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TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: IMPROVING TEACHERS' CULTURAL  
COMPETENCIES THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF *UBUNTU* PEDAGOGY

by

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida.

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Major Professor: Carolyn Walker Hopp

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## ABSTRACT

The pursuit of this ethnographic study was inspired by my lived experiences as an urban school teacher for 18 years, as well as, the experiences of a group of other urban teachers. The study explored the following question: Does knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy help to improve teachers' cultural competencies in an urban school? The research documents how knowledge and practice of the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy help to transform the perspective of urban teachers. The three pillars are (1) Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency, (2) Collaboration and Partnership, and (3) Relationship and Learning Community. Data were collected using multiple techniques, which included semi-structured interviews, book study, reflective digital journal notes, observations and a focus group. Seven participants, who were interviewed, were selected using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013). Transformative learning and *Ubuntu* pedagogy are constructs in the conceptual framework that guided the process of the research design. For the data analysis procedures, the description of the interpretation of the cultural-sharing group provided more insights about teachers' experiences in an urban school. Recommendations were made based on the data collected, which provided evidence of how the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy helped to improve teachers' cultural competencies. The teachers' focus group, book study reflections and classroom observations revealed that all the teachers experienced levels of a disorienting dilemma, a shift in frame of reference that was more inclusive and self-reflective.

I dedicate this dissertation in practice to my life partner, Burt Murray and all our children, (Tsaywattak Murray, Mirrikattiwat Murray, Selamdesta Murray, Mabrak Murray, Inefta Murray, and Tesfayealem Murray) who supported me during this long and laborious process.

This win is for you all!

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I am incredibly thankful to my life partner, Burt Murray who has been supporting and encouraging me to stay focused on my journey. To my children, thank you all for being patient during the days of my absence. Thank you for being my cheerleaders. I extend a special thanks to my extended family and my community for believing in me and encouraging me on this journey. To my mom, Petrona Mclean who has made many sacrifices so that I could have a good education, thank you! Thank you, for instilling in me the importance of education.

I am especially thankful for all my committee members (Dr. Biraimah, Dr. Boote, Dr. Little, and Dr. Washington for supporting me on this journey. To my chair, Dr. Hopp, you are the quintessential mentor. You understand how to take the position of a learner and help me clarify my ideas. You are patient, kind, and understand how to motivate me to activate the

excellence within. With your wisdom and guidance, I was able to give birth to this dissertation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement .....	10
The Background of the Problem in the Organization .....	12
Relationship to Other Organizational Problems .....	13
Key Stakeholders .....	13
Significance of the Problem .....	14
Exploratory Research Question .....	17
Organizational Context .....	17
Members of the Organization .....	18
Definition of Action Research .....	19
Researcher's Positionality .....	20
History and Conceptualization: Factors That Impact the Problem .....	21
International Context .....	23
National and State Context .....	25
Local Context .....	26
Dissertation Plan .....	27
CHAPTER TWO UBUNTU PEDAGOGY AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMERWORK .....	29
Cultural/Ubuntu Competence .....	29
Ubuntu Pedagogy .....	30
Humanism and Ubuntu Competency .....	35
Relationship and Learning Community .....	36
Collaboration and Partnership .....	39
Culture .....	41
Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory .....	43
Goals and Framework of the Ethnography .....	44



Summary .....	45
CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH PROCESS .....	47
Interviews .....	48
Professional Book Study .....	49
Observations .....	53
Focus Group .....	55
Focus Group Structure .....	57
CHAPTER FOUR PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES .....	60
Participant Introductions .....	61
Ms. Stacey and Her Story.....	61
Ms. Myrtle and Her Story .....	63
Ms. Judy and Her Story.....	64
Ms. Elaine and Her Story .....	65
Ms. Petrona and Her Story .....	68
Ms. Florence and Her Story .....	70
Mr. Nigel and His Story .....	72
Participants Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	74
Ms. Stacey's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	74
Ms. Myrtle's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	75
Ms. Judy's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	76
Ms. Elaine's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	77
Ms. Petrona's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	77
Ms. Florence's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	78
Mr. Nigel's Knowledge of Cultural Competence .....	78
Other Interviewees Teachers Stories .....	79
Role of Researcher and Subjectivity .....	80
Summary .....	81
CHAPTER FIVE MEANING MAKING .....	82
Overview of the Study.....	82
The Researcher's Story .....	83
Exploring the Problem of Practice .....	85

Making Sense of the Forest of Data .....	88
Book Study Analysis .....	92
Classroom Observations Analysis .....	96
Focus Group Analysis.....	98
Findings and Discussion.....	104
Limitation of the Study .....	108
Implications and Recommendation.....	110
Implications for Future Research .....	113
The Researcher’s Reflection .....	114
APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA .....	118
APPENDIX B APPROVAL LETTER GEORGES ACADEMY .....	127
APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	129
APPENDIX D FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL .....	132
APPENDIX E CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE .....	135
REFERENCES .....	140

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The 2015 NAEP Comparative data in reading and math. ....	10
Figure 2: The percent of students scoring 3 & above on FSA in Lime District (grades 3-8) and Georges Academy. Georges Academy is predominately consisted of black students (99%) <a href="https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/rvPromptsCommit">https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/rvPromptsCommit</a> .....	11
Figure 3: Action Research Process .....	19
Figure 4: The Conceptual Framework .....	33
Figure 5: Indicators of Ubuntu Pedagogy .....	34
Figure 6: Habits of Mind, Heart, and Action (Ukpokodu 2016) .....	36
Figure 7: Stages of Cultural Competency .....	98

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Dissertation Plan.....	28
Table 2: Studies on Relationships and Collaboration.....	38
Table 3: Mezirow’s Ten Phases of Transformational Learning.....	53
Table 4: Participants in the Book Study and Focus Group.....	58
Table 5:Data Analysis Flow Chart.....	90
Table 6: Connection to Transformative Learning.....	91
Table 7: Comparison Knowledge of Cultural Competence.....	102
Table 8: Findings with Evidence.....	108

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

“*Ubuntu* speaks of the very essence of being human. A person with *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.”— Desmond Tutu

Inquiry into human functioning often evolves within the realm of experiential engagement. As it is with this study, personal encounters generated a query of how to codify a culturally relevant approach to positively impact the learning-teaching environment of primary education students and their teachers. As a teacher leader, I have honed my skills for 18 years while finding innovative ways to teach diverse students in urban schools. During my seventh year of teaching, a professor, who studied/researched in South Africa, observed me teaching and said, “you teach in the spirit of *Ubuntu*.” Unaware of the meaning of *Ubuntu* at that time, I have been on a quest to study the philosophical concept of *Ubuntu* and how such could impact the classroom environment.

*Ubuntu*, in its simplest meaning, is an African concept from the Bantu languages in Southern Africa, which loosely means “Humanness.” *Ubuntu* is an all-inclusive worldview which considers values shared across cultures and which encompasses the concepts of care, compassion, empathy, honesty, hospitality, respect, and tolerance (Biraimah, 2016; Broodryk, 2006; Koensane & Olatunji 2017; Letseka, 2012).). It has been my intent to deeply understand what it means to teach in the spirit of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* affirms the idea that we are all interconnected and interdependent. In the classroom, I define *Ubuntu* pedagogy as a humanistic

approach to building an authentic relationship with and amongst the students in the class so they work together to strengthen the culture of the class community, which enhances the classroom environment and improves students' acquisition and retention of academic content. Letseka (2000) pointed out that a person with *Ubuntu* characteristics is kind, compassionate, humble, and virtuous, and strives to promote peace and harmony. *Ubuntu* pedagogy promotes a humanizing classroom environment where every child can learn to his or her greatest potential. The moral values of *Ubuntu* are intertwined in the six key components that I used to guide my teaching. The six major components are:

- Understanding of self,
- Building relationships and setting boundaries,
- Unifying the class to work together,
- Nurturing the minds of the children,
- Teaching from a position of love and care, and
- Utilizing evidence-based practices to meet the diverse needs of the students

These six components have been the guiding principles of my teaching. Colleagues and visitors to my classroom often asked why my students were academically and socially successful. To better answer their questions, from the years 2014 to 2016, I began to copiously document my teaching process. I wanted to explain the art and science of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy, answering the following questions: (1) what does *Ubuntu* Pedagogy look and sound like in the classroom? (2) What pedagogical techniques am I using in the classroom to activate and engage students' active learning?

At the beginning of each school year, I spend the first six weeks of school building community and teaching students how to be respectful of each other. I explicitly teach, practice, and reinforce procedures in my class. I teach the students to do what is right and how to care for each other. My class motto is “do what is right because it’s the right thing to do, not because someone is watching you.” As a teacher, I model what is right and demonstrate caring behaviors inside and outside of the classroom. I am very mindful of my behavior and teach children about self-awareness. I let them know that I see them, and I validate their voices in the classroom. I notice when they are doing right and when they are doing wrong. Regardless of the behavior, I comment with a firm, yet gentle tone and state the specific action that I want to encourage or discourage. I have learned that before children can be expected to do what is right, they must first be taught what is “right” by the clear establishment and communication of expectations.

In my classroom, I have routines and rituals the children practice daily. One of the rituals and routines I do in my class is “Morning Meeting.” Morning Meeting is an integral part of the daily routines in my classroom. It is used to set the tone of my day and strengthen the social and emotional learning for my students. The morning meeting is strategically designed to ensure students develop healthy habits of mind. During the morning meetings, students learn to listen and share feelings with their classmates in a respectful manner. Morning Meeting ritual builds community, creates a positive climate for learning, and reinforces academic and social skills (Kriete & Davis, 2014). The ritualistic aspect of the morning meeting is based on four components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and message. The four components of Morning Meeting are the structure I use to teach social-emotional behavior. In the meeting, the children

learn about themselves and recognize our interdependence and connectedness to each other.

They learn how their behavior can negatively or positively impact the class.

Furthermore, students are taught both how to take responsibility for their actions, as well as skills that will help them be productive citizens. I use role-playing and storytelling to model what caring and responsible students do in different situations. I teach lessons of endurance, perseverance, determination, and self-confidence through storytelling and role-play. The students learn how to set goals and track their academic progress. They also participate in student-led conferences to share their learning with their parents or guardians.

Social-emotional learning is integrated into every subject area throughout the day. I teach students how to affirm their humanity and have respect for each other. For example, the children are taught how to work cooperatively in groups, problem-solve, and how to deepen their understanding of topics covered in the class. As the students work collaboratively, I model the desirable and non-desirable behaviors and set a clear expectation for the lesson. When children are reminded of the academic and social goals in a classroom it helps them interpret meaning in what they are doing and grow academically and socially as young scholars.

For most of my teaching career, I have been working in urban schools with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Over the years, I have learned that children are not born with the understanding of how to resolve conflicts; it must be taught to them. Conflicts and confrontation are part of the environment in which they are growing and learning. Therefore, in my class, I teach students problem-solving strategies by creating the *Ubuntu* reflective corner. The *Ubuntu* reflective corner is placed in the classroom for children to learn strategies and tools to help them solve problems within themselves or with others. The children use a variety of strategies to calm



themselves and reflect on their behavior so that they can move from confrontation to conciliation.

The tools used to calm the children include squeeze balls, music, journaling, and reflective thinking sheets the children use to ruminate on their feelings. The *Ubuntu* reflective corner is a self-directed place where children can reflect and reset before rejoining the class community. This, in turn, promotes self-regulation and recognition of self within the context of others/community.

In an effort to build a strong classroom community, I also incorporate best practices such as brain energizer activities, music, and movements between subject matters. Brain energizers are physical activity breaks during class time, which help children relax and stimulate the brain so they can remain engaged during the learning process. Research shows that physical movement increases blood flow bringing more oxygen to the brain, which leads to improved concentration (Jensen, 2000). My classroom is very orderly and well structured, though it should not be assumed that the children are arranged into neat rows. Rather, children are constantly moving around the room and taking charge of their learning. To cultivate self-directed learners, I provide clear expectations by using the CHAMPS acronym that stands for Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success. The CHAMPS acronym is a proactive classroom management system, which helps to engage and motivate students towards positive behaviors. There are several questions that an instructor using CHAMPS thinks about before assigning students to complete a task. For instance, an instructor may ask and answer questions such as:

- **Conversation:** Can students converse during this activity? About what? With whom? For how long?
- **Help:** How do students get your attention for help? How do students get questions answered? What should they do while they wait for you?
- **Activity:** What is the expected product of this activity? What is the task or objective?
- **Movement:** For what reasons can students get out of their seats during this activity? Do they need permission to do so?
- **Participation:** What behavior shows that students are participating or not participating?
- When these expectations are clear, students are more motivated to learn and are more engaged in the teaching and learning processes, which will lead **to Success** (Sprick, 1998).

Using the CHAMPS acronym in the class provides clear directions for the students and explicit instructions regarding what is expected of them. When expectations are clear, students are more engaged, and they develop the skills to become self-directed learners within the context of community.

During my two years of self-study, I learned that if you want children to learn, it is best to provide loving and caring environments. As an educator, one must first understand self. Understanding oneself requires an unpacking of our own personal biases, recognizing our cultural identities, and having awareness of any shortcomings before we start working with children. An understanding of self helps us to build caring relationships with others.

Building relationships with students is a fundamental component of academic success. When students feel cared for by their teacher, they become motivated and work diligently in school. The classroom is a community and it is important as the leaders of the class to unify the

students, encouraging them to work together. It is the teacher's responsibility to help students understand that they are interdependent, and their actions can positively or negatively impact others. To build a strong class community, I nurture the minds of the children. I cultivate them socially, emotionally, and academically by helping them develop a growth mindset. When children are taught how to persevere through challenges, they are more likely to develop resilience. Research has shown that children with a growth mindset are better equipped to continue striving for success even when they are faced with challenges (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck 2007; Claroa et.al, 2016; Dweck, 2015). Teaching from a position of love and care is essential to the academic and social development of students. It is also important to teach children how to care and to recognize when others care for and love them. Using positive language for guidance helps children develop courage and tackle their academic work with confidence (Noddings, 2002). I find that when children are confident in their abilities, both the children and the teacher enjoy the students' success in school.

As a practitioner, I utilize evidence-based practices to ensure I am meeting the diverse needs of all my students. Evidence-based practice considers making conscientious and explicit decisions while using evidence from multiple sources to get the best result (Barends & Briner, 2014). Every year, when I receive the roster of new students, I examine their school records to get background information about each student. The structure of the classroom is designed with the students in mind. Once I meet the students, I ask them personal questions and I use that information to inform my instruction and build relationships with the students. Furthermore, I closely monitor my students' data and create an *academic prescription card* for every child. An *academic prescription card* is a written document that provides an in-depth narrative of the

strengths and weaknesses of each student. The *prescription card* is an interactive progress-monitoring tool that demonstrates students' academic and social progress. I use the cards to facilitate discussions with the students. During the discussions, we talk about the students' successes, as well as what they would like to improve regarding their performance.

Another evidenced-based strategy I utilize is question asking. I spend a plethora of time teaching questioning strategies and providing opportunities for students to ask each other questions to help deepen their understandings. The students are also taught how to summarize using graphic organizers. Many studies have shown that graphic summary helps students to remember information and deepen their understanding (Hattie, 2007; Marzano, 2003)

I also use authentic assessments to demonstrate an understanding of the topic covered. The purpose of an authentic assessment is to allow students to demonstrate what they learn in class. It is an effective technique when evaluating a student's knowledge regarding a subject matter. After each assessment, students are given feedback. The immediate feedback provides the students with a tangible understanding of academic standing, strengths, and areas for improvement. Furthermore, the students are afforded opportunities to represent and demonstrate their understanding of the content in multiple ways, including multimedia, videos, and various technologies to help engage students in the learning process. When a student is assigned a task, I explicitly model the expectation and provide clear instructions regarding the most effective way to complete the task. Overall, evidenced-based strategies help me design the best learning environment suitable for all learners.

My motivation to examine my teaching praxis stemmed from a desire to understand the concept of "teaching in the spirit of *Ubuntu*," and why I am regarded as a culturally competent

educator amongst peers. Developing my cultural competencies was not an overnight process; at some level it was not intentional. My aim was to positively impact the learning experiences of urban and ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse learners. It took careful analysis of self and painstaking reflection on my teaching practices to become an innovative master teacher. As an educator, my mission is to develop academically strong, caring, and confident learners. When I reflect on my practice and how I teach in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, I realize that I put the students' humanity at the forefront of my practice. Ukpokodu (2016) refers to that type of teaching as *Ubuntu* pedagogy. *Ubuntu* pedagogy is a humanistic approach to engaging and empowering students' active learning (p.154). It is grounded in the belief that all students are humans who can excel in their academics if their humanity is prioritized before their learning.

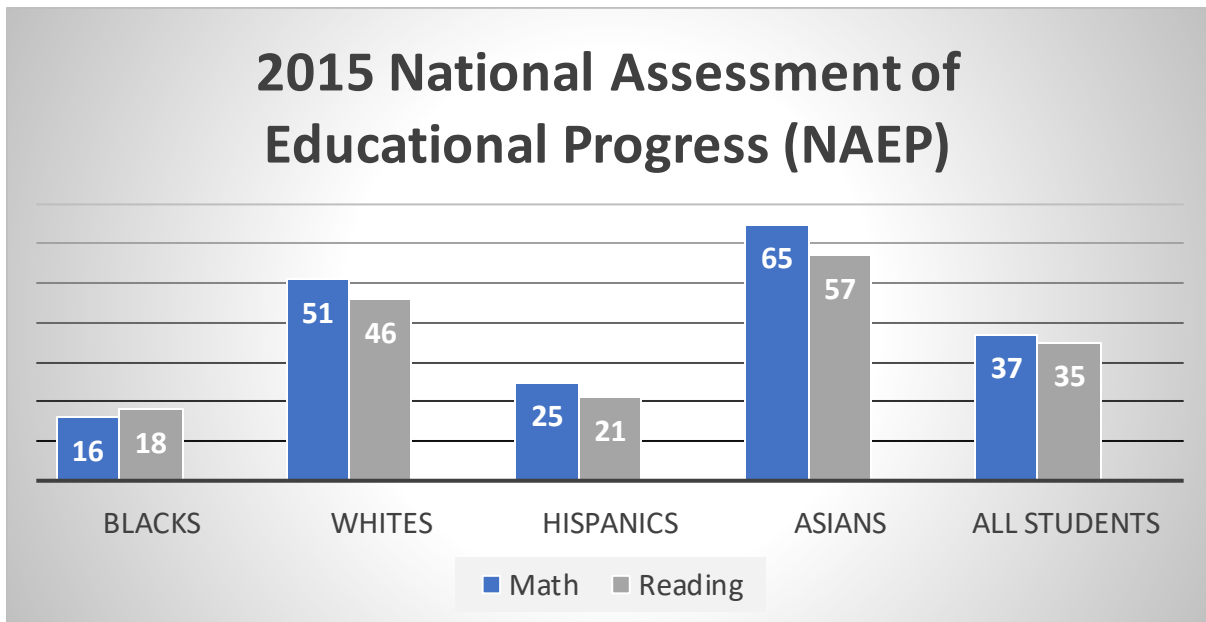
As an instructional coach in a high-poverty urban K-8 school, I have spoken to an abundance of teachers, and like my own experience, many of them felt underprepared when they began teaching. They agree that their teacher preparation program did not adequately equip them to teach students of color who have a history of disenfranchisement, marginalization, and who experience prominent levels of poverty. Many of the teachers I connected with mentioned that, after already starting their jobs, they had to learn how to engage and empower students to take control of their learning. This is a complex and ongoing problem in many urban schools. The Florida Department of Education and the Local School Board also recognize the problem and require that teachers develop their competency to work with "culturally and linguistically diverse students" (FLDOE 6A-6.0900, 2010). Despite this requirement, it remains a continual issue in many urban schools. Research has demonstrated that a teacher's effectiveness and knowledge of

cultural competences impacts students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Villegas, 2002).

Furthermore, it is evident from my organization's School Improvement Plan (2016-2017) that the teachers need to develop their cultural competence to manage diverse students and to provide effective instruction. Helping teachers develop cultural competence is one of the organization's goals for the upcoming school year.

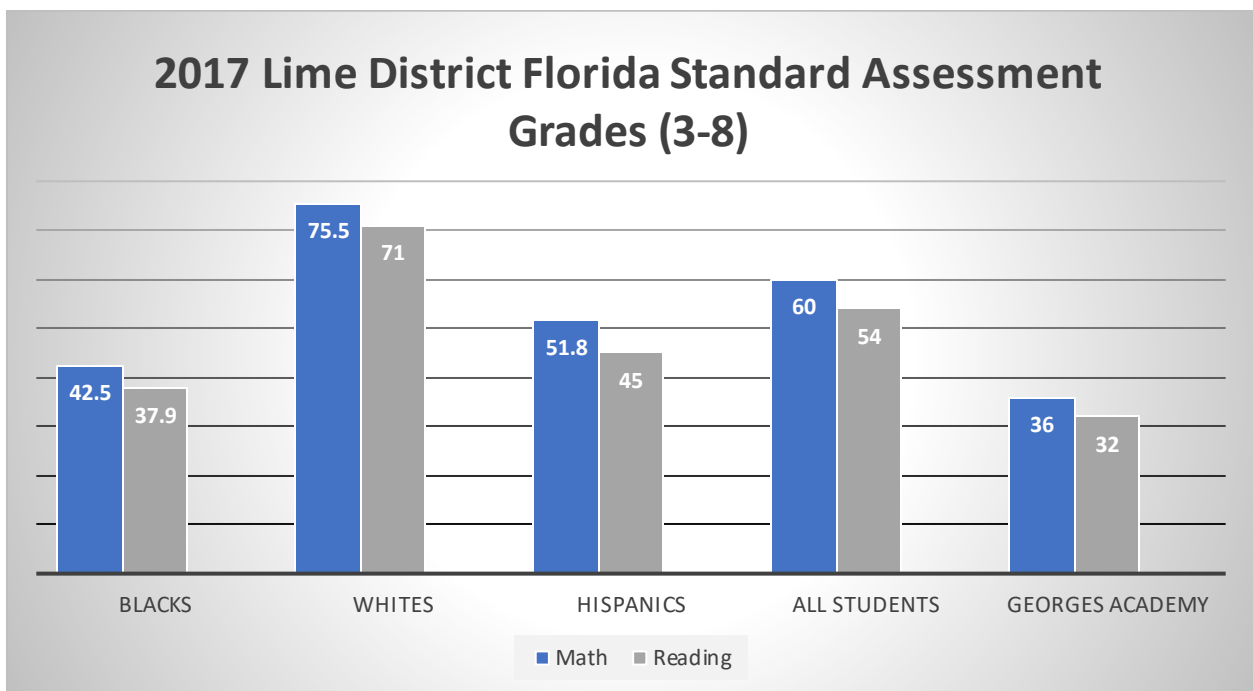
### Problem Statement

African American students are underachieving in America's urban schools. The 2015, and most recent, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results showed that only 16% of black students were at or above the "proficient" level in math, and only 18 % were proficient in reading (NCES, 2015).



