TEACHING TOLERANCE IN LANGUAGE ARTS FOR STUDENT AWARENESS IN
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING TOLERANCE IN LANGUAGE ARTS FOR STUDENT AWARENESS IN

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This qualitative study examined how students' awareness of tolerance varied

depending on their school setting. In addition, the study focused on teachers' attitudes

and perspectives about including elements of social justice in their seventh grade

language arts curriculum. The setting of the study was representative of schools in rural,

urban, and suburban settings in the Midwestern United States. Through the study, the

researcher evaluated students' awareness of tolerance through the use of focus groups. In

contrast, a semi-formal interview was used to gauge teachers' perspectives and attitudes

in regards to teaching issues of tolerance in their seventh grade language arts classes.

Transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews were analyzed, coded, and divided into

themes to express the findings of the study. In addition to field notes, the researcher kept

a journal to document personal responses to the experiences in each school.

The findings of the study did not show substantial differences in the school

settings and the students' knowledge and awareness of tolerance in most cases; however,

the semi-structured interviews with the teachers displayed variance in the school settings and the teachers' attitudes and perspectives toward teaching tolerance. The findings showed that the teachers in a suburban setting were the most likely to address issues of tolerance in their seventh grade language arts curriculum. The implications for teaching are that educators must provide opportunities through their classroom curriculum for students to learn skills that will encourage them to become tolerant and accepting members of society.

Dedicated to my witty, clever, and confident husband, Levi Elston. His love, support,

and consistent badgering have successfully guided me to this point in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Areas:

A lack of tolerance in education is an incredibly relevant issue in today's society.

Students, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, law makers, politicians,

business owners, and everyone else should be aware of the injustices in society. Without

knowledge of the problems in society, people do not look for solutions; therefore,

education must include curriculum that makes people aware of and knowledgeable about

the need for tolerance among America's youth. After a history of separating groups of

races and religions, as an educated country, one should see the error of one's ways and

fix the problem. Unfortunately, seeing and understanding differences is not a strength

among students in schools across the United States. Children are taunted and bullied for

their differences. Uniqueness is not valued by children; children want to "fit in" with

their peers. Learning empathy and developing tolerance is essential for all people.

Schools must make teaching tolerance a priority and part of their curriculum. Aristotle

viewed justice in light of virtue. The more virtuous a person, the more they deserve

(Slote, 2010). Tolerance is not limited to one view, but instead incorporates many

thoughts and can be utilized under different understandings. John Rawls explained that

justice should not be founded in sympathy and compassion, but rather in rationality

(Slote, 2010). In contrast, a utilitarian, such as John Stuart Mill, would argue that sympathy is at the root of people working toward a just and equal society (Mill, 1863). Nel Noddings (2003) would suggest that an ethic of care would create a society that was looking out for the needs of all those included.

Human rights, justice, fairness, and equality are at the forefront of tolerance. Ethics was incorporated simply because of human's ethical responsibility to respect others and treat others equally. Allowing everyone to have the same opportunities and rights no matter their color, age, gender, and ethnicity is part of being ethical. The term "equally" or "equality" varied in definition depending on the source. Miller and Walzer (1995) explained, "the ideas of simple equality of most recent currency, calling for decent basic living standards and social services for all" (p. 18). Miller and Walzer (1995) went on to explain that the view and definition of equality can vary depending on where people live and their culture. They state that:

> Equality in social democratic discourse still generally meant simple equality, this valuebeing grounded in the solidaristic universes of working-class factory and community life and in the political outlooks generated by identification with these. In communist Eastern Europe, ruled by a more severe ideology of proletarian needs and desires, the operative concept of equality for the masses was even more simplistic and uniform. (Miller & Walzer, 1995, p. 19)

Many of the concepts surrounding equality, such as tolerance, justice, and fairness, have been debated for centuries. The terms become relative to those that are using and describing them. Nagel (1991) stated that, "the impersonal standpoint in each of us produces a powerful demand for impartiality and equality, while the personal

standpoint gives rise to individualistic motives and requirements, which present obstacles to the pursuit and realization of such ideals" (p. 3). At one point in time in the United States, "Separate but equal" was considered fair and equal, but to those it directly affected, only part of the people felt it was fair and equal. Because of varying viewpoints, morals, ethics, and cultures relative and, somewhat, ideological terms cannot be completely agreed upon by everyone.

The United States of America was built around the concept of allowing and accepting diversity but has failed to fully achieve its goal. The United States was supposed to be a place for people to safely practice their own religions, to build businesses, and live freely. With the writing of the constitution, the country only held those rights to those citizens that they thought deserved it. African Americans were not allotted the same rights that white Americans were given. Women were not given the same rights as men. Other races and ethnicities were not considered equal. The amendments to the Constitution changed throughout the decades to account for those problems in society; however, the amendments did not solve the issues of intolerance. A sound education about people's differences must be implemented in schools in order for people to become more tolerant and accepting of those differences.

In an ever-changing society, new differences among people surface. Many cultures and religions instill certain moral and ethical values that do not always accept all people's differences. A question comes up, "Should all differences be accepted?" This question can be approached from a variety of stances and perspectives. Some religions would claim that homosexuality is not a difference that should be readily accepted. Some cultures are not accepting of other religions. The bottom line is that differences do not

hurt each other, but actions do; therefore, differences should be accepted. Not all people are good people, but they should not be classified or judged by their differences in race, socioeconomic status, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or gender, but rather for the actions toward others.

Statement of Problem:

Creating a curriculum involving tolerance is the responsibility of teachers today. Technology, popular movies, and trends may come and go, but respect for all people should last forever. Respecting people that are different from oneself is a learned skill and so is disrespecting people that are different from oneself. Every teacher should make an explicit priority in his/her classroom to teach about differences in culture, race, and socio-economic situation.

