the school, but they would not wait to make decisions because that would then mean nothing would be accomplished. The realization that “something is better than nothing”, and that “there is never going to be a perfect time” empowered and pushed MEPAR to move full steam ahead with building a plan. MEPAR was determined to create an experience that would expose students to different cultures and at the same time make them excited about their own cultures.

The idea of a festival or celebration had been in the works since the previous summer, but it was now time to make it happen.

Tammy: Belle’s idea with the artifacts. You can set them up like in the museum, and travel to other classes and see what their artifacts are. Like if they brought in some clothing, they could write a blurb about it like you would see in a museum.

Shelly: Right.

Belle: I like the museum.

Pat: Thinking from a different perspective, for the little guys, maybe we should think about doing something different for upper and lower grades. Because my kids, just watching someone do something, movement wise or even a dance. But either getting them moving somehow and incorporating culture somehow through music. Movement is going to be a lot better than trying to read something. You know? Because otherwise I just don’t see them absorbing it. I don’t even know if they’ll absorb the movement part, but at least its more appropriate for them…engaging for them. More like if anybody knows something, they can perform it for them.

Jimmy: I was thinking about tapping into those kids that perform for the fashion show. There are a few of those kids that I know would be great and would not need prompting. Why don’t we ask them to do a little something, and have it be like assembly? One grade comes in at a time. It could be in the middle of the multipurpose room. We put the music on, they dance and done!
By the end of our April 26th meeting, MEPAR developed a concept and plan for our school-wide Multicultural Pride Week. For the next month MEPAR teachers met for hands-on work sessions to bring Multicultural Pride Week to life. We wrote flyers to send home to parents to explain the events we had planned, we wrote directions for teachers to follow to prepare for the Multicultural Artifact Museum, we talked to the custodian to arrange tables to be brought up for the museum, and we worked with the principal to modify prep to facilitate the dance assemblies. In addition to these school-wide activities, individual teacher representatives on MEPAR worked to create grade level projects for their teams to follow.

MEPAR teachers showed great resolve and leadership in putting Multicultural Pride Week together. Every teacher and child participated in activities and in experiences that immersed them in different cultures. Students had the opportunity to walk through the artifact museums with their teachers for a “museum tour” and had the opportunity to experience a wide variety of different cultural artifacts and ask questions about them. Teachers and students had the opportunity to engage in rich discussions about culture in authentic ways. Being surrounded by concrete objects that in some way represented a cultural value or practice sparked dialogue that involved learning new things about other cultures and how it compared to values and practices in the students’ home cultures.
While all of this was happening school-wide in the artifact museum, students engaged in activities in their classrooms. Students in Pre-K to second grade made multicultural paper dolls that they “dressed” and decorated, and students in grades three to four made pennants and posters to represent their family’s culture and background. For a whole week, cultural artifacts, decorations and projects dominated the school landscape; every hallway, staircase and classroom was covered with student representations of the students. Teachers and staff also participated and brought in artifacts of their own to join in on the festivities.

In an ironic twist, what teachers at the school were unable to “fit in” for an entire year was now all they did for a whole week. Teachers and students talked in class about culture during reading, writing and social studies, as well as outside of class during recess and PE. Every class was taught the Tarantella and the Chicken Dance. The Tarantella was chosen because it was an easy dance to teach, and because it was a traditional dance of southern Italy; the Chicken Dance was chosen because it is an international dance that most people around the world recognize and enjoy during celebrations. Multicultural Pride Week culminated with a school-wide outside assembly/pep rally. Students wearing their cultural garb were announced and walked down the runway for others to see. The day ended with all children and teachers being taught how to dance the Calypso by three parent volunteers from Trinidad. It was truly a sight to
see; the entire school danced the Calypso, Tarantella and Chicken Dance before students were dismissed with giant smiles and excited chatter about how much they enjoyed the day’s events.