**Figure 1: The 2015 NAEP Comparative data in reading and math.**

The underachievement of African American students is a complex problem in the nation, one of which plagues my school and the district. While taking the current Florida Standard Assessment (FSA), students have performed significantly below grade levels in math and reading. The figure below shows the percentage of students who were proficient in reading and math.



**Figure 2: The percent of students scoring 3 & above on FSA in Lime District (grades 3-8) and Georges Academy. Georges Academy is predominately consisted of black students (99%) <https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/rvPromptsCommit>**

Given these results, I am still perplexed by the underperformance of African Americans in urban schools. Some researchers contend that the issues regarding underachievement are due to a combination of external and internal factors. Some external factors contributing to poor academic outcomes include culturally incompetent teachers, low expectations of students,

teachers with deficit thinking mindset and prejudicial attitudes, irrelevant curricula, negative school culture, and unstable family dynamics (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Delpit, 2012; Howard & Terry, 2011; Miller, 2006). Some of the internal factors contributing to the low academic outcomes of African American students include low self-esteem, low self-perception, and low motivation (Howard & Terry, 2011; Jackson & Wilson, 2012; Ogbu, 1995). While these factors influence the persistent achievement issues, Ford and Moore (2011) stated that the low academic achievement phenomenon could be reversed, given that people are not born into underachievement. Teachers' lack of cultural competence has proven to be a problem at my school. They don't understand how to teach in a culturally responsive way. Therefore, I intend to help my organization explore the problem and prepare staff to effectively teach students of color in an urban community. This dissertation will examine the problem of practice by asking the question: Does knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improve teachers' cultural competencies in an urban school?

### The Background of the Problem in the Organization

Georges Academy is one of Lime County's newest K-8 charter schools, which opened in August of 2015. The school services students from kindergarten through 8th grade and focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Georges Academy is in a low-income community in Florida. The mission of the school is to empower students to become successful leaders in the future. The student population is predominantly Black, and the teachers are from diverse cultural and ethnical backgrounds.



### Relationship to Other Organizational Problems

Our educational organization, like many urban schools, is experiencing similar issues of underperformance in reading and math from Black students. It is often challenging for the organization to hire the most qualified teachers and staff to work in the school, though the Executive Director puts forth maximum effort to do so. Although the teachers are qualified, many of them do not have the skill set to teach children from a high needs population who are often disconnected from mainstream culture (Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Milner, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial for the organization to invest in professional development opportunities that will enhance teachers' cultural competence and students' achievement.

Considering organizational accountability, culturally incompetent teachers can be a liability when a school has a predominantly underserved and struggling student population. Bolman and Deal (2013) posited that "undertrained workers harm organizations in many ways: such as shoddy quality, poor service, higher costs, and costly mistakes" (p.146).

In our school, the costly mistakes include the year-to-year underachievement of African American students due to ineffectively trained teachers who do not understand how to teach students of color.

### Key Stakeholders

Students are the most important stakeholders in a school and they are the first to be directly impacted by a problem. Students experience the most sizeable negative impact when teachers are not adequately prepared to teach them in a culturally responsive way. Children who are taught by

ineffective teachers are less likely to succeed academically (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Gay 2010, Ladison-Billings, 2009). Most children who have ineffective teachers often lose confidence in their abilities and do not perform well academically or socially, which eventually leads to a high dropout rate. The underperformance of the students can have a ripple effect on the school. Staff members can be at risk for job loss, and the school can be in jeopardy of renewing the charter with the school district.

The organization can be financially impacted by the students' underperformance as well. While in academic peril, it can be challenging for the School Board and the Executive Director to raise money from corporate sponsors for the school. As a charter school, the institution relies heavily on major funders to donate money to maintain many of its programs.

### Significance of the Problem

This study is significant because there is very little research in the field of education that examines how the ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy can help improve teachers' cultural competence. The ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy encompass a unique approach when helping to address the persistent achievement issues of students of color in America's urban schools. Ukpokodu (2017) opines that *Ubuntu* pedagogy is necessary for the 21st century because it is a humanizing pedagogy, which can transform teachers' mindsets and empower students in the teaching and learning process (personal communication June 24, 2017). Further, Freire (1993) posited that education can act as an instrument of "humanization and dehumanization," and asks that we consciously choose humanization (p.25). I agree with Paulo Freire that "humanization" should be our conscious choice as educators. Urban schools need teachers who are equipped with the

critical cultural competence to analyze social realities. Additionally, they need teachers who disrupt systemic inequities, injustice, and dehumanization and who contribute to combatting the persistent achievement issues of students of color. When describing the kind of knowledge students need in a democratic society, progressive educator John Dewey (1966) implied that students need a humanizing curriculum. Dewey (1966) attested that “knowledge is humanistic in quality because it is liberating to human intelligence...any [curriculum] that accomplishes this is humane and any [curriculum] that does not accomplish this is not educational” (p.220). Students of color need competent teachers who understand how to engage them in both teaching and learning processes.

Many researchers have also provided evidence which demonstrates how culturally competent educators positively influence students’ academic achievement (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2013; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Noguera 2003; Ogbu, 1995). Delpit (2006) posited that students’ achievement increases when teachers use their awareness of cultural diversity to activate students’ prior knowledge and experiences. When teachers build cultural capital for traditionally marginalized students and confront barriers to learning caused by stereotypes learning also occurs. Many teacher education programs do not equip teachers with the complex skills and competencies that are humane, dialogical, and affirm the dignity of others. Also, many of the teachers who teach in urban schools are not from the surrounding community and they often do not have the same cultural and social backgrounds as the children they serve (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). This creates disparities between the teachers and the students. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to develop their cultural competence to better understand how to accommodate the students they serve. Cultural competence helps teachers

develop the skill set to work collaboratively with parents and to help their students succeed (Diller & Moule, 2005).

The ethnographic studies of Ladson-Billings, (1995, 2001, 2009) attested that if teachers lack cultural competence, his or her knowledge of content and experiences will be meaningless in the efforts to effectively teach African American students. Furthermore, Gay (2002) stated that when instructors are knowledgeable about culturally responsive teaching strategies and incorporate them into content areas, student success is positively affected.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is the ability to teach to, and through, the strengths of students by using a cultural frame of reference and prior knowledge. Howard and Terry (2011) point out that:

Culturally responsive pedagogy embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts, but is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetoric, and more of a reality. Culturally responsive pedagogy is situated in a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that diverse students bring to schools, and seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices... and a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing student academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being (p 2-3).

CRT teachers understand how to first prioritize the humanity of the students, while making learning engaging, relevant, and meaningful for all. When teachers work in intensive urban communities, learning should be made interesting and fun by using culturally relevant materials. If the students are not engaged in the lessons, they are not learning.

In a qualitative study, Milner (2006) indicated that teachers could make a significant difference in urban schools if they are given the proper training on how to teach urban students in culturally responsive ways. Furthermore, the same study found that teacher's knowledge,

skills, dispositions, cultural and racial awareness, insight, and critical reflection help to bridge the gap between theory and practice when teaching in highly diverse and urban school contexts.

### Exploratory Research Question

Does the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy help improve teachers' cultural competencies in an urban school? The conceptual framework that guided the process is based on the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and Mezirow's transformative learning. The core element of *Ubuntu* pedagogy is the ethic of care. Humanistic educators and researchers have long contended that the ethic of care is the foundation of building an effective academic and social, teaching and learning environment (hooks, 2003; Noddings, 1992; Ukpokodu, 2009).

### Organizational Context

To fully understand both the problem and the organizations involved, it is necessary to provide background information to help the reader understand the roles each group plays within the context of this problem. Georges Academy is a charter school. Charter schools are independent public schools, which are responsible for hiring qualified teachers, designing unique academic programs, and controlling their own finances. They have an independent board of directors who make decisions for the schools. Georges Academy does not report to the Lime County School (LCPS) Board; however, LCPS monitors the school to ensure the school follows the regulations of the Florida Department of Education (Florida Statutes 1002.339, 2014). The mission of Georges Academy is to educate and empower children who are marginalized. Its design exemplifies the belief that the school acts as the hub of its community by engaging

community resources and offering a range of on-site programs and services that support the success of students and their families. One of the core principles of the school is to educate and empower teachers to be responsive to the academic, social-emotional, and physical needs of each student. Another core principle of the school is to educate and empower children to be responsible for their own academic, social-emotional, and physical well-being.

### Members of the Organization

Georges Academy is a Title 1 charter school, which serves about 360 students, 95% of whom receive free or reduced lunch and 99% of whom identify as Black/African American with 1% being Hispanic. The school employs 37 ethnically diverse full-time staff members, of whom 21 are instructional, plus there are two directors of instruction, one Math Specialist, one Reading Specialist, one ESE specialist, five resource teachers, and six paraprofessionals. The instructional staff is comprised of qualified teachers who have been teaching between one to 28 years. The instructional staff is highly qualified, given that 60 percent of the teachers obtained masters and/or doctoral degrees. The school's principal serves as the Executive Director, and the Directors of Teaching and Learning runs the daily operations of the school alongside a leadership team. The leadership team consists of the instructional coach, the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) Specialist, Behavior Specialist, and the ESOL/Gifted Teacher. Each member of the team supports the classroom teachers in a different capacity.

### Definition of Action Research

Herr & Anderson (2015) defined action research as the inquiry that is explored by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them. Practitioners intentionally conduct action research usually to improve their practice or context. This was an action research study in which the researcher investigated the cultural competence in an urban K-8 school. This process was fluid until the research was completed, and it was conducted with the objective to learn about the organization, which will eventually lead to change. It began with identifying a relevant problem, clarifying a qualitative question approach, identifying questions, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting data, and creating an action plan to correct the problem.



**Figure 3: Action Research Process**

### Researcher's Positionality

As a researcher, my positionality within this problem of practice was defined, per Herr & Anderson (2015), as an “insider in collaboration with insiders” (p. 40). My situation was complex in that, though I identified as an insider, I simultaneously encompassed the characteristics of an outsider. I am the instructional coach at the school, and I am in a hierarchical position in the structure of informal power within the organization. Additionally, I am the newest member of the leadership team with less than two years of experience as the instructional coach, and I am also a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Given those attributes, I found myself associating with this research as an outsider. I saw myself as an insider because I am knowledgeable of daily routines that an organizational employee would possess, and I have been working with the organization for 13 years in different capacities. As an instructional coach, I spend hours in the teachers’ classroom observing the teachers, modeling lessons and assisting in supporting the area of social and emotional behaviors. I also interact with the students’ data and provide small group interventions. Herr and Anderson (2015) stated that one’s positionality does not neatly fit into one category and may shift during the research study; therefore, I am presented all the information. I will collect the data, which can bring together the insiders to learn about the pedagogy that fosters cultural competence in urban school.



## History and Conceptualization: Factors That Impact the Problem

Teachers lacking cultural competency is a complex problem in my organization. Therefore, I intended to pinpoint the major factors that are contributing to the problem. I conducted a Gap analysis by examining the potential causes of and solutions to Georges Academy Black students' poor performance. A Gap analysis model is a systematic problem-solving approach to deconstructing problems in the effort to improve performance and achieve organizational goals. A Gap analysis is designed to help researchers investigate and validate the causes of complex problems in society (Rueda, 2011).

To better understand the complex problem and to prevent uncertainty, I conducted a gap analysis in my organization and examined problems from five major dimensions: Human resource, symbolic, knowledge, motivational, and organizational/culture. The first step in the gap analysis model begins with defining measurable goals such as a global goal or a performance goal. The global goal is a long-term goal that is built into the organization's mission statements, and it sets the foundation of the organization by providing direction. The performance goals are short-term goals that are easily measurable on a day-to-day basis, with the objective of supporting long-term goals (Rueda, 2011). After the gap was identified, research-based theories were used to analyze it.

The gap was examined through five theoretical perspectives on knowledge, motivation, cultural context, and Bolman and Deal's (2013) organizational theory-human resource and symbolic frames. For example, to gain insight into the teachers' self-efficacy, I examined motivation as one of the potential causes of the problem. The goal of the gap analysis was to

investigate the factors contributing to the achievement gap and to propose viable solutions, which could inform the problem and all the stakeholders.

To further analyze the gap, I administered the Self-Efficacy for Teaching Mathematics Instrument (SETMI) using Qualtrics, a web-based survey system. The instrument included 22 questions that assessed teachers' self-efficacy for pedagogy in mathematics (items 1-7) and the teachers' knowledge in teaching mathematics content (items 8-22). The questions used a five-point Likert scale assessing how well the participant, from a teacher's perspective, could complete the task in the 22 questions from "A Great Deal" to "None at All." Two short response items were added to the end of the SETMI survey. These two questions focused on the Florida State Standards: The two questions focused on the Florida State Standards and teachers' pedagogical knowledge of teaching math include:

- What factors contribute to your success when implementing the Florida Standards and what factors inhibit your ability to implement the Florida State Standards for Mathematics? What evidence-based strategies do you teach children that are having difficulties with Math?

The analysis of the 11 teachers' surveys with data regarding the seven items measuring self-efficacy beliefs about math instruction yielded a median rank sum of 16. The median rank sum of 16 suggested the teachers believe they are very effective mathematics teachers. It was also evident from the analysis of the surveys and interviews that the cause of the gap is due to teachers lacking pedagogical math knowledge, teachers showing minimum effort in motivating students, and the teachers' inability to teach in a culturally responsive way. Also, from an

organizational standpoint, the school needs to hire staff that are the “right fit,” and create rituals and ceremonies that will help encourage students to strive for academic excellence (Collins, 2001).

As a result of this needs assessment, several strategies were implemented to ensure teachers are better equipped with the tools to teach math and prepare students for college, career, and life, overall. This dissertation continues to examine the problem by using the Ethic of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy to help improve teachers’ cultural competence.

### International Context

In the quest to deeply understand the meaning of *Ubuntu* in context, I spent five weeks during the summer of 2017 in two countries in Southern Africa (Botswana and Namibia). Both Botswana and Namibia are very culturally and linguistically diverse. I was fully immersed in the culture while in the different countries. I took language classes and I learned about the history and culture of the people. Also, I spent time in the rural and inner-city schools working and observing teachers. Overall, I visited five schools in the two countries, and I spoke to several teachers, students, professors, and community members about the idea of *Ubuntu*. From my conversations with the natives in Botswana, I learned that *Ubuntu* is one of the five pillars of their country. *Ubuntu* is incorporated in the elementary schools’ grade four social studies curricula. The children are taught how to show respect and care for each other. For example, in one of the primary schools, there were several instances when students were left unsupervised and they remained orderly. In one of the grade four classes, I observed a student attempting to teach the class. The student was reviewing the work the principal left for them to do.

Unsupervised students were a common occurrence; it happened several times at the schools. Children were left in the classroom for several hours or days without a teacher. They do not use substitute teachers. The deputy school head (principal) explained to me that the sixth-grade class was without a teacher for an entire school year and the students still showed up every day to class. The students who were academically stronger helped the others by sharing what they knew.

In Namibia, the idea of *Ubuntu* is entrenched in the cultural values of the society. It was evident in the marketplace and amongst the students in the school. In the marketplace, the vendors were supportive of each other. For instance, if someone purchased an item from one, they encouraged us to buy an item from their neighboring vendor as well. They also worked as a team in the marketplace. Every week, a group of men bought one cow and worked collaboratively in the market to sell the meat. At the end of each day, they split the profit. In the schools, the children were very caring and welcoming, even to me, as a visitor. One morning, I observed a group of boys caring and sharing in the schoolyard. The boys put their money together to buy cooked food from a vendor, and they shared it amongst themselves. In the classroom, the students demonstrated caring and loving behaviors with each other. For example, it is a part of the culture of school for the children to celebrate the success of other students with chants and claps. Whenever a student answered a question, they all chanted and clapped in unison: “*you are a superstar, you are a superstar, well-done!*” The spirit of *Ubuntu* was evident amongst the students as they celebrated each other’s successes.

While I observed many examples *Ubuntu* amongst the students, some of the teachers, and the community members in the marketplace, there were examples of teachers that lack *Ubuntu*.

In some of the poor rural and inner-city schools, I observed teachers who demonstrated non-caring attitudes towards the children. Some of the teachers' attitudes and demeanor were like teachers in the USA who work in schools with high levels of poverty. They often approach students' learning from a deficit mindset. They blamed the students, the parents, and the government for the students' lack of academic achievement. Based on my informal observations and speaking with the school leaders, it was evident that the teachers lacked the cultural competencies and new pedagogical approaches to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students whom are from marginalized and disfranchised communities in Botswana and Namibia.

#### National and State Context

Urban schools in America are very diverse and cultural competence is a problem. The National Education Association (NEA, 2008) stated that cultural competence is a key factor in enabling educators to be effective with students from cultures other than their own (NEA, 2008). However, only one-third of states require teacher candidates to study some aspect of cultural diversity in their core preparation courses, and/or to have a teaching practicum in a culturally diverse setting. There are currently only nine states (Alaska, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, and South Dakota), which have stand-alone state cultural knowledge or competency standards. The other states incorporate cultural awareness standards in history or foreign language standards (NEA, 2008).

The public elementary and secondary educator workforce is 82% White, middle-class, and female. Many of the teachers do not understand how to teach students from other cultures. In August of 1990, a judge of the United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, approved

the Consent Decree by giving the court power to enforce an agreement between the Florida State Board of Education and a coalition of eight groups represented by Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy, Inc. (META). The Consent Decree ensured that the English Language Learners (ELL) is provided with instructions, which will effectively and efficiently help each child's English language proficiency and academic potential. While addressing these rights, the Consent Decree provided a structure that ensured the delivery of comprehensible instruction by asserting that teachers have the necessary training to teach English Language Learners (Florida Department of Education Consent Decree, 2010). It is written in the Consent Decree document that teachers should be culturally competent to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. The Consent Decree stated that teachers must "provide positive reinforcement of the self-image and esteem of participating students, promote cross-cultural understanding, and provide equal educational opportunities. Although laws are put in place to ensure that teachers are trained to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, many educators are not getting the necessary training, and so they continue to struggle to teach students from cultures other than their own.

### Local Context

Lime County school district is one of the most diverse school districts in the state of Florida. Over 70percent of the students are from a minority background. The School District established a Minority Achievement Office (MAO) to help address some of the issues of inequity and underachievement in elementary and high schools. The MAO provides year-round culturally responsive training sessions to help teachers develop their cultural competencies. Although the

district provides training, there are no follow-up sessions to ensure that teachers are showing improvement and teaching their lessons in a culturally responsive way. Teaching diverse students is an ongoing issue at the district level. One of the resource teachers from the MAO affirmed that many high school principals are not supporting the diversity initiatives. The MAO has received reports from teachers that some principals discourage teachers from implementing the culturally responsive teaching strategies at the high school level. It is the common belief among many principals that content knowledge is more important than cultural knowledge. It became such a chronic issue that the school district now requires all principals to take culturally responsive teaching courses in face-to-face sessions at the district office (M. Smith, personal communication, April 9, 2017).

### Dissertation Plan

I designed an ethnographic study that explored my lived experiences, other teachers' experiences, and how the Ethic of *Ubuntu* pedagogy contributed to their understanding of teaching students in urban schools. Written permission was granted by the School Board to conduct the research at the site. The process was documented by collecting data from multiple sources including semi-structured interviews, book study sessions with reflective journal notes, focus groups, and observations in the spring 2018. First, I recruited teachers to participate in the research using emails. Next, I interviewed the teachers who accepted the invitation and approximately seven teachers participated in a book study. After the book study discussion sessions, teachers were observed in their classrooms. Finally, we arranged for the seven teachers to participate in a focus group. The goal was to understand how knowledge and practice of

*Ubuntu* pedagogy aided teachers in the arts and science of teaching in urban schools. The constructs that make up the conceptual framework are *Ubuntu* Pedagogy, cultural competence and transformative learning. Transformative learning theory was the process, which guided the data collection process and analysis of how knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy helped teachers improve their cultural competencies. Seven participants were selected using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) and they interviewed regarding their lived experiences working in urban schools.