Students' engagement in the classroom relies on connections with the material presented to them in class. Students understand feeling different, and at times, insecure with their differences. Learning about differences is the one way to make them less scary and more normal. Teachers need to know and understand how to incorporate issues of tolerance into their classroom curriculum.

Teaching tolerance is an ethical decision and topic. Some students are often missing the ethical and moral conversations that once existed at home. Home lives around the country are falling apart, and parents are not guiding their children in moral, ethical, and/or religious manners that were once so prevalent in society. Teachers must accept the fact that morals and values are going by the wayside, and they must pick up the slack. While including issues of morals and ethics in the classroom may be

controversial to some extent, teachers must see that it is often in their hands to teach students the difference between right and wrong.

Curriculum in schools must focus on what children do not know. Many children do not know how to respect one another and treat each other equally in light of each other's differences. Children are not aware of all of the struggles in society in which different cultures, races, and genders must deal. Children do not realize that bullying other children for their differences and making other people feel bad is not, in fact, "cool". Children do not know how to fix what they do not know is broken; therefore, teachers must include issues of tolerance in their curriculum. Students must connect with the information presented in class, and teachers must make the content a priority.

Curriculum has always been a struggle between state issued standards and a moral and ethical education. In a day and age where morals and values have taken a back seat, when do students become aware of the struggles and inequalities in society and in their school? There is a need to understand how tolerant students are of people's differences. Many researchers have approached the topic of tolerance and claim that it is teachers' responsibility to include it their curriculum (Zajda, Majhanovich & Rust, 2006). With types of assertions like these that are made, does teaching about tolerance in a middle school language arts curriculum make students more aware of the inequalities that surround them? In addition, how aware are teachers about social justice issues?

Research Questions:

In this study, I investigated seventh grade students' knowledge and awareness of tolerance. The study compares students' awareness of tolerance in different school settings, as urban, suburban, and rural. In addition, teachers will be questioned about

their approach and perspective in regards to including issues of tolerance in a seventh grade language arts curriculum.

Students are typically more aware of tolerance issues if they are part of a minority. Minorities are typically the groups that injustices set out to hurt and discourage. Students that are part of the majority do not experience as many of the injustices in society, and therefore, need to be taught about the wrongdoings of society. Students that are not educated about tolerance and have never experienced an injustice of society are more likely to be the grown-ups that do not acknowledge injustices, and at times, even supports them. Instilling a sense of empathy in all students encourages them to feel the injustices that others battle, and in return, that empathy builds tolerance for other groups in society.

This study attempted to answer the following research questions, which focus on the role of tolerance in the language arts curriculum at the seventh grade level.

1. Is tolerance addressed in seventh grade language arts?

2. How aware of tolerance are seventh graders?

3. Does the school setting affect students' awareness of tolerance?

4. Are teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward tolerance affected by the school settings?

5. Does the type of school setting affect teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards including social justice issues into a seventh grade language arts curriculum?

Investigating students' awareness of tolerance, when comparing the setting of the schools, is a topic that has not often been addressed in educational research. The theory,

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methods, and pedagogy support the significance of including and studying tolerance in education. This study exhibits, in general, which types of school settings are focusing or including middle school language arts curricula on issues of tolerance. The implications of this study reach beyond that of simply finding which settings are more knowledgeable and aware of tolerance, but rather viewing schools as students' ethical and moral framework builders.

Educators cannot be satisfied with simply addressing the indicators provided by the state. Schools have a larger responsibility of having students learn how to synthesize information. Students need the skills to take information they are given and produce other ideas based on what they are provided. True pedagogy must provide more than facts and figures, but include useful skills to encourage students to think for themselves.

Significance of Study:

Ethical behavior and acceptance for diversity in society is not innate to all individuals. Middle school students see differences in one another, and instead of exhibiting interest for the differences, they show disdain and indecent behavior. Gardner (2008) explained that he "prefers the concept of respect. Rather than ignoring differences, being inflamed by them, or seeding to annihilate them through love or hate," he "call(s) human beings to accept the differences, learn to live with them, and value those who belong to other cohorts (p. 107). In a time, when reported bullying seems to be at an all-time high, learning to understand, respect, and value other's differences is an important skill. Great minds must establish empathy to truly grasp others' perspectives and to be able to synthesize information to its fullest potential. Trilling and Fadel (2009) explained that "the ability to work effectively and creatively with team members and

classmates regardless of differences in culture and style is an essential 21st century life skill" (p. 80). Understanding where the lack of awareness is among students may make clearer the issues of intolerance and inequality which have arisen in society. Lack of awareness implies a lack of understanding. A lack of understanding typically represents a lack of knowledge.

Students in schools in the United States are facing intolerance from their classmates on a regular basis. Some students are afraid to go to school for fear of the bullies they will have to face when they arrive. Bullying has become one of the largest and most concerning threats to children in schools. With all of the changes children go through during adolescence, middle school becomes a time of the most concerning and harsh bullying. Children begin to change in mind and body and do not know how to handle those changes without people taunting them along the way. The National Institute for Health claimed that "statistics from a 2007 survey suggested that bullying continues to have far-reaching impacts: nearly 1 out of 3 students in middle school and high school said they had been bullied at school during the 2007 school year ("Taking a Stand Against Bullying," 2011). Children have a right to go to school and feel safe and secure. Without students learning how to tolerate and accept differences, these statistics will only get worse. With researchers and writers expressing the need for students to have an understanding, awareness, and respect for other cultures as a skill in the 21st century, it is imperative to teach tolerance in middle schools.