Multicultural Pride Week finally provided MEPAR with the validation that they had been hoping for. Not only had they been doing important work all year long, but they finally succeeded in bringing the entire school together. No teachers complained about having to participate in any of the activities; instead they were all very excited and participate fully in the festivities and learning activities. MEPAR teachers were congratulated by other teachers for their efforts, and the children talked about it for the next few weeks until the end of the year. The entire school was on a high from the success of Multicultural Pride Week, and as preparations for the next school year went on through June, all teachers were talking about how multicultural education was going to be incorporated in the curriculum for next year, and how Multicultural Pride Week was going to become a tradition at Queens Multicultural that would be scheduled both in the Fall and Spring of every year.

Final Reflections From MEPAR Members

Multicultural Pride Week came at the end of May, and the school year was over in late June. The last month of school was so hectic with report cards, curriculum planning and room changes that MEPAR never had the chance to meet as a group to reflect on our year’s work.
Instead, final thoughts about our year-long efforts came from individual teacher exit interviews where participants had the chance to share their thoughts and feelings.

Despite the bumps in the road along the journey, all of the participants felt positive about the outcomes of our project. Teachers were proud of the work that we had done and felt that as a whole, the entire endeavor was worthwhile. There were regrets and there were criticisms, but in the end, even the setbacks were seen as a learning experience. The sentiment and the mood at the end of the study were serene and hopeful.

But I think that with the group that we had though, it’s easy to go off talking about all the different things. And everybody’s pulling and bringing in their own experiences. It’s easy for us to sit around and have a discussion. I do think that we really had meaningful discussions and we talked about a lot of great things, but I don’t think we ever really knew what our end goal was… Not that we didn’t get a lot done. Just sharing what’s going on in school and what’s going on in our classes. I think that for anyone that’s important to have that experience. But like an actual tangible thing that we did. I think that multicultural pride. Those three days we did were fantastic. I think maybe we could’ve been developed that a little bit more; we can do that next year. (Tammy, 2012)

I love everything that we did; I really felt like we did something for the school. And then we worked on everything that we did… From a group perspective, we did well with it. And I think that the kids benefited from what we were trying to do. I don’t know how much the school as a whole… I think at the end everything really started coming together. The process I feel like it was pulling… Chugging along… (Pat, 2012)

I do feel like there could’ve been more, but I don’t know what that would’ve been. Because we weren’t… It wasn’t like we had Heartwood and we were implementing it. We
didn’t have a program, and it was a job to investigate. Our job was to think about multicultural education, learn about that, and see how it works into our school. And like, I think it is a solid foundation for next year, and that there’s a sense that this is something I could do. I think that next year, especially like in the fall, when it’s time for multicultural pride again, the kids are going to be really psyched. And it’ll become an annual tradition, and those things that were missing were minor. But I think that we’ve helped to build a sense of identity, and what’s prioritized at our school. (Deena, 2012)

It was cool to be a part of something, where instead of it being just handed over to you, and that it is expected of you to do. That we had a part in doing it. Realizing how important it is for us to do, because so many of these kids do come from a multicultural background. It’s become more of a responsibility, you know. We do more than we are supposed to do, but I think it’s really important. It’s our job, our responsibility to expose them to things, because many of them have never traveled anywhere or seen so many things. It’s our job to do it. (Jane, 2012)

The teachers’ experience in MEPAR provided them with the opportunity to grow professionally and to become empowered to integrate multicultural education into their teaching practices. The end of the project resulted in a strange juxtaposition of participants feeling extremely accomplished with feeling that they didn’t do enough. This contradiction existed because teachers realized that they put in a tremendous amount of effort over the course of the year; they came to biweekly meetings after having taught all day, and hashed out issues on multicultural education, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Even though things moved very slowly, and few tangible actions were accomplished, the accomplishment was in the actual meetings and discussions, not in the tangible products.
MEPAR teachers had transformed themselves and their teaching over the course of the year and truly felt the impact on their personal professional selves. Wishing that they had done more is testimony to the fact that addressing multicultural education in schools is a daunting and time consuming endeavor. MEPAR teachers ended their project feeling accomplished, but ready to continue their work in the upcoming year. They knew their work was not done, and that this was only the beginning of bringing multicultural education to the entire school.