**Table 1: Dissertation Plan**

Conceptual Framework	Design	Data Collection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformative Learning Theory (Taylor, 1998; Mezirow, 2000; Cranton, 2002)</li> <li>• <i>Ubuntu</i> /Cultural Competence (Diller &amp; Moule, 2005; Ukpokodu, 2016)</li> <li>• The Ethics of <i>Ubuntu</i> Pedagogy Framework (Ukpokodu, 2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative method: Ethnography.</li> <li>• My goal is to examine how knowledge and practice of <i>Ubuntu</i> pedagogy improve teachers' cultural competencies.</li> <li>• Convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre -Interview</li> <li>• Book study with Journal Reflections</li> <li>• Observation: Onsite &amp;Virtual</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> </ul> <p>All data will be kept in an encrypted file on my computer.</p>



## CHAPTER TWO *UBUNTU* PEDAGOGY AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMERWORK

“Only when culturally competent teaching is routinely available will culturally different students have a chance to reach their full potentials” (Moule, 2012, p. 6).

### Cultural/*Ubuntu* Competence

The problem of practice under study in this dissertation is teachers’ cultural competence. The purpose of the study is to explore and consider whether the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improves the cultural competencies of teachers in an urban school setting. There is currently no training offered to teachers and support staff related to this problem. Many of the stakeholders in schools do not understand how teachers’ lack of cultural competence impacts students’ achievement. Research suggests that teachers’ expertise is one of the most important variables that affect students’ achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008). An effective teacher is knowledgeable about pedagogy and is culturally competent. Cultural competence is a set of attitudes, behaviors, actions, knowledge, skills, and abilities which one possesses to work and respond more effectively in cross-cultural contexts (Gay, 2010; NEA, 2008). It entails mastering complex self-awareness, acceptance of difference, and the ability to adapt skills to changing cultural needs and demands (Diller and Moule, 2005, p.27).

Ukpokodu (2016) defined cultural competence as the “will and ability to extend oneself, form authentic relationships, understand, communicate, and effectively interact with diverse others” (p.43). Culturally competent teachers are deeply knowledgeable about how to use the students’ culture as a vehicle to engage them in pedagogical content. When teachers fully live

their humanity by understanding that their humanity is “intricately intertwined” with others’ humanity, Ukpokodu (2016) refers to this as *Ubuntu* competence. A teacher who cultivates *Ubuntu* competence has the “ability and willingness to accept, affirm, dignify self and to accord full humanity to others” (Ukpokodu, 2016, p.44). *Ubuntu* competence is an ongoing developmental process which requires teachers to be mindful and intentional about how they interact with diverse others. When building genuine relationships with students, it is important to be knowledgeable about self and affirm the humanity of others. To affirm the humanity of others, teachers need to understand how to show love, empathy, kindness, reciprocity, and humility. This deeper level of cultural competence is multidimensional, and it requires teachers to be critically conscious of who they are and intentionally take the time to get to know others and their culture. Sociocultural researchers support the argument that it is crucial for urban teachers to possess the critical consciousness that allows them to make decisions, which will impact, validate, and empower students in a learning environment (Gay 2010; Ladison-Billings, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2016).

Developing cultural competence is essential for all teachers because, in our changing world, educators must be culturally competent to teach healing, peace, love, and social justice in a democratic society.

### *Ubuntu Pedagogy*

*Ubuntu* pedagogy is one of the main constructs in the conceptual framework of this dissertation. *Ubuntu* pedagogy is a humanizing approach to teaching and engaging students in the learning process. *Ubuntu* pedagogy encourages teachers to create empowering learning

spaces that affirms, validates, and treats students as dignified human beings regardless of their race or class (Ukpokodu, 2016). Ukpokodu (2016) posited that *Ubuntu* pedagogy promotes democratic classroom atmospheres where children feel respected, cared for and have the freedom to co-learn in an environment where “power relations are grounded in humanism” (p.155). Dewey and other researchers urge teachers to create democratic learning environments that cultivate caring, responsibility, and the love of learning (Delpit, 1995; Dewey, 1966; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nodding, 1992; Pang, 2001). There are five foundation pillars of the ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy: (1) Humanism and Competency; (2) Relationship and Learning Community; (3) Collaboration and Partnership; (4) Curriculum Humanization; and (5) Instructional/Pedagogical Excellence.

For the current study, I focus on the first three pillars because the objective is to first develop one’s cultural competence. Knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy can help teachers cultivate the habits of mind to work with diverse others. Therefore, I proposed using *Ubuntu* pedagogy to improve the cultural competencies of teachers’ who work with children of color in an urban school. Understanding and applying these foundational pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy can help teachers develop the critical cultural competence and better navigate the power dynamics of culture. I believe this will help transform teaching practices and ultimately lead to students’ achievement in urban schools. Figure four provides an overview of the conceptual framework that will be the focus of this study, and figure five outlines indicators of the three pillars *Ubuntu* pedagogy.

The conceptual framework of the study is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs the research (Miles & Huberman,

1994; Robson, 2011). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18).

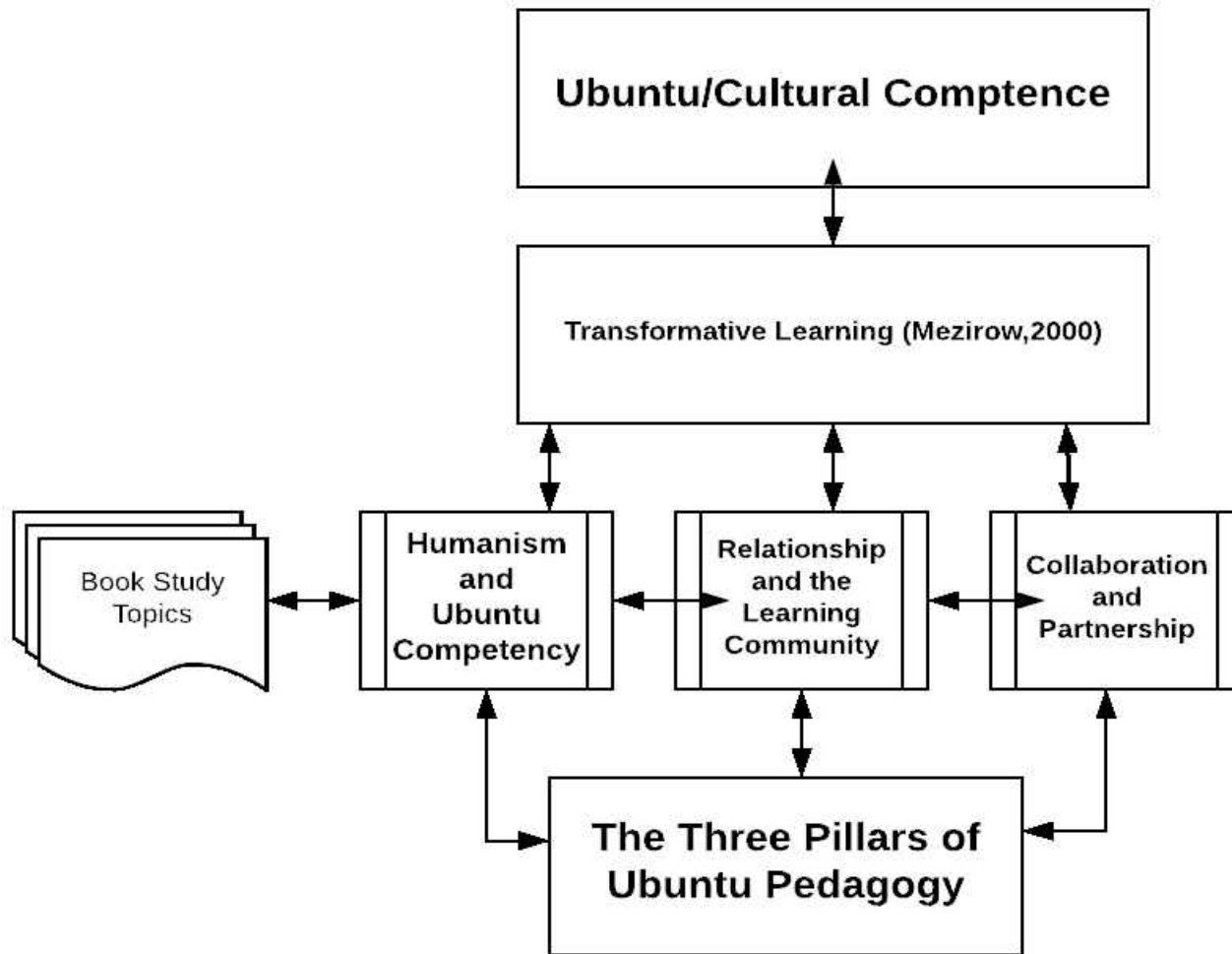


Figure 4: The Conceptual Framework

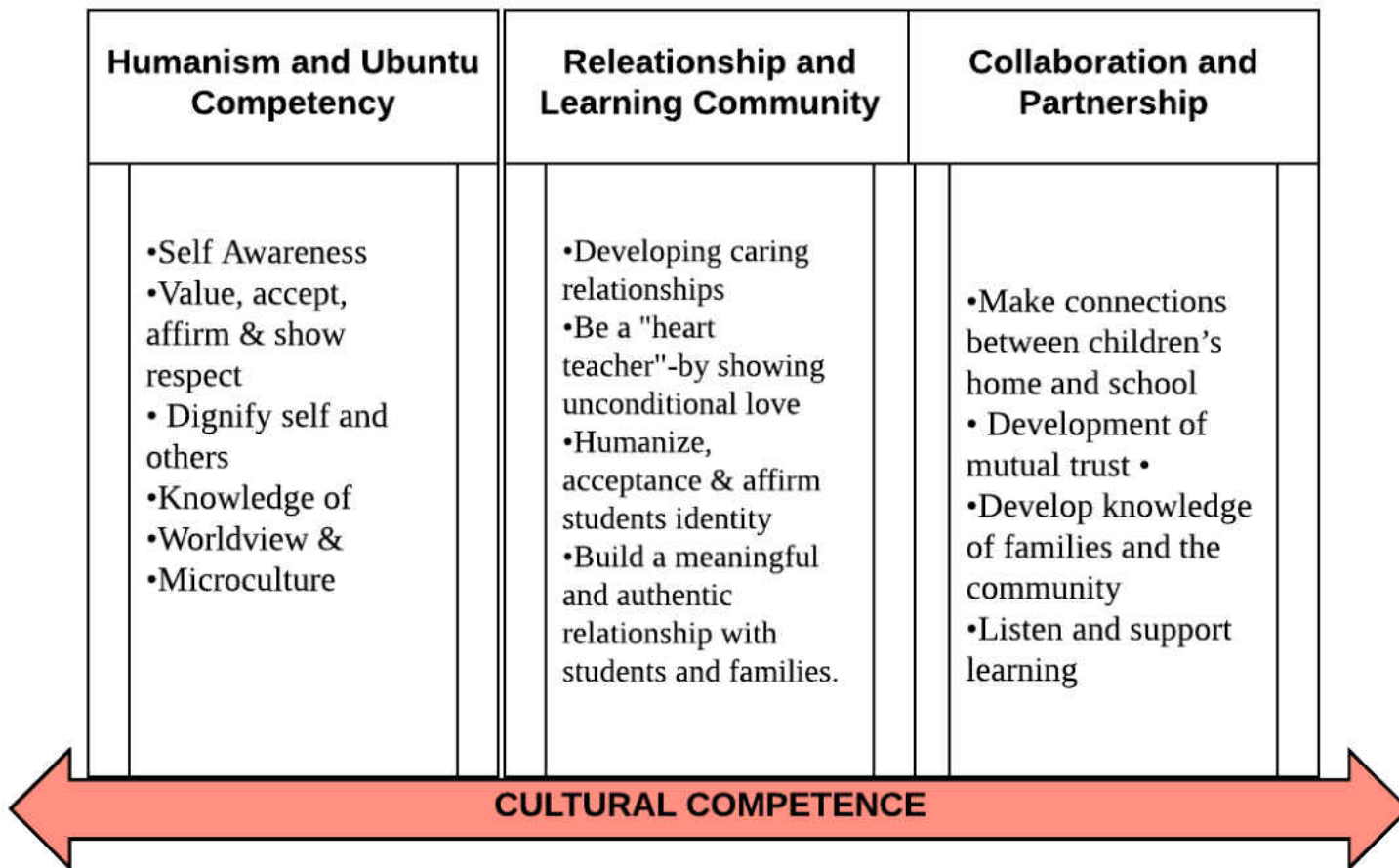
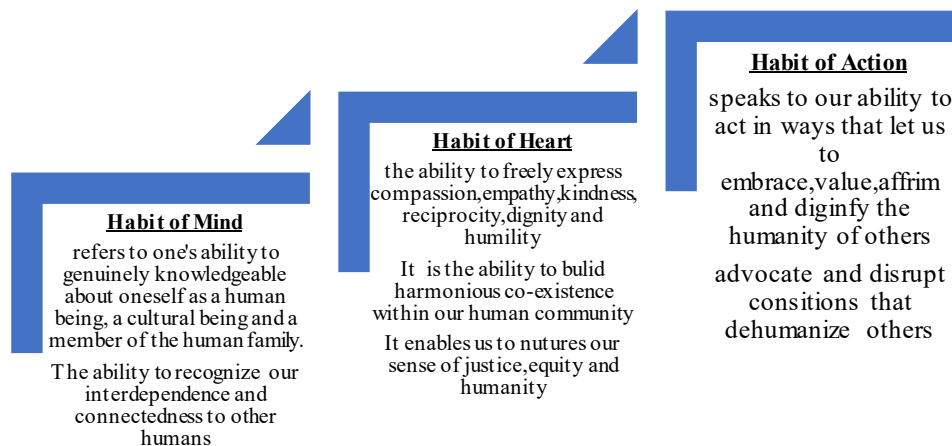


Figure 5: Indicators of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy

### Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency

Teaching in some urban schools can be very complex and challenging because the teachers and students are very diverse. Data from NCES (2011) demonstrated that 83% of public school teachers are White, European American while students of color constitute about 46% of the PK-12 population. The teachers of color make up 17%, which includes Blacks 7%, Hispanics 6%, Asians 1%, and others 3% (NCES, 2011). While perspectives vary among researchers regarding who is best suited to teach students of color, many agree that the disparity creates a disconnect which impacts the learning and achievement of urban students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2004; Sleeter, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2016). Nevertheless, both White teachers and teachers of color can be empowered to successfully teach children of other cultures, but they must cultivate the skill set and develop the habits of mind to effectively work with diverse others. Ukpokodu (2009) qualitative study which investigated pedagogies that foster teachers' learning found that teachers who were exposed to humanizing pedagogy transformed their frames of reference and developed their cultural competencies. When teachers transform their thinking, which cultivate their habits of heart and mind to work with others, Ukpokodu (2016) referred to it as *Ubuntu* competence. *Ubuntu* competence, as defined by Ukpokodu (2016), is the ability for educators to fully live their humanity by understanding that their humanity is intricately intertwined with the humanity of others (p.43). Again, the word *Ubuntu* involves human kindness. A person with *Ubuntu* competence recognizes that his or her humanity is not separate from others' humanity. The core elements of *Ubuntu* are humanity, connectedness, community, harmony, interdependence, relationship, and respect. *Ubuntu* competence is a multidimensional and

ongoing developmental process which requires educators to be cognizant of how to build harmonious relationships with diverse others. Educators must cultivate *Ubuntu competence that involves habits of heart, mind, and action* to build relationships with diverse others. The Figure 6 below provides an overview of habits of mind, heart, and action. It is important for educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond to develop their critical consciousness by understanding his or her cultural self and recognizing that their existence is not separate from anyone else's. Therefore, it is crucial that we cultivate harmonious relationships with others and speak in ways that dignify humanity. Teachers with *Ubuntu* competence work to humanize and not dehumanize others.



**Figure 6: Habits of Mind, Heart, and Action(Ukpokodu 2016)**

Relationship and Learning Community

When I started teaching in urban schools, I almost quit because classroom management was difficult for me. I did not understand the importance of building genuine relationships with students. After taking a course on culturally responsive teaching, I learned how crucial it was to build caring relationships with students. Caring relationships help students engage in the learning



process, and shifting my mindset was the first step I took to accomplish this. Furthermore, there are a plethora of qualitative and quantitative studies, which demonstrate how relationships and learning community play vital roles in students' learning. In several studies on minority students, researchers found that students value caring relationships with their teachers. Relationships with the teachers can have a negative or positive effect on students' academic achievement. Table two below highlights some studies, which reported how teachers' caring relationships contribute positively to many African American elementary and secondary students' schooling success (Hale, 2001; Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009; Valenzuela, 1999).

**Table 2: Studies on Relationships and Collaboration**

Researchers	Type of Study	Findings
Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel & Martin, (2009)	Qualitative	Caring relationship plays a significant role in urban students' success.
Hale, (2001)	Qualitative	African American students value and prefer social and intimate relationship.
Lee, (1999)	Ethnographic Study	Relationship between teachers and students affect academic achievement
Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, (1996)	Quantitative	Teachers who cared for them made a difference in their life.
Valenzuela, (1999)	Ethnographic Study	Observes that caring relationship between students and teachers help all students to thrive academically and socially.
Battistich, V., Schaps, E., & Wilson, N. (2004).	Quantitative	The longitudinal study showed a significantly stronger academic growth in both reading and math as measured by the California Standards Test—in schools that create a supportive learning environment and building a school-wide culture of care
Zinn and Rodgers (2012)	Qualitative	Caring relationships is critical to developing a humanizing learning environment.
Ladson-Billings (2009)	Qualitative	Ladson-Billings (2009) observed that the teachers in her study built caring relationship with their students by developing family like structured classrooms. The teachers and students' relationship were "fluid, humane, equitable and connected beyond the classroom and into the community" (p.65)

Marzano (2003) posited that no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.

The aforementioned researchers all contended that caring relationships are the foundation for developing a positive academic and social learning environment. Care can be manifested in acts of unconditional love, acceptance, positive affirmation, respect, and trust (Hooks, 2003).

Furthermore, Hooks (2003) posited, "when these basic principles of love form the basis of teacher-pupil interaction, the mutual pursuit of knowledge creates conditions for optimal learning" (p.131). Caring relationships increase students' disposition towards learning and

academic success. Many researchers also declare that relationships help determine how to effectively teach culturally diverse urban students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Ukpokodu, 2016).

### Collaboration and Partnership

Collaboration and partnership, as concepts in this study, focus on how meaningful relationships are built between and among key stakeholders in urban schools. The key stakeholders are the teachers, parents/families, and the students. Researchers have found that it is challenging for teachers to effectively teach culturally diverse students if they do not “know how to connect and collaborate with the students, their families, and the communities” (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Nieto, 2004; Ukpokodu, 2016). When teachers have cultivated sustainable relationships with students, their families, and communities, it has proven to contribute positively to the academic and social success of the students. Furthermore, when students feel connected to the teachers, they are more likely to engage in the learning process. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory of human ecology states, “connections between children’s homes and school encourage the development of mutual trust, a positive orientation, goal consensus between settings, and an evolving balance of power responsive action on behalf of developing person” (p.216). Developing relationships with families is an extensive process, but it is necessary to bridge the gap between home and school. Research has shown that the notion, which explains that teachers believe the parents/families of urban children don’t care about the student’s education, is flawed (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Lopez, 2001).

In Lopez's (2001) qualitative study, she found that minority urban parents/families care about their students' education and often talk to their children about the value of education. For example, when they express care, they might say to the child, "if you don't take your education seriously, you will end up like me. Do you want to be a truck driver?" (p.429). Cultural research shows that, regardless of the socioeconomic status of parents of color, they want the best for their children and they care about their education (Delpit, 1995). They want their children to develop good character and be successful in life.

As a community educator, I have facilitated many parent empowerment workshops, both in my school and in the community. From these experiences and dialogue with families, I have learned that parents and families genuinely care about the education of their children and they want the best for them. However, many times, low-income parents/families worry more about survival more often than a higher-income family, so their level of care is expressed differently from parents/families in middle-class households. For example, some parents show up at students' sports games or talent shows instead of parent-teacher conferences. Parents have shared with me that some teachers intimidate them, and they don't feel comfortable sharing their "business" with teachers. Others have confided in me saying that the elementary level math is difficult for them to comprehend, and they want to help their children but they don't understand the work. Attending sports games and other non-educational activities is one way to show they care. The power dynamics between the teacher and the parent can have a negative impact on the child's learning, as well. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to build trusting relationships both with the students and parents. I have also learned that parents and families value teachers who "go the extra mile" to show they care about their children's education (Delpit, 1995). Families

and parents want teachers who know how to teach their children and who respect their culture, and they overall want the best for their children's education. Therefore, it is essential for urban teachers to learn how to build meaningful and authentic relationships with the families. Research demonstrates that there is a positive link between parental involvement and student academic achievement (Epstein, 1996). A meta-analysis on parental involvement found that schools, teachers, and parents play a critical role in the educational success of their children. When schools build partnerships with families who respond to their concerns, it helps to foster motivation and improves students' overall achievement (Noguera, 2003).