Limitations of Study:

The limitations of this study pertain to the methods for retrieving study participants. Neither the teachers nor the students necessarily are representative of

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society. The participants addressed in this study represent parts of a Midwest state and may be representative of the Midwestern United States. Rural, suburban, and urban school districts across the country differ even though they may be classified as the same types of school; therefore, the data gathered from the students in these types of schools may vary to students in a similar school setting in another part of the country.

Terms in the Study:

Tolerance can encompass many different ideas, concepts, and definitions. Social justice, human rights, equality, and fairness are a few of the terms that have been referenced and have connections to tolerance. Philosophers and intellectuals regarded tolerance in different lights. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance (1995) defined tolerance as the following:

> Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our
> world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered
> by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience
> and belief. (Article 1.1 of the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, 1995)

The UNESCO definition of tolerance included more idealistic concepts that made everyone responsible for the culminating idea of tolerance. Tolerance cannot be established by one person or one democratic leader, but must be followed by everyone. Tolerance includes everyone in society working together and accepting one another. UNESCO's Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance (1995) went on to say:

> Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean
> toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's

convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and

accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human

beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and

values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that

one's views are not to be imposed on others. (Article 1.4 of the Declaration of

Principles of Tolerance, 1995)

Tolerance includes so much more than just accepting one another, but also accepting that

each person has their own beliefs and willingly allowing them to practice those beliefs.

Throughout this research, as *tolerance* is referenced, the meaning will relate to

acceptance of other's differences spanning over race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual

orientation, and socio-economic status. The UNESCO definition of tolerance controls

the focus of the research throughout this study.

Outline of the Study:

The reporting of my research is done through five chapters. The first chapter

acknowledged the development and purpose of my study. The significance of studying

curriculum and its inclusion of tolerance is addressed in chapter one as well. Chapter two

addresses relevant literature related to the history of education, tolerance, education and

politics, bullying, types of school districts, and curriculum (explicit and implicit).

Throughout the third chapter, I discuss the rationale for choosing a qualitative research

study and the theory surrounding my research. In addition, I provided great detail about

the students, teachers, and settings of the schools included in the study. In fourth chapter,

the analysis of the research is provided through the use of themes that arose from the

student focus groups and teacher interviews. Finally, the fifth chapter summarizes all of

the data collected and provides implications for future data and effective pedagogy.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tolerance:

Tolerance has many different meanings and applications as it is used in this study. References to social justice, equal rights, equality, and fairness relate to tolerance. This literature review will address how tolerance, or a lack thereof, has become part of the framework of education in the United States and why it should be taught in middle school.

Students are faced with the daily challenge of going to school each day, conversing with friends, learning new subjects, and dealing with ever-changing bodies. While that seems like many things to take on, numerous students in today's schools are also addressed with bullying and students that are not accepting of their differences. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) claimed that 21% of elementary school students, 43% of middle school students, and 22% of high students reported bullying problems during the 2005-2006 school year ("Rates of bullying and other school discipline problems"). More specifically the U.S. Department of Justice provided statistics that 33% of seventh grade students have been bullied (DeVoe & Murphy, 2011). DeVoe and Murphy (2011) referred to bullying as "students being made fun of, called names, or insulted; being the subject of rumors; being threatened with harm; being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; being pressured into doing things they did not want to do; being

excluded from activities on purpose; and having property destroyed on purpose" (p. 7).

Regular reports are made about students taking their lives because they could no longer handle the abuse they received from classmates; yet, the bullying and lack of tolerance continues.

Education is the most crucial element in our society. Havel (1993) stated that "everything else depends on that (education)" (p. 117). Educators must instill the difference between right and wrong, create analyzing and critical thinking skills, and bestow knowledge of subject-area content on the students. Changes must be made in the educational system in order for "schools to cultivate a spirit of free and independent thinking in the students." (Havel, 1993, p. 117) Schools must be places where minds are educated, rather than simply preparing pupils for a specific job. Educated and experienced persons must be responsible for the educational reforms that encourage thinking and tolerance as the first priority.

The first and foremost responsibility of educators is to the students. Students must learn to think on their own. They must be challenged to think creatively and analytically to ensure depth of their minds. Students, who only learn facts from books and never learn to think about the greater importance of those facts, will not be ready for a world that does not require knowledge of a historical timeline; the students must identify the relevance of the events and understand why they happened. For example, it is more valuable to learn how and why a war started, rather than knowing the dates it happened. Students need to understand why events happened in the past in order to establish an understanding and tolerance of other people in society. They need to

understand why people have created injustices in society and why there is a need to fix them.

Students have to understand the reason for their education and take ownership in it. Pupils hold teachers accountable for explaining the purpose of the content. To establish the purpose of all lessons and skills initially is difficult. If teachers are not merely training students to do a job, but truly expanding their thoughts, it may not seem of greater good now; the reality of the benefits will come later in life, when students critically think and analyze data, information, literature, or even conversation, instinctively. Students must be able to see wrongdoings in society and be able to make an educational decision about what is correct. Purpel and McLaren (2004) explained that today's world struggles with violence and tragedy on a daily basis, and it is important for students to understand what is going on in the world. Instead of the focus being on problems that do not exist or situations that are hypothetical, students should be made aware of the real life circumstances that face them in our society.

Educators need to refrain from asking students to recite answers from a text; that does not encourage independent thought. Instead of asking "what", educators must ask "why". Teachers must emphasize a classroom setting that inspires cooperative learning and innovative thought. Students must reach beyond their own knowledge and show compassion and understanding of other people, characters, and events. Students must show and understand the need for tolerance. The United States has struggled with issues surrounding equality and understanding of differences. The time has come for tolerance to be the way of life, not the exception.