What the MEPARians gained from this experience was a forum and safe haven in which they could express their ideas and concerns and work out their personal and professional baggage. They found a professional and situated space where they could learn from one another and have their ideas challenged in order to come to a deeper personal realization about multicultural education. This personal professional development was immeasurable and invaluable.
Chapter 14

Findings & Discussion

I think learning about different ways to incorporate multicultural education without it being something else was really helpful. And therefore, it has become second nature for me. So just happens! I can only say that because I’m part of this group. I can’t say that there was a lot of carryover to people that weren’t part of the group...I’m excited for next year, now that we know we can really start implementing everything. (Shelly, 2012)

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of participatory action research as a form of professional development for multicultural education. A simple answer to this question is yes, but a more elaborate explanation requires enumerating the outcomes and discussing how these outcomes fall under the definition of professional development.

1) Teachers gained knowledge about multicultural education. Earlier in the dissertation I discussed how, at the beginning of the study, teachers proved to hold collective knowledge of multicultural education; different members had bits and pieces of multicultural theory ingrained in their prior experiences, but no one member encompassed the full understanding of multicultural education as exemplified by Banks’s five dimensions. Although MEPAR teachers did not like talking about theory directly, reading and discussing theory had an impact on teacher knowledge and practice. By MEPAR’s March analysis of their work, teachers were able to identify the dimensions of multicultural education as they correlated to their classroom discussions and their
classroom pedagogy. MEPAR members were able to internalize multicultural values, ideals, and intricacies in order to craft an all-encompassing mission statement for the school. Breaking down multicultural theory into a mission was indicative of higher order learning process of synthesis, and represented the conversion of multicultural theory into practice at the elementary school level for Queens Multicultural.

2) Teachers engaged in rich dialogical conversations about multicultural education. As MEPAR participants pointed out themselves, the discussions that were had throughout the course of the year were in and of themselves professional development. MEPAR discussed an extremely wide-range of topics including anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism, stereotypes, social class, religion, poverty, culture, language, and diversity. Every conversation about any component of multicultural education became the subject of dialogue and learning. Teachers brought up an issue they were facing in their classroom, and the entire group entered into the dialogue, each providing their own point of view and challenging others to see things from another perspective. The discussions that took place in MEPAR were very similar to discussions that professors in graduate courses try to facilitate with their students, but these conversations were a staple for MEPAR and became the primary vehicle for moving MEPAR’s agenda forward, and for allowing genuine learning to take place.
3) Teachers engaged in curriculum writing, lesson planning and school-wide initiatives.

While planning instruction is one of the primary responsibilities of teachers, designing curriculum and converting theory into practice definitely does not fall under the scope of normal day-to-day teaching practices. MEPAR members engaged in discussions about multicultural education that directly linked to classroom practices and initiatives that they put into practice. Teachers were unknowingly and simultaneously professionally developing themselves in curriculum studies as they engaged in discussions about multicultural education. MEPAR also led (or attempted to lead) their colleagues in professional initiatives that were new. Choosing resources, designing instruction and leading colleagues is typically in educational leadership coursework. MEPAR teachers became school leaders and engaged in leadership activities.

4) Teachers reflected on their own values and challenged themselves to be better educators.

Teachers had the opportunity to question their practices and values to see if they were aligned with our MEPAR values. Members politely challenged each other to stop using offensive language like “Indian giver” and calling challenging and difficult parents, “trash”. Our discussions at MEPAR pushed teachers to identify and change behaviors that had underlying racist or prejudicial undertones; behaviors and comments that are traditionally accepted as harmless can cause harm to others or perpetuate stereotypes.
MEPAR members definitively took part in a rich learning experience in multicultural education. The data that has been presented as I documented the journey of MEPAR at Queens Multicultural has clearly shown that the members of the group engaged in deep philosophical, ideological, curricular and pedagogical conversations about multicultural education.