### Culture

Culture is the core of humanity, and to achieve cultural competence we must understand the broad complexity of culture. Gay (2010) defined culture as "a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldwide views, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our lives as well as the lives of others" (p.8). All humans have a culture and it extends past the celebration of people's food, music, art, traditions, and geographical location. It includes systems of belief, events, habits, and the behaviors, which are a part of people's lives. Culture is the building block of a society that shapes one's sense of self and how they "fit" into their family, community, or society. Culture is the invisible medium that encompasses all human existence (Nobles as cited in Hillard, 1998). Further, Hildago (1993) utilized the analogy of an iceberg to explain the notion of culture. Only 25% of culture is visible at the surface level and 75% is invisible. At the surface level, culture is reflected in music, art, spoken language, clothes, hairstyles, food, and other behaviors. While at the deeper level, culture is more abstract and

symbolic, including values systems, beliefs, customs, spirituality, and religion. Both the surface level and the deeper levels of culture contribute to a person's worldview. It is crucial that teachers understand the deeper levels of culture because this understanding helps educators acknowledge students and families beyond the surface level and develop a better understanding of how to help our students and tailor instructions to meet the students' needs (Banks, 2009; Hall, 1976; McGoldrick, 1982). Encompassing a deeper understanding of people's culture helps to shape our worldview. Worldview is the lens through which people view and experience the world. It also helps to shape people's cultural characteristics. Ukpokodu (2016) cautioned against confusing people's cultural characteristics with stereotypes. A stereotype is a mental category based on exaggeration and inaccurate generalizations, which are used to describe all members of a group, and is often negative. Cultural characteristics are derived from research-based generalizations about groups of people that reflect their cultural patterns, beliefs, values, and practices (Ukpokodu, 2016, p.47). Knowledge of cultural characteristics provides a baseline for teachers from other cultures as they teach and work with students from different cultures. Furthermore, knowledge of cultural characteristics helps to minimize misconceptions and communication problems (Banks, 2009). Understanding the micro culture of students' worldviews can help teachers become more cognizant of students' cultural beliefs and values, and helps to build meaningful and respected relationships with the students.

Although culture is complex, it is the duty of educators in the 21st century to understand core elements of micro-cultural student groups' worldviews. Understanding the core elements of culture and worldview provide educators with the opportunity to view the students through a non-stereotypical lens. It also empowers educators to be more cognizant of the humanity of the

students they teach. Gay (2010) attested, that “culture is dynamic, complex, and changing, yet a stabilizing force in human life” (p. 10). Culture is part of our daily existence even if we are not consciously aware of it. Culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn. Both implicit and explicit cultures are the starting points of learning. It helps students build the necessary confidence to engage in the learning process.

### Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory

I used transformative learning theory to better understand how the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy help teachers unpack and develop cultural competence. The aim of transformative learning theory is to help individuals develop and use critical self-reflection to change their assumptions, perspectives, and worldviews (Mezirow, 1997). Jack Mezirow described transformative learning theory as a learning process, which helps to transform problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change (Cranton, 1997). Furthermore, Mezirow (2009) posited that learning becomes transformative when frames of reference such as meaning perspectives, habits of mind, and mind-sets are modified. Transformative learning can be provoked by a single event, disorienting dilemma, or it can take place gradually over time (Cranton, 2006). Central to the process of transformative learning is discourse. Discourse is a “dialogue devoted to assessing reasons presented in support of competing interpretations, by critically examining evidence, arguments, and alternative point of view” (Cranton, 1997, p.6). Therefore, transformative learning is the theory I utilized to guide the process of helping the teachers actively engage in critical reflection. Critical self-reflection involves considering questions about the problem and

openly discussing the problem. Mezirow (2000) explained that when people engaged in this type of critical reflection process, it might lead to the transformation of habits of mind, heart, and action.

### Goals and Framework of the Ethnography

The purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge and practices of instructors who teach diverse students in urban schools. It was my goal to examine how the knowledge and practice of the ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improve teachers' cultural competence and enhance their teaching practices in an urban intensive school. I designed an ethnographic study that explored my experiences, other teachers' experiences, and how the ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy contributed to their understanding of teaching students in urban schools.

This study utilized an ethnographic methodology to examine the lived academic and professional experiences of the teachers in this study who work in an urban school. Ethnography is qualitative approach researchers use to observe, describe, and interpret the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group in their real-life environment (Creswell, 2013). Early anthropologists first practiced ethnographic study and it is different than other methodologies because a major emphasis is placed on the culture of a group and the disclosure of what happen in that culture (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Wolcott, 2008). In ethnographic studies, the researchers primarily collect observational, field notes, and interview data to gather information over a period of time (Creswell, 2013). Being in the field for an extended period, the ethnographer can document detailed inquiries and conduct in-depth observations for strong data collection. The advantage for ethnographers is that research can be



flexible, but it provides opportunities for critical inquiry, which captures the lived experiences of participants in their personal contexts (Creswell, 2013). Critical-inquiry reaches beyond the surface to understand people and their cultures. Ethnographers focus on developing a complex and complete description of the culture-sharing group by immersing, interacting, and considering group patterns (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 2008). To capture the complex description of the culture-sharing group, a case study was utilized as the research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 1994) to provide a “thick description” (Holloway, 1997) of all the participants’ lived experiences in urban schools. It was my intention to use a case study as a strategy for data analysis due to the autonomy available to provide in-depth descriptions of the participants and their lived experiences. The vivid description of each participant serves as a critical lens for the researcher and helps make connections, link the data together, and provide more insights of the phenomena in question. An ethnographic strategy was employed in this study because I wanted to use an “inductive investigative strategy” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 179) which allowed me to understand how the participants made meaning of their lived experiences in an urban school.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy, cultural competence, and transformative learning theory. Specific focus was devoted to transformative learning theory, which is the framework that guided the teachers’ understanding of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. Also, discussed in this chapter was literature that supported how the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy can improve teachers’ cultural competence. Chapter three outlines

processes and activities with which the teachers engage to understand the pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy.

## CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH PROCESS

The problem of practice this dissertation examined was if knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy (Ukpokodu, 2016) improves teachers' cultural competence in an urban school. In this chapter, I explain the process and activities used to help teachers understand the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The goal was to determine if knowledge and practice of the ethics of *Ubuntu* pedagogy aid teachers in the arts and science of teaching in an urban school.

Transformative learning theory was one of the constructs in the conceptual framework that guided this process. The process was documented by collecting data from multiple sources including semi-structured interviews, book study with reflective journal notes, classroom observations, and focus groups. Seven participants were selected using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) and they were interviewed regarding their lived experiences working in an urban school.

Transformational education requires intentionality, planning, and follow-up (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore, after the interview, participants were observed in their classroom and given feedback. Mezirow (2000) posited that for transformative learning to be effective, it must be guided by a systematic inquiry based process (Action Research). The process I followed included five phases (Herr and Anderson, 2015):

- 1) Developing: create a plan to address the problem
- 2) Acting: implementing the plan.
- 3) Observing: paying attention and recording what is happening
- 4) Reflecting: analyzing and evaluating outcomes
- 5) Identifying: ways to improve teaching practice.

The action research process allowed the researcher to systematically monitor the process. The research was designed so the participants could critically reflect and engaged in dialogue about the problem of practice. The seven participants were interviewed, participated in the book study, and was observed. Throughout the process, the teachers engaged in discourse about the problem of practice. The participants also had the opportunity to self-reflect, as they read each chapter of the book.

The individual interviews took approximately 30-60 minutes and the classroom observations took approximately 50 minutes each. The information gained from the interviews served as the baseline data to develop the focus group questions. The focus group explored topics regarding cultural competencies and *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The focus group took place after the participants completed reading the book. The author of the book was also invited to participate in the focus group.

### Interviews

All the teachers with one or more years of urban teaching experience were invited to participate in in the study. The teachers at Georges Academy were sent an email invitation to participate in the study. Eleven teachers were interviewed, and seven of them volunteered to be a part of the data collection process. Before the interviews began, I ensured the participants understood the purpose of the interview, and they had the right to not participate or stop at any time. I reviewed the informed consent process and asked the participants to agree to the waiver, providing consent, prior to the interview. The questions regarding interview protocol were organized around the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and cultural competence (See Appendix

B). For the interviews, I used an interview guide. The purpose of the guided interview approach was to elicit the participants' views on teaching in an urban school. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide detailed responses (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Before the interview, the questions were peer reviewed by a qualitative research expert and pilot tested. To pilot test the 20 questions, I interviewed an instructor who currently teaches in an urban school. After the pilot test, I reduced the number of questions to 11 because some of the questions were yielding the same information. The questions were used during the interview process.

The participants were interviewed in a conference room, after school. To maintain communicative dynamics with the participants, they were asked open-ended questions and provided thick descriptions of their experiences teaching in urban schools (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Seidman, 2006; University of Central Florida, 2018). During the interview, some of the questions were extended and further modified because of the details that emerged from the questions. Although I had the guided questions, the process was organic. The participants shared long narratives about building relationships and working with students in urban schools. The information from the interview served as baseline data and further guided the questions for the focus group.

### Professional Book Study

A professional book study was also used as a source for data collection. A professional book study is defined as any planned group discussion of a text or texts to further professional understanding of a specific subject or phenomenon. The members read books, portions of books, or articles in preparation for each meeting (Bach, Hensley Choate, & Parker, 2011). The goal of

the book study was to help foster knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. Ukpokodu (2016) asserted that *Ubuntu* pedagogy has helped transform teachers' beliefs and practices of pre-service and in-service teachers in urban and suburban schools. The Ethic of *Ubuntu* pedagogy framework guided the discussions of the book study. The teachers explored three chapters of the book titled *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*. The title of the first chapter is *Humanism and Ubuntu Competency*. The learning goal for the *Humanism and Ubuntu Competency* chapter was for teachers to understand how the awareness of one's culture, worldview, and knowledge of other people's worldviews can impact learning.

The title of the second chapter is *Relationship and Learning Community*. In this chapter, teachers understood how to build meaningful relationships with students and develop a caring learning community. The title of the third chapter was *Collaboration & Partnership*. The goal for this chapter was for teachers to understand how to build relationships and communicate with parents and families. My rationale for using a professional book study model instead of traditional professional development strategies was to support the teachers' learning and encourage them to become lifelong learners who strive to improve their teaching practices. Furthermore, with the ever-changing dynamics of urban schools, it is necessary for teachers to stay current, and to update their practices regularly to meet the needs of the students. McGlenn et al., (2003) stated that professional book studies are a practical alternative to traditional professional development strategies because they provide the opportunity for participants to become a community of lifelong learners who support and challenge each other to expand their learning and improve their classroom practices. In a qualitative study on book studies, Selway

(2003) noted that several participants in the study changed their teaching practices as a result of participating in the book study. Further, Smith and Galbraith's (2011) mixed method research on the use of book study as a training model for library personnel found that the book study format enabled participants to retain more information. It also allowed for a better internalization of concepts than traditional professional development strategies. Book studies are helpful because the "personal reflection helps learners internalize the content, while group-directed conversation expands that understanding by drawing on other learners" (Lyons & Ray, 2014; p.41).

The participants were provided a copy of the book, *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*. After the first interview, I met with the participants who volunteered to be in the book study and reviewed the expectations for the three chapters. The participants were asked to read the first chapter (Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency) within three weeks and post their reflection on a digital video recording platform. The plan was to have three face-to-face book study sessions. However, because of multiple factors, such as the data collection process starting during standardized testing season, the teachers had challenges committing to the same date, time, and location. The teachers all agreed to do digital video reflections. Marco Polo was selected as the digital platform for reflections and ongoing discussion about the book. Marco Polo is a private digital application that allows users to communicate using video messages either in real time or with a delay between messages. Marco Polo was selected as the platform because the communication is private, and no outside members can access the messages. All the participants, except for one, were familiar with using the Marco Polo application. I created the Polo group and I was the only administrator of the group. Each participant was sent a digital link to connect in

the group. After everyone was set up in the group chat, I modeled how to use the features of Marco Polo. After each chapter, the participants respond to one of the reflection questions at the end of the chapter. The participants use the reflection questions to guide their chapter discussions and reflections. For example, one of the reflection questions at the end of the *Humanism and Ubuntu Competency* chapter addressed: My Cultural Self: Identity your culture. What beliefs and values did you construct from your family and what impact have these had on your interactions and relationship with diverse others? For the *Relationship and Learning Community* chapter, the questions were: What is your understanding of an *Ubuntu* learning community? What do you expect to see in an *Ubuntu* classroom community? What do you expect NOT to see? In the *Collaboration and Partnership* chapter, some of the participants reflect on the following questions: What were your beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and image of urban parents/families and communities prior to engaging with the chapter? What was the source of your information? What new perspectives have you constructed about parents/families/communities? The participants used these discussion questions to engage in ongoing discussion about the topics in the book. This was an organic process; the participants freely discussed what they learned from each of the three chapters. To remain objective, I allowed the participants to freely discuss the information that gained from the book.

For the final book study reflection session, the author of the book, Dr. Ukpokodu, joined the group session to share commentaries using FaceTime. The FaceTime video conferencing application enabled the user to meet with other colleagues, using the Internet in real time. The participant had the opportunity to ask her questions about the different topics in the book. The group reflection session lasted approximately 120 minutes.



The book study was designed considering the process of transformative learning as proposed by the most prominent researchers on transformative learning theory (Taylor, 1998; Mezirow, 2000; Cranton, 2002). As the participants engaged in the book study, the researcher strategically looked-for evidence of transformation based on Mezirow’s ten phases of transformative learning as described in the table below.

**Table 3: Mezirow’s Ten Phases of Transformational Learning**

Connection to Transformative Learning theory Mezirow (2000)	1)A disorienting dilemma; 2)Self-examination (with feelings of shame or guilt); 3)A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions; 4)Recognition of a connection between one’s discontent and the process of transformation;
	5)Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 6)Planning a course of action; 7)Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan; 8)Provisional trying of new roles;
	9)Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; 10)A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

Observations

The observations were conducted at Georges Academy; a STEM focused K-8 charter school. Written permission was granted to conduct the study from the School Board and the Executive Director. The school is a Title 1 school where 98% of the students identify as Black. There are 24 professionally certified teachers working at the school. All the teachers have

between one to twenty-eight years of experience working in urban schools. The participants were sent an email, inviting them to participate in the study. If they opted to participate, I obtained consent from each participant, which clearly indicated that their participation was completely voluntary and would not affect their performance evaluations at their places of employment in any way (see Appendix A). Seven of the participants volunteered to be a part of the ongoing observations process. Some of the observations were formal and others were informal. An observation guide based on the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy was used to document evidence of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in the classroom and throughout the school. The indicators on the observation guide were based on evidence of Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency, Relationships and Learning Community, and Collaboration and Partnership. I searched for events that provided evidence of *Ubuntu* pedagogy as demonstrated by the teachers, such as actions, behaviors, dispositions, knowledge, skills, and abilities to work with students and their families.

Additionally, I conducted some of the observations virtually using the Bug-In-Ear, Bluetooth technology. The Bug-In-Ear (BIE), Bluetooth technology is a combination of radio communication systems (earpiece and microphone components) which provided a secure way to connect and exchange the information between devices. The Bluetooth technology made it possible to deliver immediate feedback to the classroom teacher, inconspicuously (Wade, 2010).

All participants were provided with bug in ear equipment, which consisted of an iPad with the FaceTime application and a Bluetooth headset. FaceTime is a video-telephony application with video and audio features. Prior to the scheduled observation, the researcher was trained by Dr. Wanda Wade, a BIE expert on how to set up and use the devices. To ensure all

components were operating correctly, the researcher trained each participant how to set-up the devices and the FaceTime application in preparation for observations.

The FaceTime application on the iPad was used to set up the classroom observations from a remote location. The digital arrangement was done prior to the start of the class to ensure we were not being intrusive. The BIE technology was used because Wade (2010) posited that it reduces classroom intrusions and potentially eliminates changes in the classroom dynamics. The BIE Bluetooth technology was used to examine indicators of Relationship and the Learning. The teachers were also provided immediate coaching and feedback.

### Focus Group

The participants in the focus group were also the seven teachers who participated in the book study. The goal of the focus group was to understand how the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improves teachers' cultural competence in an urban school. The teachers explored a series of questions related to the three Pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The purpose of the focus group was to gain knowledge and insight from the teachers who work in urban schools and were exposed to knowledge of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy. This input was valuable to the researcher and other stakeholders because this information was utilized as a part of future professional development models and teacher preparation courses at the university level.

The focus group allowed for those involved to freely discuss and give their input on the problem, their experiences, and what they felt would be suitable solutions, keeping student academic success in mind. Focus groups were chosen because I wanted to examine the group dynamics and the participants' "co-construction of meaning" during the focus group (Morgan,

2012) as it related to *Ubuntu* Pedagogy. Morgan (2012) observed that focus groups enhance disclosure, allowing participants to create their own agendas and share in-depth accounts of incidents as they engage in the group discussion. Furthermore, Wilkinson (1998) posited,

“focus group data offer considerable potential for exploring the co-construction of meaning through an analysis of interactive processes. Sensitive [analyzed], such data can offer insights into the relational aspects of self, the processes by which meanings and knowledge are constructed through interactions with others, and the ways in which social inequalities are produced and perpetuated through talk” (p. 123).

The focus group interaction helped the participants explore perspectives on what it means to be a culturally competent teacher in urban school. The participants had the opportunity to share and compare different ideas regarding the three pillars of *Ubuntu* Pedagogy. As the participants engaged in discussions about the research topic, the moderator’s role was to assist with the ongoing group dynamics and monitor how the participants elicited meaning (Morgan, 2012). The moderator also made notes elements of transformative learning such as disorienting dilemma and critical self-reflection were observed (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning is the process that guided the research design; therefore it was necessary to monitor its evidence as the participants engaged in discourse. The focus group moderator had a set of guiding questions related to the *Ubuntu* pedagogy to guide the discussions. If discussions generated any conflicts, the moderator used a reflexivity plan to guide the discussion.

### Focus Group Structure

The focus group was held in an agreed upon location away from the participants' place of employment. The seven participants in the study were familiar with one another. They are all colleagues from the same school, they were all involved in the book study, and they shared individual reflections about the research topic. Once everyone arrived, both the researcher and the expert focus group facilitator reviewed the consent agreement with each participant and explained the process of the focus group and the research study. The expert focus group facilitator is a qualitative researcher and her role was to ensure that the procedures were being correctly followed as well as aid in the discussion with the participants. The participants were a homogeneous group because they all had the common experience of working in the same urban school. Three of the participants had been teaching for over seven years, one had been teaching for two years, two of the teachers had been teaching for three years, and one had been teaching for about one year. All teachers were professionally certified. Two teachers had their Master's degree in education, and one teacher is currently pursuing her Master's degree in reading. Each participant was given a number to identify himself or herself as they responded to each question. Table 4 below indicates their level of academic accomplishments as well as their demographics.

**Table 4: Participants in the Book Study and Focus Group**

Teachers /participants	Years of Experience School	Highest Degree	Urban school Experience	Ethnicity
1) Ms. Stacey	7+	Masters	Yes	Biracial
2) Ms. Myrtle	2	BA	Yes	African American
3) Ms. Judy	2	BA	Yes	White
4) Ms. Elaine	1	BA	Yes	African American
5) Ms. Petrona	7	Working on Masters	Yes	African American
6) Ms. Florence	3	Masters	Yes	African American
7) Mr. Nigel	7	BA	Yes	African American

The session was recorded using an audio recording application. The researcher and the facilitator also took notes as the discussions occurred and they were available to the participants the entire session to answer questions as necessary. First, we met as a group and shared our experiences working in urban schools. The author, of the book, *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher* attended the meeting using FaceTime. After the teachers introduced themselves, the author of the book, Dr. Ukpokodu, introduced herself and shared why she wrote the book.

The participants were all asked the same questions and they each answered each question identifying themselves by assigned number. The first set of questions considered cultural competence and the second set of questions were concerning the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. Both the researcher and the support facilitator led the whole group discussion. The sessions were recorded and we took copious notes based on participants' responses to each question.

This study was designed to demonstrate how the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy could be used to improve teachers' cultural competence in an urban school. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board to conduct this study (See Appendix A). Chapter four will provide a detailed narrative about each participant and their experiences teaching in an urban school.

## CHAPTER FOUR PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

The research questions for this study sought to address if the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improves teachers' cultural competence in an urban school. By addressing the research questions, I provided a description, analysis, and interpretation of the culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). This chapter used case study as an analysis strategy (Yin, 1994) to explore the lived experiences of the teachers who instruct students of color in an urban school and who sought to develop their cultural competencies. Case study as a strategy helps researchers understand as they examine the information, which is most useful to provide insight into who or what is being studied. Ethnographic case study research opens the door for researchers to examine small events in detail and then document complex characteristics that make a phenomenon unique (Yin, 2003).

Creswell (2013) posited that ethnographers should create a "thick description of the culture and answer the question, "what is going on here?" Therefore, to capture that "thick description" of the culture-sharing group, I used a thematic narrative approach to write about the teachers' lived experiences in an urban school. The narrative was composed from an emic perspective because I am an insider in the culture (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Fetterman, 2010) who has been working in the organization as a teacher for 13 years and I know all the participants. The thematic narrative approach used the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy (Humanism and Competence, Relationship and Learning Community, and Collaboration and Partnerships). The narratives captured the thematic data from the interviews and classroom observations. The details from the interviews were reported verbatim and synthesized (Creswell



2013; Fetterman, 2010). The verbatim quotations aim to convey feelings and capture the facts of the observed events.

The first section provided an introduction into the background of each participant's journey by incorporating the author's prior knowledge of them, along with the observations made during data collection. The data from the interview was used as the baseline to indicate the level of understanding exhibited by the teachers, as well as, their comprehension of teaching diverse others.

### Participant Introductions

The seven participants interviewed all agreed to participate in the entire study. During the interview, they were asked to discuss what it means to be culturally competent teachers and what experiences they had while teaching in urban schools. Three of the participants were in their early to late 30's, two were in their early 20's, and two were in their early 40's. The participants knew each other because they work at the same school. All seven of the teachers attended Florida universities and continued to become certified K-8 educators. Three of the teachers were not education majors in college, but they earned their education certification through the alternative certification process. All the teachers had between one to nine years of experience working in urban schools.