History in education is littered with examples of bias in reference to race, color, class, religion, and gender. Schools have always been places of education, but have not always accepted everyone. In the beginning of public schooling, young men from affluent white families were accepted to be educated. Slowly America widened its acceptance base for public schools, but equality has never been a part of education. Even in the past when education was supposed to be equal, the equality was relative in perspective to the wealthy white men making the laws and making sure that others abided by them. Public education in America has never been equal. From the lessons taught in history to the actual laws passed in this country, inequality in education has always been an issue that may never be solved.

Education – The Past:

Education in America has never addressed the masses. When education was first brought to America, it had a strong religious base. In the beginning, Protestantism had a powerful presence within the schools and was not accepting of other religions. The battle for equal rights in education in America seemed to begin with religion. Religious leaders did not want to open schools to all types of religions, but rather only allow the one religion to be taught in the schools. With the immigration that took place in America, many different people from various religions came to the country and objected to the rather narrow view that education should only include one religion. Finally in 1948, the McCollum v. Board of Education district 71 declared that religious instruction in public schools was a violation of the Establishment Clause in the constitution; therefore, the only way religion was acceptably taught in education was in a private school setting.

Schools, in the beginning, were not accepting of all children. When schools first began, only affluent, young, white males were accepted into schools and especially into secondary education. Referring to the first grammar schools in Boston around 1635, Krug (1966) stated "boys (for these were strictly all-male establishments) entered these schools usually at eight and finished at fifteen" (p. 2). This establishment lasted many decades. White males were definitely given the upper hand in society; therefore, gender, race, and class were all unequally represented by the schools. In 1779 in "The General Diffusion of Knowledge", Thomas Jefferson made a point of stating who would attend grammar schools. He stated "some of the best and most promising genius and disposition, to proceed to the grammar school of his district" (Lee, 1961, p. 91). Once again, this only included the best and the brightest of the white male students in the public schools of the time. The less intelligent students did not have the same opportunity to attend grammar schools.

In 1829, Americans were beginning to question whether or not to include black Americans in public education. Maddox (1918) explained that during this time period, the decision to educate black Americans was left to the county or city. He continued to state that "the question, 'Can property afford to tax itself for the education of a numerous dependent group?' is still being asked by many intelligent people of the state and, as yet, few localities have assumed this tax burden!" (Maddox, 1918, p. 97). Based on Maddox's statement, Black Americans were considered a tax burden at this time in history; therefore, society did not view public schools as places where everyone belonged.

In 1831, the basis that Jefferson recommended for grammar schools and higher education did not change extensively. W.E.B. Du Bois explained that "the best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in colleges and universities of the land"; however, this time, Du Bois was referring to black Americans (Goodchild &Wechsler, 1997, p. 553). Finally, education was beginning to open up to others besides white males; however the colleges and universities still were not going to be accepting of all students.

Horace Mann continued with similar ideas and theories to that of Du Bois in the sense that education should be opened up to people of every race; however Mann went beyond that. Mann (1957) explained that "according to Massachusetts theory, all are to have an equal chance for earning, and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn" (p. 84). Instead of just focusing on the few at the top of the class, Mann believed everyone should be able to get an education.

Major laws and court decisions changed the way public schools played a part in society. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 stated that all people born in the United States were citizens of the country. This encouraged many people that possibly the difficult times of the past might have been coming to a close; however white supremacy groups quickly altered those feelings.

In 1896, the Plessey versus Ferguson decision was made that established separate but equal schools for black and white Americans. While the decision claimed that the schools would be equal, they did not live up to such expectations. Black schools were given hand-me-downs and were not funded equally. White schools were given the advantages. Many whites were satisfied with this court decision to keep black and white

Americans separated, but black Americans felt that they were not being taken seriously and not being treated as equals. In 1954, Brown versus Board of Education legally ended separate but equal. Blacks and whites were combined into schools together. This process raised tension in the country to an all time high. Tolnay and Eichenlaub (2007) stated that "discrimination exercised by the white majority took on many forms, varying from simple but effective practices, such as the imposition of a "color line" in hiring or residential access, to more extreme and brutal strategies, such as forced relocations and violence" (p. 472). Violence and hate crimes became a regular happening as some white Americans fought to get black Americans out of the schools and back where those white Americans thought they belonged.

Women were often denied the same rights as males. Provenzo (2008) stated that "until late in the 1800s, most women had few opportunities for education beyond elementary schooling, and when they were allowed to pursue advanced schooling, their access to schools and experiences depended upon a system that was separate and unequal, much like experienced by Blacks in this country" (p. 297). Women were not regarded as equals during this time period and were not given the same opportunities as males. Women were accepted in the educational world through female-only schools. While these schools were not equal to that of their male counterparts, women were the only ones in the schools, and they were given the opportunity to be leaders among themselves. Even though society would not grant them the same positions, their own private societies allowed them to stand out and be strong.

In 1972, Title IX passed, which provided better situations for women in education and in careers. The law "prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally

funded education program or activity" (Provenzo, 2008, p. 297). Women were finally recognized by the government as equals. This law opened up opportunities for women in sports at public schools, as well as giving women more prospects overall. While women were acknowledged by the government, how they were treated and accepted in society was still not quite equal.

Unfortunately, the inequalities that once existed in education are still a part of it today. After over 100 years of trying to establish equality for everyone in America, the fight is still alive. Issues of the past have held strong to establish themselves in the present. While all of the laws and court decisions have supported a society where everyone is equal, equality has not been reached. School funding is still a major frustration for those that are not getting what they need to provide an effective education for their students.