Participatory action research was in fact an effective form of professional development for use with multicultural education. It provided the structure and situational context through which learning could take place in a meaningful way. The use of participatory action research allowed the group the flexibility to learn about multicultural education, but also to learn or address specific areas that were of need to them. At Queens Multicultural, curriculum and pedagogy were topics of great importance in their journey; had MEPAR not been able to have the flexibility to talk about curriculum and pedagogy, their efforts would have been stunted from the very beginning because they would have been limited to only discussing theory, devoid of a meaningful and applicable context.

In the end, pure multicultural education theory played a small role in MEPAR’s success. While it played a major role in my work as I analyzed the MEPAR’s journey, it did not significantly impact participants in such a way that it dominated their work. Theory was abandoned quickly in favor of taking a more practical pedagogical and curricular approach.
Theory did not become a lens for discussion, but was more of a hindrance. Theory was not quoted or specifically referred to during discussions except during our first early theory sessions and our March analysis session.

Instead, an organic type of knowledge about multicultural education came to be formed. MEPAR had synthesized their own collective definition for multicultural education, and theories about multicultural education were left on the periphery. In some way it can be said that MEPAR members understood our definition and mission to be equivalent to the theory we read; that it was easier and better to work with our comprehensible version than the complicated theoretical version. MEPAR respected the multicultural theory we read about, but they didn’t let it lead them because they had their own intrinsic version that encompassed pedagogy and curriculum, which is what was going to be the most useful.

In terms of the effect that the MEPAR group had on the school and changing the school culture, the effects were limited. The MEPARians were able to provide all the teachers on staff with professional development, books, lessons, activities, and a very fun and exciting Multicultural Pride Week, but these things happened in bits and pieces, and without any fundamental shifts to the pre-established curriculum or school structure and culture. Impact on teacher practice at the school level was inconsistent, with some teachers trying to accommodate and “fit in” multicultural time into their weekly plans, and other teachers not even trying because
it was not something expected or mandated by the principal. The real impact at the school level came through the eleven participants that changed their personal practice and tested out different strategies every day. A clear and systematic school-wide philosophy or approach, however, was never achieved.

The hopes for a concrete curriculum or plan for multicultural education also never came to fruition. I can attribute this failure to produce this concrete curriculum to two important factors 1) lack of agreement, 2) inability to reconcile multicultural education topics with mandates for core subject areas. I noted throughout this study that the MEPARians lacked the ability to stay focused, accomplish concrete tasks, and come to conclusions about their goals. At some level, the constant circular discussions from week to week probably reflected the fact that the teachers in the group could not overcome the restraint of having to follow state, city and principal mandates with the desire to have an integrated multicultural education program. No matter how many times it was discussed, deconstructed and reconstructed, the plan always fell short because all of the pieces of the puzzle didn’t fit. It was bought up several times that in order to make everything fit together, we would need to start “from scratch”; but this never happened either since teachers knew that the principal would never agree to changing the curriculum in such a way that it violated or changed state and city mandates.
As a member of the group and someone interested in writing curriculum, I do believe that it could have been possible to create such a curriculum, but the level of effort and time necessary to accomplish this task would have been extraordinary. The members of MEPAR, while they were dedicated to bringing multicultural education to the school, were just not capable or able to invest that amount of time into this project. That is why teachers kept coming back to trying to modify already existing structures instead of trying to create new ones. Writing the new curriculum would have been a full time job.

Implications

The main implication that can be drawn from this study is that participatory action research has the potential to be an effective form of professional development for schools wishing to engage in professional learning surrounding multicultural education. Participatory action research provides both structure and flexibility for faculty members wishing to address multicultural education at their school. Because participatory action research is rooted in solving local problems and allows participants to mold the study as it transpires, it has universal application possibilities. The questions and problems that Queens Multicultural faced when addressing multicultural education were rooted in their local curriculum and school culture that. Addressing the need for professional development in multicultural education through
participatory action research allowed for contextual and situationally appropriate solutions to develop. Because the context of an individual school is so important to allowing professional development to take root, participatory action research guarantees that the project outcomes would reflect the needs and values of the school.