### Ms. Stacey and Her Story

Ms. Stacey is a passionate master teacher. I have known Ms. Stacey for nine years and she started at the school during her senior undergraduate internship. Ms. Stacey is a caring

teacher who takes the time to get to know her students. During the first 21 days of school, Ms. Stacey incorporated several community-building activities in her class. During an informal classroom observation, I noticed that Ms. Stacey speaks to the children in a clear and calm voice while providing explicit directions to the students about the activity for the Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting is the time of the day when the students interact and build relationships with each other. In the interview, Ms. Stacey candidly spoke about how she builds relationships with her students.

“Personally, I do not have a problem building relationships with my students. I take a lot of time to build relationships with my children. We have a lot of heart to heart conversations. I'm not afraid to share parts of my life with them. They understand that they are not alone in the things that they are going through. I allow my children, my students, to speak often, especially about something that they are feeling or thinking so that they can do it on a more regular basis. We celebrate even the smallest success. Even if we went from an F to a B, that's still a celebration because [they] are trying [their] best. Even if [they] don't move in whatever it is trying to move in but still working hard, that's also important. That's just as important as getting an ‘A’. I tell my kids I love them every day! In the beginning of the year, some of them are quiet about it, but towards the middle of the year when I say I love you, they immediately say I love you, too. My children like hugs and by mid-year, everybody gets a hug when they come in and a hug when they leave”.

Getting to know her students is paramount. Ms. Stacey has a personal relationship with all her students. She took the time at the beginning of the year to learn about them on both a personal and academic level. She is very intentional about how she interacts with her students. For example, she tells the students that she is biracial, her mother is White and her father is Black. She uses her cultural identity to teach lessons of tolerance and social justice in the class. She also tells her students that she loves them. Throughout the day, Ms. Stacey makes it a priority to do a check-in meeting with her students. After Specials and lunchtime, she conducts a brief check-in meeting with her students before she begins with academic content. The check-in

meeting is another, ongoing way for her to build relationships with her students. She stated that the Check-in Meeting gives her students an opportunity to talk and say what's on their minds because the students do not get enough time to talk at lunch. Furthermore, Ms. Stacey goes above and beyond to develop partnerships with the families. Although she reported that it is challenging to get her students' parents to attend scheduled parent conferences, she finds many ways to connect with parents. For example, sometimes she conducts phone conferences and home visits. She has a reputation for showing up at her students' homes to provide support and address academic concerns. Recently, one of her student's sister died, and Ms. Stacey constantly reached out to the family to provide support and help the students adjust back to school life.

#### Ms. Myrtle and Her Story

Ms. Myrtle has been teaching in urban schools for almost three years. I first met Ms. Myrtle when she was working as a paraprofessional. She has a warm and caring demeanor towards her students. Working as a paraprofessional was her first experience at teaching in schools. Ms. Myrtle's educational background is in Social Work. After a year of working as a paraprofessional, Ms. Myrtle took the teacher certification test and started the process of becoming a fully certified classroom teacher. In an interview, Ms. Myrtle described how teaching in urban schools could be challenging because teaching students involves more than only sharing the content knowledge. It takes a lot of patience to work with the students because the students come to school with a variety of social and emotional issues. However, her social work background helps her overcome some of the social, emotional, and behavioral issues with the students. Furthermore, teachers need to build relationships with students because when

students feel cared for, they are more cooperative and work harder for the teacher in school. Ms. Myrtle believes it is important to build relationships with the parents as well. The parents need to feel and know the teacher is invested in their child's future. Also, the teachers must develop a partnership with the families or parents. For instance, during the first weeks of school, she calls all the parents and shares something positive with them about the child. The parents also receive her personal contact information that they can use to communicate with her on a daily or weekly basis to remain informed about their child's academic and social progression.

Although Ms. Myrtle had a challenging group of students, it was evident from classroom observation and daily interactions that Ms. Myrtle tried to use different strategies to help them manage their emotions in the classroom. She stated, "it takes much patience because you are not only teaching them academics, ...you are teaching them manners and how to act in an environment away from home." Teaching in an urban school is a "huge responsibility" because teachers must play a dual role as both parent and teacher.

#### Ms. Judy and Her Story

Ms. Judy is a loving, enthusiastic and vibrant teacher. It is her first-year teaching in an urban, Title 1 school. The students love her and seek her out on campus. Ms. Judy has lived her entire life in Florida in the more affluent communities. Working in a low-income community was something new for her. During the beginning of the school year, she took a bus tour to learn about the students and the community. The Getting to Know the Community bus tour was an "eye-opener." On the tour, she learned about the positive assets and the rich history of the historically black community where many of her students live and play. After the informational

bus tour of the community, Ms. Judy stated that she “empathized more with the community and she wanted to do more to help the children in the community.” The information from the tour helped her to better understand and connect with her students. Once a month, afterschool, Ms. Judy dedicates her time to do Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) related activities with the students from the community. Ms. Judy and some of her colleagues started a school-community garden where the students learn knowledge about plants and vegetables they can share with their families.

Building relationships with her students was challenging at first because her teacher preparation program did not prepare her to manage the range of social and emotional behaviors she experienced with many of her students. Ms. Judy credits the professional development at the beginning of the school year, which helped her understand the importance of building relationships with students and creating a positive learning environment. For example, she learned that Morning Meeting was an important ritual. She admitted that once she held Morning Meetings consistently, she noticed an improvement with her students’ performance. In an interview, Ms. Judy stated that she builds relationships with the students by simply “acknowledging” the students in the mornings. When students are acknowledged by adults, it shows that they care about them and the students are more responsive to the teaching and learning (Noddings,1982; Ukpokodu, 2016).

#### Ms. Elaine and Her Story

Ms. Elaine and I have a history together. I first met Ms. Elaine when I taught her son in second grade. At that time, she was a paraprofessional in my class. Ms. Elaine is a natural

teacher with a loving and compassionate spirit. She was very passionate about seeing children learn, so I encouraged her to work on being fully certified as an educator. Conversing with Ms. Elaine was very interesting because she had a great deal of information to share about her son's teachers, myself included, over the last three years. Ms. Elaine was a political science major in school, and she worked in the business industry after graduating from school. She became interested in education after she started having children. Her mother was a schoolteacher who was the first good example of a teacher she knew. In the interview, she talked about how wonderful and culturally competent her son's teachers were at Georges Academy.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe a teacher that is culturally competent?

**Ms. Elaine:** My son has had, numerous teachers I feel were culturally competent. Those are the teachers that were aware of the African American or black culture, as far as knowing the background, knowing what it takes to teach a black boy, what it means to teach a black girl... Well you, [Interviewer], [are] one of those teachers that understand how to use the student's culture and connect them to the learning.

Ms. Elaine also attributed her son's confidence and awareness of culture to the consecutive years of having teachers who are culturally competent and understand how to teach black boys. As a first-year teacher, Ms. Elaine acknowledged that one of her goals is to be a culturally competent teacher. She continued to seek opportunities for growth in this area.

**Interviewer:** As a classroom teacher, how do you go about building relationships with your current students?

**Ms. Elaine:** I talk to my students every day; we have Morning Meeting and Closing Meetings. I also share my personal childhood story with them... It opens them up to be a little more and feel comfortable with just speaking and sharing their feelings and being able to say what's on their mind.

Listening to the students, holding one-on-one conversations, and sharing her childhood stories helped her build meaningful relationships. Although Ms. Elaine consistently finds

different ways to build relationships with her students, she experienced challenges when connecting with the families. Many of the parents are young mothers, and some of the children live with grandparents or other family members. Some of the families are not supportive, and they do not respond when she sends communication home.

**Interviewer:** How supportive are the students' families and how do you build relationships with them?

**Ms. Elaine:** I have a few parents that are supportive, that are always responding to anything that I would say most of my parents are not responsive. I send home notice, I write in their planner, which is to tell them how their day went and they don't respond.

**Ms. Elaine:** Every day. I say about maybe 60, probably more than that. 70% of them don't respond with any type of signature saying that they saw it... that they read it. Homework, a lot of them tell me that they didn't have anybody to help them with their homework and they didn't understand it. We'll go over it, but they don't have anybody there.

**Interviewer:** So, how do you build relationships with the parents that are non-responsive?

**Ms. Elaine:** Well, I don't want them to be disrespectful or anything to their mom. I [have] been trying to figure out a different way that they can maybe get a response out of their parents... I use Class Dojo to send messages for them to contact me, but. I don't get a response from them at all.

**Interviewer:** What is the class dojo?

**Ms. Elaine:** Class Dojo is a digital messaging [application] for parents and teachers to interact and to let them know, it could be behavior, [but] you can send different messages about what's going on in the classroom, pictures you could send to them through class dojo. It's an App that parents can download on their phone, and I know everybody pretty much has a phone.

**Interviewer:** When you find that the parents are not checking the messages, how else do you reach out to them?

**Ms. Elaine:** Well, I would go to the car and meet them at the car and just let them know what's going on. That worked well, but some of them are not picked up by parents. They walk home or the Daycare picks them up.

Although Ms. Elaine had challenges when connecting with parents, she continues to seek support from her colleagues on how best to work with the parents. During the curriculum night, she volunteers to read stories to the students and their families. It is evident from the observations of Ms. Elaine in the classroom that she makes a great effort to build relationships with her students and create a positive learning environment. For example, during a reading lesson, one of the student said to his reading partner, “I disagree with you because the character was brave”. Ms. Elaine teaches her students how to converse using the strategy of Accountable talk. Accountable talk involves student-centered discussion prompts and conversation starters, which help to engage students in meaningful learning. It is also another way to teach the students about what respect looks and sounds like. Although, some of the students struggle academically and socially, Ms. Elaine consistently seeks support from administration and her colleagues to help meet the diverse needs of her students.

#### Ms. Petrona and Her Story

Mrs. Petrona has been teaching in urban schools for over seven years. She has a passion for working with children in the primary grade. She is a graduate of one of Florida’s Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) and she embodies her university motto- “enter to learn and depart to serve.” After she graduated, she returned to her community to teach. Her goal is for 100 percent of her students to show reading at or above grade level. To ensure that her students are reading at or above grade level, Mrs. Petrona stated that she first builds relationships with her students. During the first six weeks of school, she plans community-building activities to learn



about her students. During the interview, she talked about how she builds relationships with her students.

**Interviewer:** How do you build relationships with your students?

**Ms. Petrona:** I definitely open up my personal life and let them know like how many children I have. I have a family display board in my class that I share with the students. And then I ask them things about themselves. So, I never like leaving them blind. It comes down to who I am and trying to get to know who they are.

So, from day one, we get to know each other by doing small activities like team, not just team building, but like building a relationship and learning about each other. And I remember this year we did a team building activity where we just wrote words on the back of a person's back on a sheet of paper. And just from looking at them, we wrote words down of who we think they are. ...We did same team building activity after a month of sharing and getting to know each other, and some of the words changed.

So, I thought that was powerful because they got to know each other better and then reflect, during the second reflection words change from mean to loving. some of them wrote that I was nice, caring, and funny. That activity was a moment where we were able to build on our relationships. The students were able to get to know each other better.

Ms. Petrona also takes immense pride in building relationships with the parents or families of her students. In the interview, she stated that she finds different ways to get the parents or families engaged in the child's learning process. At the beginning of the school year, she contacts all the parents or family members. She ensures the families can reach her by phone.

**Interviewer:** How do you build relationships with your parents?

**Ms. Petrona:** From day one, the moment I meet my parents I always share my personal information with them. I give them all access to me; my email, my personal cell number, whatever way they need to get in touch with me, I give them that information.

Then I start with a weekly kind of like telling them the progress of their child from Day One, and I also get some of the parents to come in every so often to just learn about how good or what kind of situation that, their child be in so we can work together to help improve whatever situation that child is in.

But I keep a constant log of who I talk to and the times I talk to them and what we talked about, and that kind of opens them up to knowing me as their [child's] teacher.

Ms. Petrona takes the time to get to know her students and the neighborhood in which they live. She makes sure the families understand what the child needs to learn to be successful in school. On several occasions, I observed and confirmed that Ms. Petrona listens to the parents, shows them respect, and does not talk to them in a belittling or condescending manner. She has a good rapport with parents because she makes the parents feel very comfortable. At the end of each quarter, she schedules conferences with the parents/families. Many of the parents have unique circumstances, so she makes her self-available to support the parents and shares vital information about their child with them. Parents can meet her early in the mornings during her lunch break, and late evenings to have a conference. Ms. Petrona stated that her goal when working with families is to make them “feel confident in her abilities and trust” her as a teacher to work with their child.

### Ms. Florence and Her Story

Ms. Florence was very excited to be a part of the study. She spoke about how her love for children attracts her to the teaching profession. She has been teaching in an early childhood program for five years. She started her teaching career as a paraprofessional where she fell in love with the children. Two years later, she became a fully certified teacher and has been

teaching full time for three years. Ms. Florence is passionate about finding the best ways to teach her students. She is also mindful of her tone when speaking to the young children. She stated that many of the students she works with come from environments where parents are often stressed and constantly screaming at the children. Therefore, in her classroom, she creates a peaceful and harmonious environment for the students. During the first few weeks of school she teaches, practices, and reinforces the desired behaviors she expects from her students. The students are taught how to use a calm voice, how to show respect for each other, and how to use kind words when interacting with their classmates. Ms. Florence creates a safe environment for her students. The five and six years old students work independently and peacefully together in the class. In the interview, Ms. Florence stated that she spends a lot of time building relationships with her students. In the mornings she does Morning Meetings where the students get to learn more about each other. Throughout the day the students have share time between the transitions of subjects. Ms. Florence calls it “free shares.” During the “free shares” time, students and teachers engage in conversation about a variety of topics. The free share time provides many insights and opportunities for her to learn about her students. The information helps her to make modifications to her instructions. To build relationships with her students, she attends birthday parties, recitals, sports games, and does home visits. Ms. Florence also stated that when she shows interest in the students, it helps her relationship with the parents. It helps build more trust with the families whenever she shows genuine interest in the children’s lives outside of school. Although some of the families struggle with daily life issues, they still want the best for their children. She asserted that it is important to learn to listen to the parents and not to pass judgment. Having a good rapport with the parents helps to foster strong partnerships and trust.

Ms. Florence's classroom is welcoming and students are very loving towards each other. Daily, the students in her class are very engaged and can work independently on a task. She invests in her students and takes the time to teach them how to be self-directed learners. The classroom environment is very structured and student friendly. In the interview, Ms. Florence spoke about how she tries to build a relationship with parents. During an informal observation, I saw Ms. Florence interact with a parent. Ms. Florence listens to the parents, validates the parents, and starts her conversation by saying something positive about the child before sharing the problem. Ms. Florence ends the conversation by devising a specific plan to help the parent and the child feel successful at school.

### Mr. Nigel and His Story

Mr. Nigel is a motivated African-American male teacher. Teaching is Mr. Nigel's second career. He has been teaching for seven years in several urban schools in the Southeast. During the interview, he stated that he taught in many Title 1 schools and learned they are not all the same. In one of the urban elementary schools where he worked, many of the children came from working-class families and mid-level communities where single-family homes had well-kept lawns, but the children witnessed crime, regularly. Mr. Nigel stated that after learning about the community from the children, he finds creative ways to connect their lived experiences to lessons. For example, one day he taught the word "warrant" and a young man replied that his mother has a warrant out for her arrest. Mr. Nigel said he had to use it as a teaching moment to

talk about the criminal justice system. Using it as a teaching moment allowed him to affirm and validate the student by building relationships with and checking in with the students.

Furthermore, Mr. Nigel stated, “to survive in urban schools, you have to know how to relate to the students and show love and care even when you get pushback from the students.” Many times, the students come to school hungry, so he keeps a snack pantry for them. When children are hungry, they cannot relax and focus on the lesson. Equally important is building relationships with a parent or family member. Mr. Nigel stated that it is essential to establish a good relationship with families at the beginning of the year. It is essential to start with positive feedback when sharing information with parents or families.

For instance, he stated,

“If I must say something about the child's behavior, I'll say something good first, to get the parent on my side, and then I'll let them know. So, you have to approach them in a way to let them know you care about their child, because that's why they come to us in the first place. The parents want to know that we are providing an education for their child, and that their child is safe. So as far as the parent and the child is concerned, they need to know that their safety comes first. As long as they're safe, that relationship will be. The child feels safe, and the parent knows that you're keeping their child safe, that relationship is easy to build”.

Mr. Nigel was born in the community in which he currently teaches. As a Army veteran, he uses his lived experiences and the assets from the community to connect the students to teaching and learning processes. He also incorporates music and dance to teach social justice lessons in his class. His advice to teachers interested in teaching in an urban school is:

If you're only coming here to pay off your loans, to lessen your student loans, if that's your sole purpose for coming, find another way, because you're not going to make it if you can't relate to these kids. You're not going to make it if you can't put your personal feelings aside. You can't come here with judgment. You can't come here being biased. You have to come with the right attitude of making it better. If you come to an urban school, come here with the purpose of making it better.

### Participants Knowledge of Cultural Competence

The interview was designed with several questions about cultural competence. The purpose of the questions was to gather baseline data about the participants' knowledge of cultural competency. Some of the indicators of cultural competencies are self-awareness, acceptance of differences, the ability to teach children that are from different cultures, and using students' culture as a vehicle to engage them in the learning process (Diller and Moule, 2005, Gay, 2000, Ukpokodu, 2016). During the initial interview, the participants were asked the following questions: Can you describe a culturally competent teacher? What specific skills do teachers need to possess to teach students in urban schools? Does what you learn about your students culture impacts the instructions in your class? The purpose of these questions was to gather data about the teachers' knowledge of cultural competencies.

#### *Ms. Stacey's Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

Ms. Stacey stated that her 22 students are very culturally diverse even though 21 are Black and one is Hispanic. Some of the students are African American, Haitian, and Caribbean American. Each student possesses unique needs, and Ms. Stacey must tailor her instruction to meet the needs of the students. When asked about cultural competence, she stated that a "culturally competent teacher is one who understands that different cultures ... like dialects and language skills are different within one area, as well as the culture of the children". She also stated that culturally competent teachers "understand [that it is] more about survival versus education for some students and understanding and celebrating the differences of each culture of

the children. Ms. Stacey recognized that the cultures of the students are important and teachers should celebrate their differences. When asked about the skills urban teachers need, she smiled and stated,

**Interviewer:** Do you think teachers in urban schools need to possess a particular skill set to work with the children?

**Ms. Stacey:** Yes, I think teachers in this particular setting have to have a different type of patience. I think that they have to have a deep understanding of the culture of the community involving around things like emotions, verbalizing emotions.

They must have a good understanding for the community and what's important in the community versus what we are pushing on them . And they must learn how to merge the two.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by merging the two?

**Ms. Stacey:** So, instead of having math problems where Sally is buying almond milk or there are camels and things like that, I think that the question should relate to things that the kids could relate to because then they can kind of see a real-life experience. And they can see value in what it is that they are learning.

Ms. Stacey's responses to the questions revealed that she had some knowledge of cultural competence. She talked about the importance of understanding culture and merging it into the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

### *Ms. Myrtle's Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

During the interview, Ms. Myrtle made a long pause before answering the question about a culturally competent teacher. In an unsure voice, she stated that a "culturally competent teacher is familiar with the traditions and values of the individuals of the population that they serve, and just being respectful to the culture, the environment or the individuals." When asked the

question: Does what you learn about your students' culture impact the instructions in your class?

Ms. Myrtle was also unsure of how to answer the question.

**Interviewer:** Does what you learn about your students' cultures impact the instructions in your class?

**Ms. Myrtle:** “Yes. I feel like I like to be more motivating and try to ... but I feel I just teach I feel like it doesn't matter what the culture is, I will still teach with fidelity.”

Ms. Myrtle tried to explain the notion of a culturally competent teacher, however she was struggling to explain or provide clear indicators of a culturally competent teacher.

#### *Ms. Judy's Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

Ms. Judy was unsure of what it means to be a culturally competent teacher. She mentioned that she only took one diversity class in school and most of her life she grew up in affluence. When asked to talk about a culturally competent teacher she stated,

“Culturally competent? Understanding a person's culture and not wanting them to shy away from it. So, I know in urban communities sometimes the culture is not always exactly what is taught in school. You also don't want them to shy away from their culture. I mean, I grew up in a more Hispanic-heavy area. So, I guess I can relate it to that. You don't want people to forget their culture; you want people to embrace their culture. So just being aware and embracing people's culture, to me being culturally competent.”

Her explanation, although fragmented, demonstrated that Ms. Judy attempted to talk about how important it is to help students embrace their culture. Furthermore, she stated that driving through the community and seeing how the children live was “eye-opening” and it helped her to understand their culture better. She mentioned that she wished her college classes



taught her “half” of what it means to be culturally competent. She felt it would have, at least, helped her to be successful when teaching urban students.

#### *Ms. Elaine’s Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

Ms. Elaine was very confident in providing examples of culturally competent teachers. She spoke candidly about two of her sons’ former elementary school teachers. She mentioned her son had numerous teachers who were culturally competent. However, his first and second grade teachers were exceptional. They “were aware of the African American or black culture, as far as knowing the background, knowing what it takes to teach a black boy, what it means to teach a black girl, and how the environment that they are in and the environment that they will be in when they grow up.” “My son’s teachers knew how to use the students’ culture and connect them to the learning.” Ms. Elaine knows how to identify a culturally competent teacher and recognizes where she is in her developing stage of becoming a culturally competent educator. She concluded by saying that one of her goals, as a teacher, is to reach a level of competency comparable to her sons’ former teachers.

#### *Ms. Petrona’s Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

Ms. Petrona stated that, “a culturally competent teacher is familiar with the culture of our children.” If a teacher is not culturally competent, he or she will not have an “impact and will not be successful” in urban schools. A competent cultural teacher must have an “understanding of what the children are going through and be aware that different cultures will help them meet needs and connect them with the students.” Furthermore, Ms. Petrona explained that she realized

students are more engaged in the learning process when she uses aspects of their culture such as music to teach them. Her students love rap music, so she uses it to teach them math and reading. During the interview, Ms. Petrona seemed very confident and prepared to share her explanation of cultural competence. Her in-depth explanation on how she uses the students' culture to connect them to the learning demonstrated that she has some knowledge of cultural competence.