Education - The Present:

While all issues of racial inequality and social classes are supposed to be issues of the past, they are still here in America today. Provenzo (2008) stated that, "Some educational scholars contend that the problem no longer exists, but research demonstrates that inequality remains entrenched in U.S. educational systems, policies, and practice" (p. 301). In today's society, there are schools that enroll only minority students, schools that are falling apart, schools with ill-prepared teachers, schools with few supplies, and these dire conditions remain chronic and unresolved in too many places. If those same circumstances held true for a predominantly white, upper class population, someone would do something drastic to change the situation.

Many examples of inequalities exist in schools around the United States. Unfortunately, not enough is being done to correct the inequalities. Law says we are equal, but the law is not enforcing equality. Kozol (1991) stated:

It (government) does assign us to our public schools. Indeed, it forces us to go to them. Unless we have the wealth to pay for private education, we are compelled by law to go to public school – and to the public school in our district. Thus the state, by requiring attendance but refusing to require equity, effectively requires inequality. Compulsory inequity, perpetuated by state law, too frequently condemns our children to unequal lives (p. 56).

Kozol presented an interesting point about inequality. Society was supposed to protect children by giving all of them an equal opportunity for an education; however, by not ensuring that the students get an equal education, society is doing them a disservice, one which they have no control to change. Provenzo (2008) illustrates that "the positional advantages accrued to students who achieve high levels of excellence will usually lead to a virtuous cycle of employability, mobility, social status, and well-being. The corollary of this is that factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and social class are strong indicators of whether a child will do well in school or not" (p. 729). Once again, all of these aspects of a child's life affect their likelihood of being successful in life, yet the children themselves have no control over any of those factors.

While women have overcome many of the gender inequality issues that once plagued them, several issues still exist for women today. Upper level career positions still employ a majority of men. In addition, women's sports are still not as highly attended or supported as men's sports are. Sexual harassment is also an issue that exists

in today's society. Even though there are many laws established to prohibit sexual harassment, women sometimes avoid discussing the situation due to embarrassment. While women have come a long way, there are still many issues that show women have not obtained full equity to their male counterparts.

The Importance of Teaching Tolerance:

While the United States has come a long way on many different levels, an area that has only gotten worse is students' lack of acceptance for their peers' differences. Instead of growing passed the inequalities that faced their parents and grandparents, students are reestablishing the lack of tolerance among their classmates. Any difference among students can result in bullying and alienation of the student that stands out as being different. Even in light of celebrities standing up for and stating the importance of acceptance, students are not changing their behavior. Too many students' lives are affected negatively from bullying and lack of tolerance. Drastic steps must be taken through education to change the perpetual intolerance among today's youth.

Clearly, solving issues of inequality in a society that has made it one of its norms will not be an easy task. Schools must take steps to educate children of the intolerance in our society. Zabierek (1998) suggests that "ultimately the duty of schools is to teach about citizenship and social justice. Students must have a sense of belonging and have the confidence to make a difference" (p. 27). Many students are only informed about the society they see on a day-to-day basis. Educators must provide a broader view for their students to see and understand. Provenzo (2008) explains that "curriculum development is another way to introduce more diverse and rich histories into the lives of children, providing an acknowledgement and celebration of diversity" (p. 729). Delivering

awareness is a step that every person can take to allow the ills of our society to become known and hopefully changed for the future.

The concept of tolerance has long been a part of education. While teaching tolerance has rarely been a central focus as directed by the state, educators have struggled with the role teaching tolerance should and could have in the classroom. Depending on the school, location, co-workers, community, and administration, the focus and curriculum vary. The state mandated content standards are the lone focus of many schools; however, some schools see the importance of teaching beyond the state required curriculum.

As with many other terms included in education, *tolerance* has long been referenced, while its definition has rarely remained the same. While similar in theory and concept, many philosophers and educators have assigned different meanings to the word *tolerance*. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1995) defined tolerance as, "Respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others." UNESCO recognized tolerance as the means to making the world a more peaceful, accepting place. In order to accomplish tolerance among a society, the population of the society must learn "respect and appreciation" for the "world's cultures".

"Teaching Tolerance" (2012) explained to what content is taught to students while teaching tolerance. The magazine explained to teach tolerance, one must "foster school environments that are inclusive and nurturing – classrooms where equality and justice are not just taught, but lived." "Teaching Tolerance" focused on establishing

empathy among our youth. Their goal is to instill a critical pedagogy in classrooms across the world in hopes that compassion and understanding would conquer fear and hate.

Over centuries, the word *tolerance* has claimed many different meanings in many different philosophical and educational movements. Tolerance has been aligned to morals, ethics, and religion. Within this research, tolerance is associated with acceptance and understanding. With the numerous wars the United States has been involved in, the 9/11 attacks, and the regular acts of violence shown toward minorities, teaching tolerance in the classroom is a must. Freire refers to tolerance by saying, "Being tolerant is not a question of being naïve. On the contrary, it is a duty to be tolerant, an ethical duty, a historical duty, a political duty, but it does not demand that I lose my personality" ("Paulo Freire – An Incredible Conversation," 1996). Children need to have a better understanding of different cultures, so they grow up with empathy for those different from them. Empathy is not an innate skill or characteristic, but instead, it is something that is learned. Educational facets, such as schools, have to provide curricula rich in cultural diversity. The majority of schools in the United States, and specifically in the Midwest, are lacking in diverse cultural experiences that allow students to learn tolerance and empathy.

Much like the concept and discussion surrounding tolerance, social justice has been an element in educational discussion as well. Again, much like the term *tolerance,* social justice has been assigned many meanings. The concepts are all similar, but the definition varies based on the perspective and necessity. Sensoy and DiAngelo described social justice as being "commonly understood as the principles of 'fairness' and

'equality' for all people and respect for their basic human rights" (2012, p. xvii). Much like the concept of tolerance, social justice implies the need for equality and fairness among society. Much like tolerance, the concept is easier to understand than it is to instill in the population. The notion of an equal and fair society resembles that of a utopian society. Unfortunately, while the discussion of fairness and equality continue, the progress in that direction remains stagnant or sluggish, at best.