While participatory action research can guarantee that contextual professional development will take place, it can not guarantee being able to meet Banks’s fifth and most difficult to achieve dimension: empowering school culture. The example of Queens Multicultural showed that despite the efforts of the MEPAR group, school-wide change couldn’t take place if only a small group of people is leading the charge. The implication here is that a certain critical mass of faculty members must be invested in bringing multicultural education to the school in order for it to permeate the school culture and make changes to instruction, pedagogy and curriculum.

At Queens Multicultural, the curricular obstacles were too great to overcome without being able to make drastic changes to the instructional program. This could have only been achieved with the backing of the school principal. While MEPAR members became instructional leaders through their work in multicultural education, they lacked the authority and supervisory position to steward such an endeavor. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal sets the tone and the course of the school; if the principal does not adopt a school-wide initiative as
their own, then the chances of it being successful are very low. Even at Queens Multicultural, where the prerequisites for positive school change (teacher collaboration, professionalism, mutual respect, and principal support) were well established, multicultural education did not take full root because it was only a priority goal for MEPAR and not the entire school. Instructional demands and expectations for student learning directly aligned to Common Core Standards made it impossible to prioritize multicultural education, so it always remained on the periphery as an afterthought, worthy of consideration, but difficult to implement.

One final but very important implication is that true multicultural education cannot be achieved without transforming curricula and pedagogy. Full integration of multicultural education into a school’s culture is blocked when federal, state and local mandates do not allow the time or flexibility. While this study showed that participatory action research could accomplish four out of the five dimensions of multicultural education, an empowering school culture cannot be achieved so long as multicultural education is viewed as an “add on” by lawmakers and school staff.

Since the chances of the federal, state and local governments eliminating curricular mandates is highly unlikely, the best hope for finding the answer for how to fully integrate multicultural education into schools is to look for opportunities where schools are changing the way they “do business”. One such opportunity that seems promising and that is re-
conceptualizing the way people think of schools is the Community School Movement. Currently, in New York City Mayor Bill di Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina are leading an initiative to open and establish more community schools. As defined by the NYC Community Learning Schools Initiative (NYCCLSI), community schools “are public schools that collaborate with service organizations to support the academic, health and social service needs of children, their families and communities” (www.nyccls.org, 2015). Community schools by definition are challenging the current trend of seeing schools solely as centers for academic learning that is linked to the Common Core.

This shift in ideology is important because it allows schools to change; schools would have the power and authority to change their curricula and change their daily structures in order to meet the needs and priorities of their local school community. The scope of the work that community schools are setting out to do overlaps with the goals of multicultural education. Perhaps community schools can become schools where a strong and solid multicultural education philosophy and philosophy can become well established and embedded in the overall structure and culture of the school; there multicultural education can coexist alongside and support the mission of serving the needs of children and families.
Epilogue

Autoethnography

Those who were raised in the culture have more immediate access. However, as those that have done research in their own culture are aware, there are also disadvantages to studying “at home” To do it successfully requires a great deal of reflexivity (Wolf, 1992).

Throughout this study, I felt a great deal of pressure to remain true to myself as a researcher, a colleague, and a multicultural education advocate. This journey was not easy; as I mentioned in my theoretical framework, this research project was unique in that it was conceptualized and developed in the intersection of professional development, multicultural education and PAR. This intersection was rich and full of possibilities, but it was also intricately complex. Each of these areas, professional development, multicultural education and PAR, embodied certain nuances that at times made me feel forced to take an action that would champion one of them while betraying the other. Further complicating this study was the fact that it was conducted as an action research project itself, where as the principal researcher I was charged with collecting data to evaluate the effectiveness of my applied intervention (PAR) on this group of participants (my colleagues) in terms of their growth (professional development) in multicultural education.
The biggest dilemma that I faced as both a researcher and participant was determining how far, or how much I would be involved in setting and shaping the agenda for the multicultural education participatory action research group. As a faculty member at Queens Multicultural, I was fully invested in the work that MEPAR was pursuing. Just like the other members of the staff, I wanted to bring multicultural education to the school in the most meaningful way possible. I wanted the school to adopt pedagogical practices and theoretical frameworks for how to teach multicultural concepts to multicultural students in multicultural ways. The dilemma that I faced was assuming the role of the multicultural expert and knowing that I could not and should not force my interpretation of multiculturalism on the school and on the staff. I could have easily taken the school’s curriculum and redeveloped it to look exactly like what I thought it should be. But, this very act of seizing leadership of the group, however selfless I could have convinced myself that it would be, goes against the participatory action research framework.