#### *Ms. Florence's Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

Within her explanation, Ms. Florence spoke at length about her understanding of a culturally competencies. A culturally competent teacher is "someone who, whether it's your experience or not, understands what a child may need and his willingness to learn" A culturally competent teacher can "set their emotions aside, set their feelings aside and really look at a child or and keep in consideration what they're going through". Ms. Florence also stated that a culturally competent teacher is one who can "determine what children are going through at home and what their life experiences." For example, if a child comes to school without a jacket and the teacher is already aware of the child's life circumstances, the teacher will better understand how to respond to the need of the child. However, the explanations and example provides supportive evidence of a caring teacher.

#### *Mr. Nigel's Knowledge of Cultural Competence*

"A culturally competent teacher is one who is well-rounded, able to adapt to any situation they walk into and quickly pick up on the norms." Mr. Nigel suggested that when teachers are culturally competent, they adjust well to the culture of a school. For example, if a teacher has

students that are at different levels, the teacher must know how to adjust to meet the needs of the students. Like Ms. Florence, Mr. Nigel's definition and examples of a culturally competent teacher does not indicate that he fully understands cultural competence. They did not provide clear evidence of how a culturally competent teacher uses the students culture as a vehicle to engage students in the teaching and learning process.

In the next section, I capture some of the statements made in the interview by several of the other teachers at the school.

#### Other Interviewees Teachers Stories

Like the seven participants, there are other teachers I interviewed in the school that explained how relationship matters, and a caring class culture can help children succeed in urban schools. Ms. Mclean (pseudonym), a veteran middle school teacher for ten years stated that "when teachers build genuine relationships with the students, it helps to establish trust and open communication." She explained that her classroom operates similarly to a family. The students feel a sense of belonging because they treat each other like family. The democratic process also guides her classroom and decisions are made based on group consensus.

For example, Ms. McLean spoke about how she used the knowledge of a *Kgotla* (a town meeting) that she learned, while studying in Botswana, how to structure her daily class meetings. In a *Kgotla* (**COAT-la**), the elders and the community members discuss issues using a democratic process. The Chief facilitates the meeting, but each member of town has a voice. Likewise, the daily class meetings are designed for the teachers and the students to converse about a topic and learn problem-solving skills. Mr. Murray (pseudonym), a veteran teacher for

21 years in urban schools, stated that to build relationships with the students and families, it is crucial that “you show them that you care and listen to them.” Ms. Daniels (pseudonym), an urban teacher for 13 years also stated that it is important to establish “trust with the students and mean what you say and do what you say.” When students do not trust a teacher, it is hard to get them to work for them. Also, she stated that teachers must talk to students like they are human and share life stories with the students that are relatable. Furthermore, it is essential for the teachers to be aware of their biases and be self-reflective and explicitly teach students how to manage their emotions. Ms. Daniels (pseudonym) also shared that to be successful in an "urban school it is important to be self-aware and works daily to make sure biases do not interfere with learning."

### Role of Researcher and Subjectivity

My role in this study is an insider collaborating with other insiders (Herr and Anderson, 2015). My positionality does not neatly fit into one category, and my role as a researcher in this study had several caveats. First, participants felt comfortable with me because I have been working with all of them for more than a year. I was a classroom teacher at the school for 12 years before I became the instructional coach. Therefore, the teachers view me as one who advocates for them and understands the nuances of day-to-day teaching. Also, I am a participant observer who works at the school, and I am document my lived experiences, as well as, the teachers' lived experience working in an urban school. Finally, I served as an instrument through which the voices of the urban teachers can be shared with others, which has the potential to influence stakeholders and policies in education. For the data analysis, an *emic* approach was

used to examine the multiple data sources and report them with verbatim quotes (Creswell,2013). Fetterman (2010) posited that the *emic* perspective is the insider's perspective of reality and it is central to most ethnographic research. The insider's perception of reality is "instrumental in understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviors" (Creswell, 2013, p.20). Further analysis was done by synthesizing the data using the researcher's' *etic* perspective to interpret the experiences of the culture-sharing group. The *etic* perspective is the views of the researcher as an insider. It was necessary to capture both *emic* and *etic* perspectives because both perspectives provide insightful interpretation of multiple data sources.

### Summary

The analysis is ongoing during the research process and allows researchers to carefully examine and reduce an excessive amount of information into a user-friendlier format (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The analysis in an ethnographic study, organizing data, breaking them into more manageable parts, developing codes, and searching for possible patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interview served as the baseline data, which provided insight about the participants and their lived experiences in an urban school. The section regarding the individual participants knowledge of cultural competence provided evidence of how knowledgeable the participants are about cultural competence. After the interview, the teachers were given Diller and Moule's (2005) self-assessment of cultural competence for teachers to think about where they are at with their understanding of cultural competence and where they want to be at the end of the book study.

## CHAPTER FIVE MEANING MAKING

“To make ‘meaning’ means to make sense of an experience, we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision-making or action, then making meaning becomes learning.”-Jack Mezirow

The purpose of Chapter Five is to provide an overview of the study and make meaning of what the participants revealed in the book study and the focus group. The findings include the alignment of the constructs in the conceptual framework, relationship to the interview questions, and data source evidence. For this dissertation, I first presented an overview of the study and a table with a flow chart demonstrating how the conceptual framework is aligned with the questions and data sources. Next, I presented an analysis of the book study and the focus group, which included verbatim quotes to support the themes and constructs of the conceptual framework. I used discretion to remove any identifiable information from the quotes. However, I maintained how participants’ quotes were expressed in their own dialects to truly capture their voices.

### Overview of the Study

The study examined how the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy helps to improve teachers’ cultural competencies in an urban school. Knowledge is operationalized as the process of building, interrogating, and elaborating on additional information. Having knowledge means the teacher knows how to support and foster individual learning progress with various cognitive and motivational learning processes (Voss, Kunter, & Baumert, 2011).

Practice is the how, when, and what teachers do as they use the formal knowledge base in the daily work of the classroom (Cochran-& Lytle,1999). Ethnography was used as the research

design because I am studying a culture-sharing group dealing with complex problems. The ethnographic method provided the researcher with the tools to explore the research questions centered on the who, the what, and the why of what happens in the classroom setting being studied. Ethnographic methods permit the researcher to gain a broader understanding of the cultural group from the perspective of an insider because the researcher is required to immerse him or herself into the culture being studied (Fetterman,2010; Creswell,2013).

The conceptual framework consisted of three constructs that guided the research design. The three constructs were *Ubuntu* pedagogy, transformative learning, and cultural competence. Data were collected using interviews, observations, a book study, and a focus group. The book study was used to foster the knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The purpose of observations was to look for evidence of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in action. The interviews, and the focus group were designed to gauge whether the teachers experienced transformative learning. The goal of the study was to examine whether teachers show improvement in cultural competencies after studying *Ubuntu* pedagogy.

### The Researcher's Story

My lived experience inspired the study as an urban teacher for 18 years. A few years ago, a professor that observed me teaching told me that I “teach in the spirit of *Ubuntu*.” As a reflective educator, I wanted to understand what that statement meant. Thus, for two consecutive school years, I utilized my knowledge of action research, and I was intentional about the how, the what, and the why of my teaching practice. I studied myself as I worked with the same set of students for two years. For those two years, I

was ranked as a highly effective teacher, and my students outperformed the state and the district on their 3rd grade Florida Standard Assessment in both reading and math. There were 16 students in my class. Fourteen students passed the math exam while thirteen of those students passed the exam scoring above grade level. Additionally, 100% of my students showed growth academically and socially. I set high expectations for the students, and they excel.

The school is a Title 1 school with 99% of the students being Black and 98% of the students on free or reduced lunch. It is in one of Central Florida's lowest income communities. The published exam results prompted many people to ask questions regarding my classroom instruction to yield such high-performance results in math and reading. Colleagues and other school administrators had questions and wanted to know what I was doing in my classroom with the students. I also received a call from the local district school board and a letter from The Dean of the College of Education at the University of Central Florida

As I reflected on my success as a classroom teacher, I realized that I have a deep understanding of self and I build authentic relationships with my students and their families. I affirm, value, and dignify each child who walks into my class by showing them unconditional love. Also, I nurture the students by motivating them and building their confidence. My classroom also operates as a community family. We create a democratic learning environment where each person feels a sense of belonging and feels heard. The students are explicitly taught about how to be kind, show love, and respect themselves and others. Each day begins with a Morning Meeting. The Morning Meeting is a time when we set the tone for the day, reflect, share, and develop our character. We work hard at the start of the school year to create a safe and



caring classroom. I strongly believe in using the first six weeks of school to build a positive classroom and school culture, which will contribute to students' success. My teaching philosophy is to build authentic relationships with the students before I start teaching them how to read and do arithmetic. Spending the time to build relationships with the students and encouraging this amongst one another is very paramount because it is a contributing factor to the students' academic and social success. By creating these authentic relationships and setting high expectations, students can rise to the occasion and succeed despite their circumstances in life.

### Exploring the Problem of Practice

Many Black students are underperforming in the current public education system. The current school structure does not effectively meet the needs of Black students from low economic urban communities. The results of the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed, that only 16 percent of Black students are proficient in math and 18 percent are proficient in reading. Performance is also a problem in our local school district. Many of the Black students are not proficient in reading and math compared to their racial counterparts. The 2017 (grades 3-8) FSA math scores showed that 42 percent of students are proficient in math and 37percent are proficient in reading. These results clearly demonstrate that, as educators, we must examine the root of the problem. Why are so many Black students nationally and locally underperforming in public school? What is the missing link? Do Black students need a different pedagogy to foster knowledge? Many scholars argue the same point; Black students need a different approach to engage them in the teaching and learning process.

Ukpokodu (2016) reminded us that students who have been historically marginalized, disfranchised and dehumanized need an approach unique to them when being taught.

Freire (1993) and other researchers have called for a humanizing pedagogy that will foster students' understanding and connect the students to the teaching and learning process (Dewey, 1966; Noddings, 1982; Delpit, 1995; Ford, 2013; Ukpokodu, 2016). To address this problem, I proposed exposing teachers to the knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. *Ubuntu* pedagogy is a humanizing approach to help engage the students. The notion of *Ubuntu* pedagogy involves switching our focus for a child by putting the child's humanity in the forefront before teaching academic content. To achieve this level of cultural competence, teachers must be self-aware, examine personal biases, build authentic relationships with students, and strengthen communication and collaboration with parents or families.

To further examine the depth of the problem, this dissertation explored the following question: Does the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy help to improve teachers' culture competencies in an urban school? Seven teachers went on a journey to study *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The researcher's goal was to examine whether teachers gain knowledge from practicing *Ubuntu* pedagogy and if any improvement is shown in the way they teach diverse students.

The three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and transformative learning theory are constructed in the conceptual framework, which guided the design and analysis of the study. Seven teachers were interviewed and participated in a book study on *Ubuntu* pedagogy for 14 weeks. The participants were instructed to read, *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher* and engaged in

discussions about the topics in the book. Most of the reflections were shared using Marco Polo, a digital video chat application. Also, some reflections were shared face-to-face, and one participant wrote their reflections. The objectives of the book study were to increase teachers' understanding of self and *Ubuntu* competence, understand why relationships matter, and how to build meaningful relationships with the students and their families.

Data were collected over the course of 14 weeks. The seven participants volunteered to be interviewed and to participated in an ongoing book study session. Observations of the participants were an ongoing process throughout the study. I observed the teachers in their classrooms and their interaction with students and parents on the school campus. Some of the observations were formal (scheduled observations) and others were informal (unscheduled observations). For some formal interviews, I utilized the BIE Bluetooth technology. The BIE Bluetooth technology was an unobtrusive way of providing of conducting classroom observations. Using BIE technology allowed me to observe and listen to the teacher from a remote location. Teachers received immediate feedback on classroom practice. For the observations, I utilized the guide instrument provided in Appendix (E). I designed the observation tool based on the indicators of the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy: (1) Humanism and Ubuntu Competency (2) Relationship and Learning Community; (3) Collaboration and Partnership. As I observed the teachers, the indicators of *Ubuntu* pedagogy informed my frame of references. Although I had the observation tool as a reference, this process yielded forest data because I often wrote down things that were occurring in the classroom and in school.

A focus group was also used as a data collection source. The focus group session took place during the end of the academic school year. In attendance were six of the seven

participants, and the author of the book joined the group using FaceTime. FaceTime is a video conferencing application. The session was co-facilitated by my faculty research advisor and me. My faculty research advisor explained the purpose of the research and each participant was given a number to be identified. The number corresponded to the pseudonym that was assigned to each participant. Fetterman (2010) posited that the use of pseudonyms in an ethnography study is a “simple way to disguise the identity of the individuals” (p.147). To maintain confidentiality, each participant identified himself or herself using a number before they answered their questions. Questions were prepared before the day of the group interview, but the questions served as an essential guide because participants often elaborated on the questions. The focus group questions are in Appendix D. The first objective of the focus group was to have the participants share about their knowledge of cultural competencies and their experiences in an urban school. The second objective of the focus group was to instruct the participants to reflect on what they learned about themselves and their teaching practices regarding *Ubuntu* pedagogy.

### Making Sense of the Forest of Data

The data from the interview, book study, observation, and the focus group was used for the analysis of this section. The table below captures my organization of the data. Fetterman (2010) and other ethnographers posited that the best guide to managing the “forest of data” is clear thinking. Therefore, I created a data analysis flowchart to show a visual representation of my thinking. The purpose of the flow chart is to show how I process the information in a meaningful and useful manner. The first part flow chart shows the definition and attributes of the

three main constructs in the conceptual framework. The second part of the chart exhibits the evidence of knowledge and practice from the various data sources.

**Table 5: Data Analysis Flow Chart**

Conceptual Framework	Constructs: Attributes (A) Definition(D)	Data Sources			
		Observations (See Appendix E)	Relationship to Interview Questions (See Appendix C)	Relationship Focus Group Questions? See (Appendix D)	Book Study N=7
<i>Ubuntu Pedagogy</i>	<p><b>(A)Humanism</b>-value, affirm, dignify</p> <p><i>Ubuntu</i>-all-inclusive word view-care love, empathy, compassion, community, connectedness, interdependence, &amp; respect</p> <p><b>(D)Ubuntu Competence</b>-ability of an educator to fully live his/her by being deeply knowledgeable that our humanity is intertwined with the humanity of others.</p>	Evidence of Practice	Evidence of Knowledge Q2,Q3, Q4, Q5	Evidence of Practice & Knowledge	Evidence of Knowledge
	<p><b>(A)Relationship and Learning Community</b>(D) care, authentic communication, meaningful relationship, heart teacher-unconditional love that humanizes, acceptance &amp; affirmation</p>	Evidence of Practice	Evidence of Practice & Knowledge  Q4, Q8	Evidence of Practice & Knowledge	Evidence of Knowledge
	<p><b>Collaboration &amp; Partnership</b> - Trust, engage families; be proactive and make connections</p>	Evidence of Practice & Knowledge	Evidence of Knowledge Q1, Q2, Q4, Q7,	Evidence of Practice & Knowledge	Evidence of Knowledge

**Table 6: Connection to Transformative Learning**

<b>Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>Constructs: Attributes (A) Definition(D)</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Relationship to Interview Question</b>	<b>Relationship Focus Group Question?</b>	<b>Book Study(n=7)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transformative Learning</b></li> <li>1. A disorienting dilemma;</li> <li>2. Self-examination (with feelings of shame or guilt);</li> <li>3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions;</li> <li>4. Recognition of a connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation;</li> <li>5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;</li> <li>6. Planning a course of action;</li> <li>7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan;</li> <li>8. Provisional trying of new roles;</li> <li>9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;</li> <li>10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.</li> </ul>	<p>Connection Mezirow's Ten Phases (2002)</p> <p>(D)Transformative learning theory that helps to transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change</p> <p>(A)Discourse is evidence of transformation(Cranton;2006)</p> <p>Critical Self reflection</p> <p>(A) Transformative learning refines our existing frames of reference (meaning perspectives);</p> <p>learn new frames of reference (meaning perspectives);</p> <p>transform habits of mind; and transform points of view</p> <p>reinterpret an old experience</p>	<p>Provisional trying of new roles;</p> <p>Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;</p>		<p>Self-examination</p> <p>Planning a course of action;</p> <p>Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan;</p> <p>Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;</p> <p>Discourse</p>	<p>Self-examination</p> <p>Recognition of a connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation</p> <p>Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</p> <p>disorienting dilemma;</p>

### *Book Study Analysis*

In the book, study participants were introduced to information on the three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The three pillars of *Ubuntu* pedagogy are (1) Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency, (2) Relationship and learning community, and (3) Collaboration and partnership. The emphasis was placed on *Ubuntu* pedagogy because it is a revolutionary approach to restoring the humanity in the teaching and learning processes. The book addressed the need of urban teachers to be reflective in their practice and put the humanity of the students first when teaching. The participants also learned from the real-life stories of other teachers' who had struggles teaching in urban schools and how they overcame the challenges. This book provided information on teachers' need to value and affirm students. Central to the teaching and learning processes is building genuine relationships with the students and families. Participants also learned that to teach in urban schools they must know how to connect and collaborate with the students' families and communities.

During the book study, transformative learning theory was the lens that I used to examine the learning process. The teachers were engaged in ongoing conversation about culture, socialization, and worldviews that triggered strong emotions (disorienting dilemma) and feelings of disequilibrium (Mezirow, 2000). Evident in one participant's digital reflection was her struggle to talk about her cultural identity. She stated that she did not think she had a culture. However, in the chapter on Humanism and *Ubuntu* Competency, some participants attested that "it was eye-opening", because they learned a lot about the African American culture, Arab



Americans and Asian Americans students and families. Another participant also stated that, as an African American, she was “shocked” to know that Ebonics (Williams, 1997), a term coined by Robert Williams, is called African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and that it was a term recognized in books.” The participant also stated that she learned how important it is not “to make assumptions about students from a culture group because there are differences between cultural groups as well.” Another participant pointed out that she did not know the information about the cultural groups discussed in the chapter. For example, the information about Asian Americans and Arab Americans was new for her. Learning about the different cultural groups caused her to reflect on what she thinks about Asian Americans and Arab Americans. The information regarding culture, socialization, and worldview caused these participants to experience a shift in their frame of reference and experience a process of critical self-examination (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). The process of transformation was evident because the additional information led to a change in thinking and an awareness of self.

Throughout the book study, the participants were engaged in discourse about the importance of building relationships with students. One of the participants, Ms. Elaine (pseudonym) pointed out that she now” understands the importance of building relationships with students.” She mentioned that, although she is an African American woman teaching Black children, she did not necessarily understand the culture of the students. Her Christian culture and the students’ cultures often “clashed”. She explained that she was not raised in the city and churchgoing was a part of her culture, while many of the children in her class do not go to church. Therefore, some of the expectations and values she had and those of the children did not match (disorienting dilemmas). However, by reading the book and talking with her colleagues at

the school, she changed her thinking (critical reflection and rational dialogue). For example, she shared a story about a boy in her class with whom she was struggling. After critical reflecting she took a different approach with him, and the negative behavior changed (action).

It was evident that throughout the book study and the ongoing discourse, Ms. Elaine experienced perspectives transformation. Perspectives transformation occurred because the information she learned from the book and from her discussions caused a paradigm shift (Mezirow, 2000) in her thinking about the cultural values of her students. The fact that she changed her thinking and created a plan of action demonstrated that her perspectives transformation was evident in four of the Mezirow's phases of transformation. These four phases are disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, rational dialogue, and action.

The ongoing discourse contributed to Ms. Elaine's and the other teachers' perspectives transformation. Discourse is a dialogue devoted to assessing reasons presented in support of competing interpretations, by critically examining evidence, arguments and alternative points of view (Mezirow, 1997, p.6). The ongoing discussion about the book was a way for the participants to learn from each other's experiences.

All seven participants revealed that the knowledge in the book informed or validated their thinking about teaching in an urban school. When asked if the knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy was helpful and how they will continue to use it, they all firmly and confidently said the information was helpful and they will "absolutely" continue using the knowledge they gained from the book. As a part of her final reflection, Ms. Florence wrote:

*"Absolutely. I would like to ensure I continue to establish a strong classroom community. Understanding the cultural background of each child and the family dynamic is something I will continue to do as an educator. But moving forward I have learned that I also need to include the students. It is important for our students to get to know each*

*other as well. I loved the idea of the self-narrative in the classroom, allowing my students to talk, share and explain about themselves and their home life, and giving the other students and opportunity to ask questions. That is something I will definitely take with me”.*

Another participant stated that the book was “absolutely helpful and she wished she had it at the beginning of the school year”. Ms. Elaine, Ms. Stacey, and Ms. Florence stated that they planned to re-read sections of the book during the summer to prepare for the upcoming school year. Ms. Stacey requested to facilitate an ongoing discussion about the book during the summer; she took the initiative to organize the follow-up sessions by asking the teachers to write questions they wanted to discuss. Her level of transformation was evident in her “autonomous thinking.” Thinking as an autonomous and responsible member of the team shows further evidence of her being critically reflective (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow and Cranton (1997) supported the argument that we transform our personal frames of reference through critical reflection. We solve problems when we are involved in communicative learning, when we read a book, hear a point of view, and engage in self-reflective activities. Given that the teachers set up a book study for the summer and requested to have a follow-up session in the fall further corroborates evidence of transformative learning. Arranging the book study and assigned roles given by the teachers’ supports evidence of phase 6 -- “planning a course of action” and phase 7 – “acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan.” Overall, the knowledge gained from the book study revealed that all the teachers experienced levels of perspectives transformation because they were very self-reflective during the process.