Social justice encourages equality and fairness among all people. Some social structures seem to get in the way of people accepting each other's differences. Even when cultural differences are not an issue, other differences arise that cause prejudice and discrimination. While the idea of socioeconomic status may not be established or even discussed among today's youth, students are aware of their classmates' financial situations. They may not understand or know their classmates' household incomes, but students know who the "rich" and "poor" kids are. Students treat each other differently based on their money, clothing, house, and possessions. While students can be made fun of for being "poor" and not having nice things, they are also ridiculed when they have a more elaborate lifestyle with more expensive belongings. Some students that are jealous, point out their differences and make them feel uncomfortable.

Peer research on integrating tolerance into the curriculum revealed that it left an impression on the students. Vogt (2004) stated that, "Educational programs can have strong positive effects on students' beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. They can improve intergroup relations among students, and these improvements can last long after the programs are completed and the students have graduated" (p. 1). While the implications for study were similar, the terms used to describe teaching tolerance varied

based on the setting. Some studies referenced teaching tolerance through a larger purpose of educating students by means of a "character education." In another situation, tolerance is referred to in connection with political tolerance. Studies show that including engaging and active lessons that incorporate issues of tolerance in them into an elementary school, middle school, high school, and/or a higher education curriculum can improve the students' level of tolerance for other cultures and perspectives (Avery, Bird, Johnstone, Sullivan & Thalhammer, 1992; Avery, Sullivan & Wood, 1997; Engberg, 2004; Gay, 2010). The key to making the lasting change in the school climate and the increased tolerance derives from the methods for portraying the information to the students.

Changing students' views is possible through a rich curriculum. Avery, Sullivan, and Wood (1997) describe teaching a political tolerance as, "immediately involving conflict resolution. In encouraging young people to show forbearance toward unpopular and disliked groups by allowing these groups to exercise their political rights, conflict will arise" (p. 97). Turning an argument or disagreement into a "teachable moment," so to speak, allowed teachers to model conflict resolution with the students. Not only were students given the opportunity to see how arguments or disputes could be handled properly, but they also had the chance to discuss the rights of those of whom have opposing views from oneself. With the integration of case studies and examples of people from different cultures, students can begin to establish understanding and compassion with the hopes of eventually creating empathy.

Unfortunately, based on a study done by Deane (1989, as cited by Gay 2010), of approximately 300 popular children's fiction books, there were some serious questions as

to the diversity of the content and characters (p. 142). European Americans have been the focal point of fiction literature in the United States for decades. Popular book series typically lead with a while male or female and rarely show significant diversity. In the past, when a character of a different race would be introduced in literature, he/she would often be portrayed as representing a racial stereotype versus simply representing another character. Even in popular movies and video games, the main characters are typically white. Diversity seems to be lacking from all angles. If students are not introduced to cultures different from their own at school, it seems unlikely that the media and entertainment will be a good source of diverse experiences either.

Gay (2010) explained that studies also show that the news and media can give different impressions of certain cultures and ethnicities by stating that there is a "deliberate exclusion or addition of information to create certain images, to shield consumers from particular ideas and information, and to teach specific moral, political, and social values" (p. 152). Media has a strong impression on the public and is transmitted in multiple forms. With these stereotypical impressions relayed to society through entertainment, news, and educational texts, contradictory information needs to be provided to students to allow them to draw conclusions from their experiences and their knowledge, versus being provided with views that are altered to fit a trite explanation of the cultures for which they encounter.

Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) devised a study regarding the transmission of aggression. In their research, they found that children were likely to imitate the behavior of an adult model. Bandura's (1977) work with this study steered him toward developing his Social Learning Theory. In Bandura's (1977) study, he stated that, "Considering the

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large amount of time that people spend watching televised models, mass media may play an influential role in shaping behavior and social attitudes" (p. 10). To counteract the negative models children view in the media, it is important for educators to be positive role models showing compassion and acceptance of others, being that many children spend as much time with their teachers as they do with their parents and/or guardians at home.

Simply reading about cultures different from their own is not enough to get students to change their behaviors or viewpoints. The students' experiences must go beyond that. Creating compassionate and caring environments for which the students will feel comfortable contributing to conversations regarding different cultures is important. In addition, students respond well to engaging activities that give them experience enacting the information or skills they learned. Students tend to retain more substance from a lesson when they have the opportunity to apply the information they have been provided.

Education rooted in teaching tolerance and understanding does not start and stop in the classroom. The more educators that are involved, the better. The administration can be an instrumental piece of the puzzle. Riehl (2000) stated that to create truly inclusive schools with diverse students, administrators must "foster new meanings about diversity, promote inclusive school cultures and instructional programs, and build relationships between schools and communities" (p. 55). As teachers must be agents of change, so must the administrators in school buildings. When there is an expectation of tolerance from everyone in a school setting and everyone is promoting the same type of inclusion, there are many role models for students to follow. The more a skill is

modeled, the more likely students will begin to practice the skill when there are not any teachers around them. The goal of all education is that students will take their knowledge beyond the classroom.

In a study done by Bender-Slack (2007), twenty-two secondary reading and language arts teachers were interviewed to find out how they defined social justice, the purpose of teaching social justice, and the texts they used as tools to teach social justice. Bender-Slack's (2007) findings showed that there were "common concerns regarding student safety and comfort. Teachers frequently complied and self-monitored in order to work within the structures of institutional limitations" (p. 138). The researcher's suggestions explained that she believed that teachers and teacher educators should encourage critical thinking through questioning and delving into the texts they encountered. Her results also led her to suggest that English/Language Arts educators may do well to distinguish between teaching the study of literature and an active literacy. She explained that an active literacy would have included teaching for social justice.