Instead, I resigned myself to play the role of the facilitator and discussant. While this role was the best one for me in this study, it was not without its difficulties. I had to refrain from leading the group directly and instead tried to contribute by summarizing and synthesizing for the group. This was difficult to do with my colleagues because they saw me as the MEPAR leader. They also saw me as their leader because I was the multicultural education “expert” completing my dissertation research, and because I was the direct line of communication
between them and the principal. Whether I liked it or not, to them I was the leader. I had to figure out a way to lead MEPAR without purposely or inadvertently steering, pushing or prodding.

This required much reflection and reflective action on my part. I found myself constantly monitoring myself during meetings and thinking about my actions during the meetings and on my way home.

*Do we need to have this theoretical framework under our belts in order to create something that is powerful? If I keep pushing it, then I’m not letting the group move. I’m just leading them in the direction I want. I think this was good. We had a good conversation. We’ll talk about curriculum integration next week. I wonder if it is going to make them think outside the box? Will they be aware that some of their ideas were the superficial system of introducing things? If they’ll get the different levels of integration? (Jimmy, Second Meeting Reflection Notes)*

As a lecturer in graduate courses, I am used to crafting lessons and activities that engage my students in dialogue; my purpose being to allow them to gain a deep understanding of the theory in texts that we are reading. As the facilitator of MEPAR, I could only push the group so far before I was actually lecturing them about what they needed to do, which was not the point of PAR. This was incredibly difficult for me because not only did I want the group to move forward, but I also knew the group wanted me to lead them. In order to protect the integrity of PAR, and my integrity as an “objective” researcher, I had to fight my instinct to teach, and I had to fight the instinct of the group that wanted me to take the reins of the group and lead them.
This crazy dance of going back and forth was exhausting for me. I would often be frustrated and would second-guess myself, but however frustrated, I always came back to the same answer: It is not my job to tell people what to do. I had to let things happen as they happened. But as the documented journey showed, the dilemma was that things weren’t “happening” at a steady pace. Learning was taking place, and discussions were providing opportunities for MEPAR teachers to deepen their understanding of pedagogy and multicultural practices, but concrete decisions weren’t being made. We were stuck in the discussion zone.

Eventually I understood that my role was to be the leader, but not the decision-maker. I had to lead the group in making decisions, but the decisions were not mine to make. Decisions always had to be made based on the consensus of the group. Essentially, I precipitated the decision-making. I found myself serving in a role of a mediator, where I would listen to everyone and draw conclusions based on their thoughts. MEPAR needed me to serve this function to allow them to move forward in taking concrete actions and steps. They needed a leader, but not a boss. Once I was able to situate myself in this new redefined position of “leader”, I was able to push when the group needed it, and sit back when I knew that they needed to have more discussion.
The Time I Dropped the Hammer

As Deena mentions in her final interview, there was a point in time where I had to “drop the hammer”. It was October, and I had become frustrated with some of the things that were going on in the group: people chatting to each other and having side-bar conversations, people not really paying attention during meetings, and people sitting on the side-lines and not contributing to the discussion. I had noticed this at our summer book meeting, but attributed it to the fact that we were on vacation, and that people were excited to see each other and couldn’t focus on working. When we came back to school in September and restarted MEPAR, I still noticed the same behaviors at our first two meetings. Realizing that this was not going to be productive, I knew I had to “confront” the group about their attitude.

Part of the problem was that MEPAR was getting paid per session to stay after school to meet. While I had secured this money in order to be able to have the members receive compensation for their efforts, I had to make sure that the payment was not the only reason that they were there. I needed to know that they were committed, and they needed to know that there were expectations for how MEPAR had to be conducted. So on that fateful October day, I told everyone that they couldn’t be in MEPAR if they were only there for the money, or if they just wanted to do me a favor and be in the study to support my research. Being in MEPAR meant that
they cared and that they were there for the group and for the school. Nothing should be said on the side, but should be said up front so that we could all be a part of the discussion. I told them that if they weren’t serious, they shouldn’t come back to MEPAR’s next meeting.