### *Classroom Observations Analysis*

Observation was ongoing throughout the data collection process. As a participant observer I was engaged with all the participants in their classroom and on the school campus. I used an observation guide (See appendix E) to look for specific indicators of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. For example, when looking evidence of relationship and learning community I am looking to see evidence how the teachers build relationships with the students. I observe to see if the teachers are consistently conducting Morning meetings or Check-in meetings with the students I look to see if teachers and students show each other respect. Furthermore more I look to see if the teachers create a loving and caring environment where the children are actively engaged in the learning process .My observations revealed that the some of the participants demonstrate evidence *Ubuntu pedagogy* in practice than the others. Furthermore the study also revealed that teachers were at different stages of understanding of cultural competence. The three stages of understanding are: awareness, emerging understanding, and knowledgeable in action and practice.

After the triangulation process, I concluded that one of the teachers is at the awareness stage of cultural competence. If a teacher is at the awareness stage of competency it means that the teacher understands that culture is important and is willing to accept and learn about how to teach students that are from different cultures. However, there was not enough evidence to support the data that was reported by two of the teachers who feel that they are knowledgeable about cultural competence. I did not find enough evidence during my observations to support that they are culturally competent. These two teachers are in the emerging understanding stage of

cultural competence. They are aware of cultural competence and its importance to learning culture, they build relationships with students, they care about the students and they know some things about the students' culture, they also teach in a culturally responsive way. The classroom observations supported data reported by the other four participants/teachers in the interview, book study reflections and the focus group. Four of the participants demonstrate evidences of Ubuntu pedagogy in the classroom. These participants were knowledgeable in action and practice. The participants had a deeper understanding of cultural competence understands how to use the students' culture to connect with the learning, they validate and affirm by allowing them to have a voice in the classroom, they care and show unconditional love to the all students. All this is demonstrated in their actions, attitude and how they work with the children. These teachers also teach the students to be culturally competent as well. It was also evident during the virtual observation and onsite observation that the teachers were consistently doing an outstanding job in creating an atmosphere where students feel loved and supported.

<b>Awareness Stage of Cultural Competence</b>	<b>Emerging Understanding Stage of Cultural Competence</b>	<b>Knowledgeable in Action and Practice Stage of Cultural Competence</b>
Understands that culture is important and is willing to accept and learn about how to teach students that are from different cultures participate in cultural celebration :( Black History Month ,Hispanic Heritage, Chinese New Years Foods and customs	Aware of cultural competence and its importance to learning culture, they build relationships with students, they care about the students and they know some things about the students' culture, they also teach in a culturally responsive way.	Deeper understanding of cultural competence/Ubuntu Competence. They understand how to use the students' culture to connect with the learning, they validate and affirm by allowing them to have a voice in the classroom, and they care and show unconditional love to the all students. All this is demonstrated in their actions, attitude and how they work with the children. These teachers also teach the students to be culturally competent as well.

**Figure 7: Stages of Cultural Competency**

### *Focus Group Analysis*

Throughout the research process, there was ongoing data analysis. However, the focus group session was a cumulative process of examining how knowledge and the practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy improved teachers' cultural competencies in an urban school. The focus group lasted for 2 hours and 28 minutes. The participants verified the data and sections used for the analysis. Six of the seven participants were present at the session. The group was actively engaged in conversation the entire time. All the participants were asked to respond to the same questions. One of the questions they responded to was: Before you engaged in the study, did you have knowledge of cultural competence? The participants' responses were charted in the table below.

The table below captures the verbatim quotes of teachers, explaining cultural competence during the initial interview and the focus group with the teachers about cultural competency.

Many qualitative researchers point out that “a great deal of care” and “clear thinking” should be used when interpreting and analyzing focus group data (Stewart, Shamdasani, Rook, 2007; Fetterman, 2010). Therefore, for this exploratory research, descriptive narrative with verbatim quotation was used as a part of the analysis.

The comparing and contrasting of the data is a way of triangulating the two data sources. Triangulation is the heart of ethnographic validity, testing one source of information against another to strip away alternative explanations and ultimately putting the whole thing into perspective (Fetterman, 2010, p. 94). Comparing the statements made in the initial interview to the statements made during the focus group session revealed that some of the participants had a better understanding of cultural competency after reading the book. The teachers could articulate what they learned about cultural competency and provide examples of it in practice. For example, as I analyzed the data I was looking for evidence of what the teachers know about a culturally competent teacher. I then compared their initial interview statements with what they discussed in the focus group (see Table 7). The teacher’s knowledge of cultural competencies was evident in the focus group reflection session; however, more data was needed to demonstrate evidence of cultural/ *Ubuntu* competence in practice.

A common theme that emerged throughout the study was that building caring relationships with students and families matters. They were all in consensus that the most significant thing they learned from the book is how to build caring relationships with students and families. Ms. Elaine stated that she learned specific strategies from the book regarding how

to build relationships and strong classroom culture. In her initial interview, she stated that she builds relationships with the students by talking to them during “share time.” However, after reading the book chapter on relationships and learning communities, she learned that a teacher’s love and acceptance helps with developing authentic relationships. Understanding that “students’ come with imperfections,” but a “teacher’s ’love and acceptance”” is crucial when cultivating a caring classroom community. Investing time into getting to know the students on a personal level and focusing on the strengths of their cultural connection with them is also crucial.

Ms. Stacey and the other participants mentioned that the book provided specific strategies on how to cultivate a classroom culture where students learn to speak in “ways that value, affirm, and dignify the humanity of others.” The teacher must teach students “explicitly how to show love and care for each other.” For example, students must be taught what is love and respect. They need to understand what respect -sounds and looks like and how to develop loving and caring relationships with themselves and others. They stated that they were reminded that doing Morning and Check-in meetings is a great way to support social-emotional development of the students.

Another theme that emerged is social and emotional issues. All six participants stated that social-emotional issues are an area where they needed more support and time to teach. As I read and re-read the interview transcripts, all the teachers talked about needing support when dealing with the range of social-emotional issues the children brought into the classroom in an urban school. One teacher spoke openly about the challenges of dealing with the emotions of a boy whose mother was murdered by gun violence. She attested that she failed to discipline the student even when he was “rude, disrespectful, and hurtful” to others because the young man



would use the death of his mother to justify the behavior. Another participant stated that it was a struggle to find enough time for “social-emotional time with the children.” The children needed a lot of support with emotional issues, however it was challenging for her to spend time addressing the issues and teach reading and math. Others pointed out that they did not feel their teacher education programs prepared them to deal with the wide range of social issues the students dealt with daily. Through the interviews and focus group, the teachers were concerned about social-emotional issues. However, they all attest that the book study gave them some insights on how to address some of the social-emotional issues. One of the participants stated she learned that she must first change the way she thinks about the students and create an *Ubuntu* classroom community. In an *Ubuntu* classroom community, the teachers create a positive environment where students feel, love and supported, and accepted. A teacher who accepts their students and is committed to do all it takes to make that child successful is called a “heart teacher”. The “heart teacher” loves with unconditional love and goes above and beyond to help his or her students develop to their maximal potential. Utilizing the knowledge about *Ubuntu* classroom has helped her to have a successful end of the school year where she was better able to manage the social-emotional issues of the class.

**Table 7: Comparison Knowledge of Cultural Competence**

Teachers /participants	Initial Individual Interview Knowledge of Cultural Competence Before Book Study	Focus Group Knowledge of Cultural Competence After Book Study
Ms. Stacey	<p>“culturally competent teacher is one who understands that different cultures ... Like, dialects, language skills that are different within one area and the culture of the children”</p> <p>“culturally competent teachers “understand [that it is] more about survival versus education understanding and celebrating the differences of each culture of the children.”</p>	<p>“I had some understanding of cultural competence.</p> <p>I understand Black culture, because I lived it. Being that my mom is White I know some of White culture. But I don’t have enough knowledge about other cultures and the cultural competencies how to teach them”</p>
Ms. Myrtle	<p>“culturally competent teacher is familiar with the traditions and values of the individuals of the population that they serve, and just being respectful to the culture, the environment or the individuals.”</p>	<p>“Yes, understanding of cultural competence. I was a social worker and I study cultural competence” how to work with different people”</p>
Ms. Judy	<p>“Understanding a person's culture and not wanting them to shy away from it. So, I know in urban communities sometimes the culture is not always exactly what is taught in school, I grew up in a more Hispanic-heavy area. So, I guess I can relate it to that. You don't want people to forget their culture: you want people to embrace their culture. So just being aware and embracing people's culture, to me being culturally competent.”</p>	<p>“I sort knew about cultural competence, but once I read about it, I was surprise I did not know African American teachers had hard time connecting with urban students because the teachers might have a different the same culture. It more about cultural values”</p>
Ms. Elaine	<p>“My sons’ first and second grade teacher was culturally competent knew how to use the students’ culture and connect them to the learning”</p> <p>“My goal as a teacher is to reach the level of competency of her son's former teachers”.</p>	<p>“Somewhat aware of cultural competencies but, NOT really; stuff I read was eye opening Sometimes I was imposing my own culture. Even though we are the same skin color, I had to look at them individually Having the now has helped me to finish off the year strong”</p>

Teachers /participants	Initial Individual Interview Knowledge of Cultural Competence Before Book Study	Focus Group Knowledge of Cultural Competence After Book Study
Ms. Petrona	<p>A culturally competent teacher is “familiar with the culture of our children”</p> <p>“understand what the children are going through, and be aware different cultures will help them meet needs of them connect with the students.”</p> <p>“Use music and sports to teach”</p>	<p>“Yes, I feel like I do know some things about cultural competencies</p> <p>I just know how to teach and connect with the students in urban culture</p> <p>I know urban culture because I have family that are in that urban culture</p> <p>I am middle class-my mother was a nurse and my dad was a police officer.</p> <p>I don’t know about other cultures</p> <p>I want to learn about other cultures background</p>
Ms. Florence	<p>“A culturally competent teacher can “set their emotions aside, set their feelings aside and really look at a child or and keep in consideration what they're going through.”</p>	<p><i>(Absent during focus group session.)</i></p> <p>Written response: “I did not know cultural competence by name, but I was aware of the importance and responsibility we have educators, to be mindful, respectful and knowledgeable of the environment that we are serving. And the idea what we lead our classroom with that information.”</p>
Mr. Nigel	<p>“A culturally competent teacher is one who is well-rounded, able to adapt to any situation they walk into and quickly pick up on the norms.”</p>	<p>“Yes, I understand cultural competence I feel like I already had, because as a substitute teacher going to urban schools and work with Hispanic, Blacks and Whites I had to be aware and be ready for anything that happen”</p>

## Findings and Discussion

The data analysis revealed that knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy had a profound impact on all the teachers' perspectives in the study. Their lived experiences in urban schools supported the notion that to educate, teachers must put the humanity of the students at the forefront, build authentic relationships and collaborate with students and families (Ukpokodu, 2016).

Analyses of the interviews indicate that all the teachers need help in supporting students with social-emotional needs. After reading the transcripts, I coded 46 times the teachers made references that they need support in meeting the social emotional needs of the children. For example, one veteran teacher stated that if the social emotional needs are not addressed “no learning takes place.” The other teachers mentioned that they experienced several challenges in meeting social emotional needs of the students. They all stated that their teacher education program did not equip them with the skills in meeting the diverse social emotional needs of the students in urban schools.

Observations analysis was ongoing during the data collection. The observations revealed that some of the teachers understood how to incorporate the knowledge of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in their teaching practice. The teachers understood how to build authentic relationships, affirm, dignify and validate the students. They also understood how to develop trusting relationships, collaborate with students' families and engaged them in the learning process. During the observations, I noticed that two of the teachers consistently demonstrated knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in their classroom. They understood how to connect with the students by creating caring, harmonious classroom environments where the students are loved

and engaged in the teaching and learning process. For example, the teachers explicitly taught the students how to love and respect themselves and others. Furthermore, they develop trusting relationships with the parents by making “sunshine calls” (positive phone calls), visiting students at home or showing interest in students’ extracurricular activities. These teachers also understood how to teach for social justice and how to create a democratic classroom. The **observations** also revealed that knowledge of cultural competence does not automatically mean that it is evident in the teacher’s practice. Two of the teachers self-reported that they were knowledgeable about cultural competence. However, during the ongoing observation, I did not find supporting evidence that showed that these teachers were culturally competent. I used the observation guide (see appendix E) to look for specific indicators of cultural competence. The data showed that the teachers care for the students because they showed concern about the students’ wellbeing. They supplied the students with snacks and other school supplies whenever they were in need. However, there were inconsistencies in the teachers’ actions and behaviors in demonstrating culturally competence. There was a lack of evidence of how they build authentic relationships with the students. For example, both teachers were not consistent in conducting relationship-building activities such as morning meetings. Morning meeting is a prime time that teachers use to build relationship, affirm and validate with students. I conducted two types of observations: face-to-face observations, and to remain objective and unobtrusive, I conducted virtual observations, using the observation guide with indicators of cultural competence. The face-to-face observations and the virtual observation yielded the same results. Researchers stated that culturally competent teachers build authentic relationships, they have positive dispositions

toward cultural differences, and they know how to facilitate the instructional process in cross cultural context (Diller & Moule, 2005; Gay, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2016).

The book study & focus group revealed that all the teachers experienced different levels of disorienting dilemma, and a shift in frame of reference that was more inclusive and self-reflective. During one of the book study reflection session, some of the teachers experienced disorienting dilemma. Within Mezirow's transformative theory, disorienting dilemma is the process when a learner struggles with the resulting conflict of view that caused them to question their understanding and views (Mezirow, 1991). For example, one of the teachers was struggling to talk about her cultural identity. She stated that she thought that she did not have a cultural. But after reading the book she recognized that she is Jewish with a mix of Italian. Another teacher stated that she realized that as a Christian, she was imposing her believes on the students in the classroom. The other teachers talked about how "eye opening" the information on micro-cultural differences was. All the teachers experienced disorienting dilemma that led to critical reflection and perspective transformation. Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation states that a paradigm shift occurs when we have "a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). The focus group revealed that there was a shift in the participants' frames of reference that was more inclusive and self-reflective. For example, in the focus group, all the participants were given a chance to respond and to reflect on the all questions. When the teachers were asked what they learned about *Ubuntu* pedagogy, they all shared insightful information. One teacher stated that the information in the book was "life changing." Some of the participants stated that the information on "the habit of

mind” helped them realize the importance of creating a family structure. This was a key in building a caring classroom environment. The participants were engaged in discussions about the impact of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. They were openly self-critical, and this process inspired them to develop an action plan for supporting each other during the next school year. Mezirow (1991) relayed that discourse and critical reflection that questions assumptions, and lead to the development of an action plan, is transformative (p.164). The table below surmised the findings and evidence that revealed how the teachers experience perspective transformation. Central to the teachers’ transformation is their openness about their lived experiences, critical reflecting on their experience, and engaging in dialogue with others. The teachers experienced transformation in their habits of mind and action through this process of critical self-reflection, meaningful discourse, and the development of an action plan.

**Table 8: Findings with Evidence**

<b>Findings</b>	<b>Evidence (How and When)</b>
An analysis of the <b>interviews</b> indicated that all the teachers need help in supporting students with social-emotional needs	Social-emotional was coded 46 times (N=11) “I need more time to teach it;” emotional issues prevent them from learning” “the kids come with a lot of problem” “I was not prepared to deal will the social-emotional stuff” “I struggle ...to make him not feel attacked”
The <b>observations</b> revealed that some of the teachers understand how to incorporate the knowledge of <i>Ubuntu</i> pedagogy in their teaching practice. The <b>observations</b> also revealed that knowledge of cultural competence does not automatically means that it is evident in the teacher’s practice.	Teachers consistently do morning/check-in meetings Teachers connect with the students- Affirm, validate, dignify Explicitly teach students how to show love and respect each other Develop trusting relationships with students’ families (conferences, home Visits, Positive phone calls to families (“Sunshine calls”) Lack of evidence for indicators of cultural competencies from teachers who self-reported that they are knowledgeable about competent
The <b>book study &amp; focus group</b> revealed that all the teachers experienced levels of a disorienting dilemma, a shift in frame of reference that was more inclusive and self-reflective.	“I was imposing my culture” “I want to learn more about teaching other students” “Action plan to start book study” “Life-changing”; “eye-opening” “growth” Teacher struggling to talk about cultural identity – “I did not know I have a culture” Social Emotion Plan: Find the good and praise it (Newsletter)

Limitation of the Study

There were several limitations to this dissertation in practice. The study was limited to the lived experiences of seven urban schoolteachers. The themes that emerged in the study are



only examined through the lens of a small sample size of seven participants in a small urban school. Though the experiences of the participants are like what is reported in the literature about teaching in urban settings, the findings are not generalizable beyond the scope of this study.

Another limitation of the study is that the study encompasses issues of reliability. Reliability refers to the extent to which studies can be replicated. It requires that a researcher use the same codes in the data analysis process to obtain the same results as those of a prior study (Lecompton and Goetz, 1982, Creswell, 2013). Understanding that reliability might be a potential problem, I provided detailed explanations of the research process and codes used in the data analysis (Making Meaning chapter). I also used triangulation to compare the information from the data sources (Fetterman, 2010).

A potential researcher's bias is an additional limitation to this study. I am very passionate about the topic of *Ubuntu*, and I have an in-depth understanding of *Ubuntu* as a philosophical construct. In this study, I also serve as an instrument that is very knowledgeable about the cultural sharing group. Therefore, to guard against obvious biases, I shared my story in the first chapter, and I also explained my positionality as an insider collaborating with other insiders. Furthermore, in the analysis process, I avoided making assumptions and I clarified significant statements with the participants. Member checks are a strategy to increase the credibility of findings and to ensure that I did not misinterpret the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also practiced "self-discipline and self-criticism" (Fetterman, 2010) as I went through the process.

## Implications and Recommendation

The study provides insights regarding the pedagogical skills teachers need to teach Black students and all students in urban schools. As discussed in the study, teachers need to be self-aware and engage in self-reflection. Building authentic relationships with students and families is essential in urban schools.

It is crucial for teachers to be self-aware of how their biases can unintentionally impact learning. To be successful in urban schools, teachers must examine their biases and cultivate a habit of mind, knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach in a cross-cultural context.

Findings from the study also supported the argument that teachers of color, like White teachers, need to be aware and understand how their biases can impact teaching and learning. The study also dispelled the notion that Black teachers are better able to teach Black students. The study revealed that the Black teachers, like the White teachers, had similar challenges in teaching the students of color because they not they did not understand the cultural socialization of the students. Multicultural scholar, hooks (2003) relayed “a that black child taught by black teachers who believe they are not capable of academic excellence are no better off than black students taught by white teachers who see them as academic sub-standard” (p.68). All teachers need to be self-aware to be an effective teacher of students in urban schools.

According to the findings of the study, to improve teachers’ cultural competence, they must be taught how to build relationships with students and their families. Improving cultural competencies is not an overnight process nor does it involve simple professional development. It requires that teachers be exposed to ongoing learning about the skill set that will help to create a paradigm shift and change their frames of reference. For this level of transformation to occur,

teachers must be exposed to new knowledge that will help them to engage in discourse and critical self-reflection. Mezirow (1997) posited, “discourse and critical reflection on assumptions can lead to significant personal transformation” (p.6-7). The study revealed that all the teachers who engaged in the book study on *Ubuntu* pedagogy showed levels of personal transformation. Therefore, I recommend that schools and teacher preparation programs which seek to transform teachers’ perspectives and prepare them to work in urban schools must help learners become aware, critical of their assumptions, and engaged in a discourse that is “free from coercion” (Mezirow,1997).

From an organizational perspective, one way this can be done is through professional book study. Book studies allow participants to become lifelong learners who supported and challenged each other to expand their learning and improve their classroom practices (McGlinn et al., 2003; Smith and Galbraith; 2011; Segway (2003). The Florida Department of Education(FLDOE) also recommends Book studies as an alternative to traditional professional development. FLDOE professional learning tool kits suggested, “Book studies can be powerful tools for developing the teacher expertise necessary for improving performance and enhancing student learning through deliberate practice”(http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/talentdevelopment/news/plc/PLC-Book-Study-Guidelines.pdf).

For higher education teachers’ preparation institutes working on preparing the teachers for urban settings, the study revealed that the participants did not feel adequately prepared to teach in urban school. These direct quotes recommendations are from the participants that attend colleges in the state of Florida:

- Black female from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU): “Internships are necessary to help teachers experience success in urban schools.”
- White female from a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), stated that “I would like to see more diversity courses that teach us how to work with students that are from urban schools.”
- Biracial Female from a PWI, recommends that: “There should be more classes on diversity in teaching. [There should be] a social-emotional class so that we can, be better equipped to handle some of the same issues that are research based that are happening in the classroom”  
 “While the internships are important, I do not think that one internship is enough. Student teachers are assigned a part time and a full-time internship. Depending on the area in which they live, they will never have an urban experience. Teachers should experience both a Title 1 school and not. The educational and resource gaps are huge. Every student teacher should experience this first hand before entering the workforce”.