Pietrandrea (2008) performed a case study in which she used ethnographic methods focusing on a sixth grade English and Language Arts class as they interpreted and explored texts that included issues of social justice. Pietrandrea's (2008) findings showed that "the deeply engrained cultural beliefs and attitudes are difficult to deconstruct" (p. iii). While there was some difficulty with encouraging the students to open their views to other perspectives, Pientrandrea (2008) explained that, "It is important for teachers to be aware that their teaching activities have the potential to reproduce dominant cultural beliefs or produce new pedagogies of equity and justice" (p. 193). Again, the goal is to instill skills into education that will create valuable,

contributing members of society. The elements that are taught in class will, hopefully, guide students in the real world as well.

Keime, Landes, Rickertsen, and Wescott (2002) utilized an action research project in a rural setting in the Midwest, the researchers looked to develop tolerance through increased cultural awareness. Their study focused on third grade and high school students. The researchers found that there was a lack of cultural awareness through standardized test scores and student and teacher survey data. To increase cultural awareness, the researchers integrated programs and speakers into the school curriculum and did pre and posttest format for evaluating the students' growth in terms of their awareness. The researchers concluded that changing values for individuals is easier at a younger age than when students have already formed opinions and perspectives. Keime, Landes, Rickertsen, and Wescott (2002) stated that, "The elementary teachers introduced the students to different cultures through guest speakers, food tasting, cultural games, and ethnic crafts. When the children were immersed in hands-on learning experiences, they exhibited a greater awareness and acceptance of change" (p. 29). When asked if the elementary school students would choose a friend from a different culture prior to the interventions, 71% said they would. After the interventions, 94% of the students in the third grade said they would choose a friend from a different culture. The researchers found positive impacts for the high school students as well as the elementary school students, but overall, the high school students were not as likely to change their perspectives, as their opinions had already been established.

Hanson, Dietsch, and Zheng (2012) focused their research on implementing a character education for one year for fourth and fifth grade students in language arts

settings. The researchers were looking for growth in the areas of academic achievement, social competence, and problem behaviors. The character education was based on the "Six Pillars of Character," which were trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Unfortunately, the analyses from the study did not find the benefit of integrating a character education to be statistically significant in terms of improving academic achievement, social competence, or problem behaviors. The results from the study of the group that had the character education integrated into the curriculum did not vary significantly from the control group; therefore, the character education did not make substantial strides with the students.

While the research seemed to vary on the impact of teaching tolerance in the classroom, there have been studies that have shown the benefit of introducing students to a culturally diverse curriculum that is actively engaging. Gay (2010) stated that, "Although the number of programs on which research information is available is rather small, their results are consistently supportive of the theoretical claims about the pedagogical potential of culturally responsive teaching" (p. 157). Students should be taught about a variety of cultures to ensure they are provided that information through an unbiased source. Avery (2002) explained that, "At least three studies suggest that when curricula are specifically designed to teach young people about the role of tolerance in a democracy, levels of tolerance can increase" (p. 123). Integrating a curriculum of tolerance is essential to provide students with the knowledge and information they need to make informed decisions beyond the classroom.

Another difference that appeared in nearly every school, and all schools that were included in this study, was gender. While all people are familiar with the other sex,

stereotypes and poor behavior are established and demonstrated in the home by parents and guardians, and perpetuated through their children. As a result, students commented and acted in ways that were unfair and unjust in many situations. The most troublesome of these behaviors came out when students displayed inappropriate sexual behavior and disrespect toward the opposite sex, and typically, men towards women. At some point in children's lives, they were not exposed to respect and acceptance of others; therefore, they exhibited behaviors that were unjust and hurtful toward others. While some parents are thoroughly involved and participatory in their children's lives, many are preoccupied or absent, which leaves the responsibility of teaching justice and fairness to the child's teachers. Even with parents that are present, gender roles are established by parents when children are as young as six-months old. Female children are typically coddled more than boys, which, in turn makes them more dependent upon their mothers and fathers (Henslin, 1999, p. 73). Support of gender roles are carried on throughout children's lives. As female and male roles are established in households, through mass media, video games, and advertising, children and teenagers are regularly reminded of the differences in gender (Henslin, 1999, p. 74). By middle school, many children have established patterns of behavior which are more difficult to change than when trying to alter perspectives and outlooks with younger children. As cultural differences are essential when creating tolerance, so are gender differences. Adults model behaviors that exploit gender stereotypes. When children witness the behavior that is modeled for them by their parents, guardians, and educators, they mimic those behaviors. The most effective method for teaching children respectful behavior is to lead by example.

Education and Politics:

The educational world, the government, and society happen to be on different

pages at all times in history. Rarely do the three understand one another and have similar

priorities and visions for what schools should be; therefore, making great strides with

altering the purpose and foundations of public schooling remains highly unlikely. While

the larger purpose of school seems to be more understood by educators or those in the

education field, those outside the field tend to make the discussion about schools more

about money. Money and public education will unlikely ever be coinciding entities.

Developing intelligent young adults that are change agents and understand how to be

tolerant of one another will not be directly lucrative; however, those skills are important,

valuable, and long-lasting, which is not a certainty with money.

A curriculum developed in a capitalist driven society is uniform in content and

nature.

Learning is measured by standardized testing with no, or little, thought to background or

culture. While not always the rule, the capitalist portion of society rarely sees the

importance in public education. The main driver or motivator is money, something

which is not plentiful in public education. With money being at the forefront of decision-

making, curriculum is guided by the state. Income and revenue typically follow the

subjects of math and science. Because of this, our country has made a push to excel in

those areas. Schools are increasingly making cuts in the arts to stay afloat, due to

unpassed levies and unsupportive communities. While the arts tend not to be highly

lucrative areas of study, that is not always the case. In addition, not all minds think alike.