Fortunately, this meeting did not scare off anybody, but actually served to refocus the group. When MEPAR met again in late October, the atmosphere had changed, and we were ready to work as a group with minimal distractions. To be completely honest, some of the behaviors that annoyed me didn’t completely disappear, but at least they didn’t distract the proceedings and allowed us to move forward.

I didn’t want to “yell” at the group, but I felt compelled to do so because I was afraid that my research project would fail. This was the one and only time that I can say I put my needs as the researcher over the values of PAR. Fortunately, this small break in character worked to PAR’s advantage. Had I sat back and let the group steer itself, we might not have achieved or learned as much as we did. I knew that my MEPAR colleagues were good people that cared about our school, but I also knew that they were human beings that were exhausted at the end of the day and who needed to unwind whenever they got a chance. To give teachers the opportunity to unwind a little bit, we always started our meetings with a few minutes of gossip and catching up. This served as an outlet, and interestingly enough often gave us our first topic of
conversation at meetings; this tradition allowed everyone to feel safe and comfortable with one another, which facilitated our work together.

**Personal Learning**

During the 2011-2012 school year, I was conducting my research in PAR and facilitating MEPAR at Queens Multicultural. I was simultaneously also completing coursework towards obtaining my School Building Leader (SBL) certification. In May 2011, Ms. Samberg had announced that since our school was growing so rapidly and our student population was going to go over 400 students, Queens Multicultural would become eligible for hiring an assistant principal in the 2012-2013 school year. I loved Queens Multicultural so much, that I wanted to move into that position. After an intense year of MEPAR and my SBL coursework, I received my certification and was hired as assistant principal in September 2012.

The school year started and I was working diligently to get everything prepared. The principal and I worked side-by-side and planned our professional development, talked about curriculum calendars, planned school-wide procedures and divided supervisory responsibilities. Before I knew it, it was mid October, and MEPAR hadn’t met a single time. I tried to revive MEPAR, and had addressed the staff in early September about continuing the multicultural read alouds and discussion block. Unfortunately, MEPAR never met again. While it is disappointing
to report that MEPAR dissolved after only one year, I was able to see the long term affects on MEPAR participants from an administrator’s perspective. As I formally and informally observed teachers over the year, I saw evidence of teachers making use of the multicultural practices they learned about in MEPAR. MEPAR may not have continued to meet, but the experience had left an impact of the participants, and they maintained their dedication to multicultural education, despite not receiving the formal support from after school professional development sessions.

The pressures of being a new administrator and worrying about all of the mandates that I had to guide the staff in achieving, didn’t leave me any time to think about MEPAR. No matter how dedicated I was to multicultural education, and how much I truly believed it to be valuable, I was not able to prioritize multicultural education in my work. As a classroom teacher I had been successful “sneaking it in” when it was not a priority for my previous principals, but then as an administrator myself, I could not stay afloat with everything else that I was charged with; as an assistant principal I was forced to treat multicultural education as a peripheral concern.

I am including this reflection here out of respect for Ms. Samberg. While the results of my study imply that school leaders are pivotal in leading change, and that they have to prioritize multicultural education, I learned that it is easier said than done. Ms. Samberg supported the MEPAR group and me as best as she could. She went above and beyond what most other school leaders would have done; Ms. Samberg could theoretically have done more, but saying that

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ignores the fact that most administrators are under tremendous pressure to ensure that federal, state and city mandates are being met. Until schools and school leaders have the flexibility to determine what priorities they want to focus on, multicultural education may not get the attention that it deserves. I have told myself that perhaps I could not champion multicultural education because I was not the school leader and could not set the course for the school. This may be true, as I still am confident that it is possible to create a curriculum and establish school structures that can embody multicultural education’s values, while still addressing federal, state and local mandates.
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