The other recommendation came from Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu, the author of the book, *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*. Dr. Ukpokodu is a 30-year educator and Professor of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies at the University of Missouri - Kansas City. She recommends using *Ubuntu* pedagogy as an organizing framework to help prepare teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Dr. Ukpokodu stated that:

- Students of the 21st century and beyond need new and complex sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values to live and participate in it. Specifically, they must possess a critical cultural competence to live their full humanity and exemplify the cardinal principle of “I in you and you in me” or “I am because we are and because we are, therefore I am” in their individual and collective life.
- Finally, in today’s world that is deeply broken and divided along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and language, and plagued by increased racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and homophobia, *Ubuntu* pedagogy cannot be more necessary, if teachers are to educate for humanity,

peace, healing and reconciliation, and social justice. Any education worthy of its value must help all students to develop as decent persons, compassionate citizens, empowered social actors committed to reconstructing society so that it is more democratic, equitable, humane, just, and harmonious. Only *Ubuntu* pedagogy teaches for humanity, so it is absolutely a necessity for the realities of today's world and education (O. Ukpokodu, personal communication, June 26, 2017).

As a student of Ukpokodu, an urban school educator for almost two decades, and a scholar, I cannot agree more! It is crucial for higher education institutions to take into consideration the recommendations from the experiences of stakeholders (Bolman and Deal, 2013) to continue producing highly competent teachers who are well prepared to teach students, from diverse populations.

#### Implications for Future Research

The following are implications for future research on the topic of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The study was a convenience sample of seven participants that study *Ubuntu* pedagogy for 14 weeks. I believe that a larger sample size and a longitudinal study could reveal more meaningful results. A larger same size should focus on doing a book study with ethnically diverse teachers in low-income urban schools. The professional book study should be conducted for two years using the book; *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*. Teachers' success should be tracked, and students' achievement should be measured.

The second implication for future research is to examine the culture of the classroom after the teacher has completed his or her studies on *Ubuntu* pedagogy. The research should examine if *Ubuntu* classroom communities have any impact on the overall school culture.

Observations using BIE Bluetooth technology should be one of the data sources. The BIE Bluetooth technology is an excellent way of providing immediate feedback during the coaching cycle of the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. Exploring the influence of classroom culture on school's culture could provide more knowledge into how to develop a positive school-wide culture.

A third implication is to conduct a mixed method study that compares urban schools that utilize *Ubuntu*-oriented education and urban schools that follows traditional ways of teaching diverse students. A comparative study will show if there is any statistically significant difference between FSA reading scores of students that were taught by teachers that were knowledgeable about *Ubuntu* pedagogy and students that were taught by teachers that were not knowledgeable about *Ubuntu* pedagogy. This type of study would provide insight into school culture and students achievement.

Lastly, after completing this study and knowing what I now know, for future research I would explore the question: Does the knowledge and practice of *Ubuntu* pedagogy transforms teachers' perspectives about teaching in an urban school? This question is more concise, aligned to transformative learning and the other constructs in the conceptual framework.

### The Researcher's Reflection

The study began with my quest of wanting to use *Ubuntu*-oriented teaching to address the complex problem – the performance issues of Black students in urban schools. After reading the Dr. Ukpokodu's book, *You Can't Teach Us if You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming*

*an Ubuntu, Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*, the author validated and confirmed what I was doing for years in my classes that contributed to my success as a classroom teacher. After contacting her via email, she continues to be a mentor and provided guidance during the research process. When I shared the topic of *Ubuntu* with my chair, Dr. Hopp, her response was “you are going to revolutionize how we look at teaching and learning in an urban school.” I did not know exactly how I was going to structure the research but, with her support and the knowledge I gained from the Curriculum and Instruction Education Doctorate (Ed.D) program, the study began to take shape.

The Curriculum and Instruction Ed.D program helped me develop my research acumen and examine complex issues in education. During the first semester I was enrolled in two classes, EDP 7517: *Facilitating Learning, Development, & Motivation*, and EDF 7457: *Data, Assessment & Accountability*. The rigor of the classes stretched my mental capacity and spirit of resilience. In the EDP 7517 class, I was expected to integrate, synthesize the new information by the end of the course and complete a Gap analysis of a complex problem. As a novice researcher, I felt incredibly overwhelmed and often question my acceptance to the program.

In Dr. Hopp's EDF 7457 class, excellence and high expectation was the order of the day; however, she put our minds at ease by sharing stories of perseverance and determination. These stories motivated me to move forward in the face of challenges. The class was like a “therapy session” for many of us. Once our minds were at ease, we were better able to focus on the lessons regarding how to use data to explore complex problems. The knowledge I gained from classes helped me during this dissertation process. I am also appreciative of Dr. David Boote and Dr. Kevin Washington for sharing their willingness to share their expertise with me. Dr. Boote

has helped me refine my knowledge of qualitative research methods and Dr. Washington has helped me integrated the philosophy *Ubuntu* in the research. The library's education researcher, Terri Sypolt was extremely diligent in supporting me on how to find books and quality articles for my research topic.

As I was engaged the research process I learned a lot on how to analyze data. Reading John Creswell's book, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, has help helped me with the overall structure of the dissertation. During the study I had an epiphany about the notion of cultural competence. I realized that the teachers were at different levels of cultural competence. Cultural competence is a set of attitudes, behaviors, actions, knowledge, skills, and abilities that one possesses to work and respond more effectively in cross-cultural contexts (Gay, 2010). It entails mastering complex self-awareness, acceptance of difference, and the ability to adapt skills to changing cultural needs and demands (Diller and Moule, 2005, p.27).

*Ubuntu* competence would be the highest level of cultural competence because it is a multi-dimensional, ongoing learning process. A teacher with *Ubuntu* competence knows how to accept, affirm, dignify self, and to accord full humanity to others (Ukpokodu, 2016). This level of competence must be evident in knowledge and practice. In the study, two of the teachers demonstrated evidence of *Ubuntu* competence in both knowledge and practice. The two teachers created masterfully classroom environments, which affirmed and dignified the humanity of their students. They discussed how they teach love, respect, and acceptance in a way that validates and affirms students. Their teaching practices and classroom culture embodies *Ubuntu*. The teachers also understood how to explicitly teach lessons on social justice. For example, during the virtual



observation of the morning meeting, Ms. Stacey asked the students a social justice question that stemmed directly from the lives of children. Ms. Stacey facilitated the discussion and helped the students to make connections to the real world and what they were learning in school rather than sharing her views on the topic. When teachers incorporate social justice issues in the classroom, it helps to build a strong classroom culture where students feel valued, cared for and respected. Surprisingly, what emerged from the study is that knowledge of cultural competence does not automatically mean that it is evident in the teachers' practice. Two participants who stated that they are knowledgeable about cultural competencies did not consistently demonstrate it in practice. I firmly believe that urban teachers have the potential to achieve reach the level of *Ubuntu* competence if they practice *Ubuntu* pedagogy with fidelity.

Although I enjoyed learning about the research and data collection process, the journey was not easy. I learned many lessons along the way that helped me to grow as a researcher. I often share my research on international and national platforms as a catalyst for this growth. By sharing my research, even though I made myself vulnerable, I received several feedbacks that helped me to modify my process. From engaging in the program coursework, presenting at conferences, and working on the dissertation, I can confidently say I have achieved my goal of increasing research acumen.

Offentimes, I faced challenges, yet I persevered. I am thankful for my village that supported me during this long, laborious progress. I appreciated the kind gestures, the words of encouragement, the prayers and the positive meditation, it all contributed to my success.

**APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL  
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

Approval of Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**      **FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Alecia Blackwood**

Date: **February 14, 2018**

Dear Researcher:

On 02/14/2018 the IRB approved the following modifications / human participant research until 02/13/2019 inclusive: Type of Review:      Submission Correction for UCF Initial Review Submission

Form - Expedited Review Category #6 and #7

Adult Participants; n=16

Project Title: Transformative Learning: Improving Teachers' Cultural

Competencies Through Knowledge and Practice of *Ubuntu*

Pedagogy

Investigator: Alecia Blackwood

IRB Number: SBE-17-13706

Funding Agency:

Grant Title:

Research ID:      n/a

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu> .

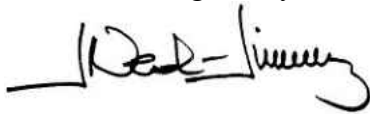
If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 02/13/2019, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a signed and dated copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

This letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Neal-Jimenez", written over a horizontal line.

Signature applied by Jennifer Neal-Jimenez on 02/14/2018 09:19:33 AM EST

Designated Reviewer



## **Transformative Learning: Improving Teachers' Cultural Competencies Through Knowledge and Practice of Ubuntu Pedagogy**

### **Informed Consent**

Principal Investigator: **Alecia Blackwood, Doctoral Candidate**

Faculty Advisor: Carolyn Walker Hopp, Ph.D.

Investigational Site(s): Georges Academy Charter

**Introduction:** Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study, which will include about 16 teachers from Urban Schools. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are a teacher in an urban school. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person doing this research investigation is Alecia Blackwood, a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida. Because the researcher is a doctoral student, she is being guided by Dr. Carolyn Walker Hopp, faculty advisor in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership.

### **What you should know about a research study:**

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the question: Does knowledge and practice of Ubuntu pedagogy improve teachers' cultural competencies in an urban intensive school? The goal is to examine if knowledge and practice of the three pillars of Ubuntu Pedagogy: (1) Humanism and Competence, (2) Collaboration & Partnership ;(3) Relationship and Learning Community help with the perspective transformation of teachers in urban schools. We want to understand what pedagogy helps to improve teachers' cultural competencies for working in urban schools.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:**

You will be asked to participate in a book study, an individual interview, and a group interview. In the book study, you will read chapters, write reflections and discuss the book in a group setting. In the individual interview, you will be questioned about your knowledge and skills in teaching in urban schools. In the group interview, you will be asked about how do you build relationships with students and collaborate with families. You do not have to answer every question or complete every task. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks.

**Location:**

The study will be conducted at Georges Academy School. George Academy is a STEM charter school in Orlando, Florida.

**Time Required:**

We expect that you will be in this research study for only the duration of the interviews and observations. The individual interviews will take about 60 minutes in a conference room at UCF. The focus group will take place on a Saturday at UCF. The focus group will take about 120 minutes. There will be virtual classroom observations. One will take place in Mid-February and the second one will take place at the end of May. Each one will take about 60 minutes. The interviews will be done after school in a prearranged conference room. You will also be asked to participate in three book study sessions on a Saturday. The book will be provided at no charge. Each online book study session will last approximately 60 minutes and will consist of three written reflections. The book study sessions will take place online and face-to-face. The research will be done by May 2018.

**Audio or videotaping:**

This discussion will be recorded using Audio Note, a recording application, and the investigator will take notes as deemed necessary during the discussion.

You will be audiotaped during this study. If you do not want to be audiotaped, the interviewer will conduct the session without a recording device but will take brief handwritten notes during the discussion on the protocol document. After the meeting ends, the interviewer will prepare a report documenting the interview and recording the thematic responses of the interview subject. If you are audiotaped, the tape will be kept in an encrypted file on the researcher's computer. The tape will be erased or destroyed when the study is over in August 2021. After all, interviews are complete, the reports will be prepared for interpretation and coded according to thematic responses.

**Risks:**

There are no expected risks for taking part in this study. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study. Appropriate steps are being taken to protect your confidentiality.

**Benefits:** The participant's contribution in this research will help gather important information that will help with the understanding of teaching in urban schools. The participants will learn about research-based practices that can aid in the understanding of teaching culturally diverse students in urban schools.

**Compensation or payment:**

There is no compensation or other payment for taking part in this study. The principal investigator is the only researcher and has no staff. Dr. Carolyn Hopp will assist in conducting the focus group, to support the researcher's experience of conducting focus groups.

**Confidentiality:** We will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to Carolyn Walker Hopp, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, 407-823-0392 or Carolyn.Hopp@ucf.edu.

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact:

Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

**Withdrawing from the study:**

If you decide to leave the study, contact the investigator so that the investigator can remove you from the study. The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include no longer working at an urban school. The sponsor can also end the research study early. We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare or choice to stay in the research.

**Results of the research:**

The results will be shared with the Dissertation Committee at UCF.

Your signature below indicates your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THE IRB EXPIRATION DATE BELOW

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent



Dear Teachers,

I hope all is well. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree at the University of Central Florida, under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn Hopp. You are being contacted to participate because you have 0.5 years or more of experience working in urban schools.

The purpose of the study is to examine what pedagogy improves teachers' cultural competencies in an urban school.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve two interviews, three book study sessions, classroom observations and one focus group meeting.

### **Interview**

Each interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length. The first interview will take place in Mid-February and the second one will be at the end of May. The interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location.

### **Book Study**

Some participants might be asked to participate in the book study. Each participant will be given the book-- Ukpokodu, O. N. (2016). *You can't teach us if you don't know us and care about us: becoming an Ubuntu, responsive and responsible urban teacher*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. There is no charge for the book.

The participants will be asked to read three chapters from the book between Mid-February to May. There will be three 60 minutes online and face-to-face Book Study sessions. During each book study sessions, the investigator and the participants will discuss one chapter each using the guiding questions in the book. The investigator will conduct the book study sessions.

### **Observations**

The investigator will conduct ongoing virtual classroom observations. The observations will take place in the mornings between 8-12pm. The participants will receive feedback from the observations.

### **Focus Group**

The focus group will take place in a prearranged conference room and will be facilitated by my research faculty advisor and me. We will ask questions that will lead to a discussion about teachers' cultural competence and urban schools. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish.

Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded to facilitate the collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for six months in an encrypted file on my personal computer. The file will be erased or destroyed when the study is over in August 2018. Only the researcher associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (407617-4963) or by e-mail at [blackwooda@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:blackwooda@knights.ucf.edu). You can also contact my supervisor Carolyn Walker Hopp, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, 407-823-0392 or [Carolyn.Hopp@ucf.edu](mailto:Carolyn.Hopp@ucf.edu).

I would like to assure you that this study this research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact:

Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Alecia Blackwood

**UCF IRB NUMBER: SBE-17-13706**

**IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/14/2018**

**IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 02/13/2019**

**University of Central**

**APPENDIX B APPROVAL LETTER GEORGES ACADEMY**

January 25, 2018

To Whom It May Concern,

Alecia Blackwood has permission to do conduct research at [REDACTED] for her dissertation at the University of Central Florida for the Spring and Summer semesters of 2018.

I permit Alecia Blackwood to conduct individual observations, interviews, and a focus group of faculty at the school. It is expected that the use of this data is solely for research purposes and meets all requirements established for the protection of privacy for faculty and the school.

You may contact me at 407-985-[REDACTED] or [REDACTED] if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

[REDACTED] Executive Director

## **APPENDIX C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Research Question /Ubuntu Pedagogy	Data Source	Data Collection	Connection to Ubuntu Pedagogy Cultural Competence (CC)	Connection to Transformative Learning theory	Analysis
Does <b>knowledge and practice</b> of <i>Ubuntu</i> Pedagogy improve teachers' cultural competencies?	Semi-structured Interview	Q1-Please tell me how long have you been working in urban schools? Describe the community that you work in?	Humanism and Ubuntu Competence (HC) Relationship and Learning (RLC) Community Collaboration and Partnership (CP)		Patterns (Cresswell,2013)
	Semi-structured Interview	Q2-Can you tell me about how you <b>build relationships with the students</b> ? Prompt 1 Tell me how you build relationship with your families?	RLC, CP	Self-Examination	
	Semi-structured Interview	Q3-Can you describe a culturally competent teacher?	CC		Interview& Focus Group Comparison
	Semi-structured Interview	Q4-Describe a time when you had a difficult student in your class. How did you build relationship with the student and the family? Prompt 1- What do you do to learn about the culture of your students in your class?	RLC, CP HC		

<b>Research Question /Ubuntu Pedagogy</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Connection to Ubuntu Pedagogy Cultural Competence (CC)</b>	<b>Connection to Transformative Learning theory</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
	Semi-structured Interview	Q5 Does what you learn about your students culture impacts the instructions in your class	CC		
	Semi-structured Interview	Q6-How would you describe a caring teacher?	CC		Interview
	Semi-structured Interview	Q7- What specific skills teachers need to possess teach students in urban schools? ?	RLC, CP, CC, HC		Interview, Focus Group
	Semi-structured Interview	Q8-What advice would you give to a new teacher coming to work in urban schools for the first time?	RL C, CP		Interview

## **APPENDIX D FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**



<b>Focus Group Questions</b>	<b>Connection to Transformative Learning theory</b>	<b>Connection to <i>Ubuntu</i> Pedagogy</b>
<b>Cultural Competence</b>		
1. If you could use one word to describe your journey as an educator in urban schools, what would it be? Why?	Self-Examination	RLC, CP, CC, HC
2. If you had the opportunity to change or revise the teacher education program you attended, would you make any changes for pre-service teachers? Explain.	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions	RLC, CP, CC, HC
3. What do you feel has been the greatest accomplishment for you this year as an educator? Your biggest challenge?	Self-Examination Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	HC
4. As you reflect on what you learn about <i>Ubuntu</i> Pedagogy, what is the most significant thing you learned that contributed to your knowledge of working with urban students? Your classroom practices?	Self-Examination Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	RLC, CP, CC, HC

<b>BOOK STUDY REFLECTION</b>	<b>Connection to Transformative Learning theory</b>	<b>Connection to <i>Ubuntu</i> Pedagogy</b>
<b>Before you engaged in the study, did you have knowledge of cultural competence?</b>		
1. Describe your experiences since you began studying <i>Ubuntu pedagogy</i> .	Phase 1,2,4	RLC, CP, CC, HC
2. Has knowledge of <i>Ubuntu pedagogy</i> influenced the decisions you make when dealing with students and families? How?	Phase 1,2,6,7,9	RLC, CP
3. <i>Can you describe a specific time when the knowledge of Ubuntu pedagogy was helpful? Use this as a probing question if needed.</i>	Phase 4,6	RLC
4. Will the knowledge of <i>Ubuntu pedagogy</i> inform your teaching practices as you continue to work in urban schools? Explain how.	Phase 1,2,3	RLC, CP, CC, HC
5. Were there any sections of the book that were difficult to understand?		
6. How did you respond to the chapters in the book that were studied?		

<b>Connection to the Ten Phases of Transformative Learning Theory</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A disorienting dilemma</li> <li>2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame</li> <li>3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions</li> <li>4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change</li> <li>5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions</li> <li>6. Planning a course of action</li> <li>7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan</li> <li>8. Provision trying of new roles</li> <li>9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</li> <li>10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective</li> </ol>

## **APPENDIXE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE**

## CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity observed (formal/informal): \_\_\_\_\_

Humanism and Competency HC

Relationship and Learning community=RLC

Collaboration and Partnership=CP

Cultural Competence =CP

<p><b><i>Evidence of Interactions with All Cultural Groups</i></b> Researcher will make note when teacher distributes her interactions as evenly as possible with all students of different cultural backgrounds in the classroom. When attention appears to be directed toward specific groups of students more than others, the researcher will make note of this behavior.</p> <p>ELL Students SLD Gifted Challenging Behavior</p>	
<p><b><i>Description of Cultural Aesthetics within Academic Setting</i></b></p> <p>The researcher will note within the classroom evidence of cultural celebration. This may be in the form of artwork displayed or words translated into different languages to label items in the room.</p> <p><b>Teach Healing words</b> <b>HURT OR HEAL, HELP</b> <b>Monitor Learners Academic and Social</b></p>	

<p><b>Evidence of Humanism and Cultural Competence</b> The researcher will look in the at teachers’ student interaction evidence of books that focus on a variety of different cultural groups. Those books can be from any genre and can be in any form (art books, music books, recipe books, etc.), but must reflect more than one culture.</p> <p>Evidence of Social justice books  Caring behaviors towards students  Teachers attitude towards students  Loving and respect  Validating students  Sharing personal life stories  Recognize students ‘humanity  Teachers self-examination  Affirm, validate, dignify</p>	
<p><b>Statements of Cultural Affirmation/Caring Attitudes</b> The researcher will listen to the teacher as she interacts with her students to make note of statements that affirm the students’ cultural differences.</p> <p>Those statements include, but are not limited to, words or phrases that encourage students to use their personal cultural capital for problem solving and/or to contribute to classroom discussions.</p> <p>Teachable Moments  Recognize the uniqueness of students and their cultures</p>	
<p><b><i>Instances of Relationship and Learning Community</i></b></p> <p>The researcher will make note of how the teacher integrates culturally appropriate practices into his or her classroom in ways that seek to include students’ personal knowledge into the learning process.</p> <p>These practices are not to be reserved for specific times during the month (i.e. Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage), but</p>	

<p>rather are to be incorporated throughout the daily activities.</p> <p>An example of such as practice would be to take students for a walk in their neighborhood to develop mathematical problems and allow students to come up with their own solutions by which to solve the problems.</p> <p>Using students name in math problem  Relevant and meaning topics that students can make connection to</p> <p><b>Deescalating situation</b>  <b>Acknowledging students</b>  <b>Visiting students in out of school context</b></p>	
<p><b><i>Description of Classroom Environment</i></b></p> <p>The researcher will write a description of the way in which the room is arranged. This includes the placements of student desks, the teacher’s desks, the literacy center (i.e. couches, bean bags), evidence of culturally affirming student work samples, etc. One thing to note is if student desks are arranged in groups, pairs, or in rows. This provides evidence of whether the teacher encourages cooperative or individual learning.</p> <p>Ongoing Class Meetings</p>	
<p><b>Evidence of Family and Community Engagement</b></p> <p>The researcher will make note evidence of family engagement.</p> <p>Parent conferences  Sunshine call-Good report to parent  Community events -sports or talent show  Interaction with parents</p>	
<p><b>Unanticipated Events</b></p> <p>The researcher will make note of anything that takes places during the observation that was not anticipated in the planning of the visit.</p> <p>This could include, but is not limited to, fire drills that might interrupt the flow of the lesson, an observation from an</p>	

<p>administrator, a child bringing in something from home that he/she wishes to share with the class, and a field trip that allows for open discussion on culture. Discussion about students</p>	
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