The state and federal governments continue to control means of funding for public schooling and also continue to mandate unfunded programs. Public education is controlled by people who have never set foot in a school since they were a student themselves. These same people create programs that have a lovely exterior and sound promising, when the truth is that they end up hurting students by making requirements that schools cannot afford. In response to the unfunded programs, schools end up making cuts that begin with the liberal arts and exploratory classes. Public school districts' hands are tied as far as where to begin when making cuts. Since the state establishes school ratings based on standardized testing, schools cut programs that are not tested; therefore, students are given less and less options to take classes beyond their core academic coursework. The new Common Core curriculum was created to extend students' thinking. Now, schools are eliminating classes, such as art and music, which inspire creativity because they do not have the money to keep regular core class sizes down and maintain the arts.

In addition, schools are cutting or minimizing physical education programs beginning with middle and high school grades. Some schools are cutting their sports programs as well. The government turns students into numbers and dollars versus being people with needs. Athletics and physical activity are a healthy part of life that are missing for many of today's youths. The United States Department of Health and Human Services provided data to show the percentage of children ages two to nineteen that are obese in the United States. "In 2007-2010, 18% of boys and 15% of girls were obese" (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). A figure provided also showed that the parents' education level directly correlated to the percentage of two to

nineteen year olds that were obese. The lower the parents' completed education, the higher the percentage of children that were obese. Many students that struggle in core education classes rely on the arts and physical education as relief at school. Those students find an outlet in those classes. Now, those classes are being eliminated or becoming less available to only allow a limited number of students to participate.

The purpose of schools has become unclear. While teachers may have one perspective and goal, the government has quite another. For the government, passing a test has usurped educating the "whole" child. While learning math, science, reading, writing, and social studies is obviously important, teaching students about health, well-being, empathy, ethics, and compassion is just as important. Children need to be able to make educated decisions about their treatment of others and of themselves. Without knowledge, children only follow what they observe, which is not always the best example.

Schools must move to a more democratic schooling and curriculum to enable the "moral" education that was once introduced as a part of students' home lives. In a society where rights and wrongs are shades of gray, and parents see no wrong in their children's actions, there has to be someone in a child's life that is going to encourage them to make changes to the world around them. The television and video games have become children's babysitters and parents to an overworked, busy, and/or lazy society. Many parents still teach their children ideals that have long since become outdated. While these ideals were once cruel, these perspectives are now absurd. The more the United States becomes diversified, the more there is a necessity for an education discussing differences and encouraging change and tolerance.

Bullying:

Bullying has become a heavily discussed and controversial issue among schools, communities, and government. The term and concept of bullying has been exploited by the media. Children and adults alike are presented with distressing accounts of young teens that succumbed to the pressures of bullying. Schools are pressured by the community and government to provide a bully-free, safe setting for children; however, the efforts are not substantiated through curriculum, but instead through new and costly government programs, which rarely prove to be effective.

Since bullying has become such a popular topic in education, the term bully is used regularly by parents and students to describe perpetrators as they see fit; however the term bully does have a common definition. Merriam Webster (2013) defines a bully as "a blustering browbeating person, especially one who is habitually cruel to others that are weaker." The key word in this definition is "habitually". Often parents and students mistake a singular behavior for bullying; however it is the repeated behavior that is labeled as bullying. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (2002) explained bullies and their tendencies. They expressed that bullies tend to be children that believe violence is an acceptable way to deal with their peers.

Bullies are not born as such. Bullying is not an instinct, but instead, it is a learned behavior. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension explains how children become bullies:

Some bullies think children will harm them, so they fight to defend themselves or to show they're strong. Many bullies are impulsive and active. Some are spanked

or physically abused by their parents or other adults. Some have parents who are bullies. Bullies often copy the behavior they see or experience at home. (2002) Realizing how students become bullies make it much clearer where their behaviors come from and why they act in the ways they do; however, trying to change those behaviors becomes much more confounding. If the behaviors are learned at home, changing them through education becomes much more difficult. A teacher can discuss tolerance and acceptance on a daily basis to encourage empathy, but a child that is exposed to the opposite when they go home may not easily change their behavior. Changing a learned behavior from a negative role model can prove to be exceptionally difficult. While a bully may know what he/she is doing is wrong, he/she may instantly react in the fashion they have learned through observation, rather than what he/she knows through education.

While the need for students' awareness of tolerance is incredibly important when encouraging students to act in a more humane way, a question also arises of how aware students already are and still choose to act in a fashion that does not support that awareness. Does their location and type of school affect the students' awareness of tolerance? Are students less likely to get bullied or misunderstood in a rural or urban school district? DeVoe and Murphy (2011) provide data that show that 27% of students age 12 through 18 who attend an urban school district have experienced bullying, while 30.5% of students age 12 through 18 who attend a rural school have experienced bullying. Finally, 27.8 percent of students age 12 through 18 who attend a suburban school district have experienced bullying; therefore, the setting does not seem to have a large effect on who has experienced bullying. On the other hand, there may be more

students that are aware of the lack of tolerance, but do not take action to help the situation.

Another piece of the puzzle when it comes to bullying is cyberbullying. Today's parents and guardians may not have the understanding of cyberbullying as today's youth. Cyberbullying was not a concern of most parents and guardians because technology did not allow it. Cyberbullying is conveyed through media such as texting or Facebook, and plays primarily on tone. Cyberbullying and traditional bullying are much different. Lohmann (2012, May 14) explained that, "It's not uncommon to play multiple roles such as cyberbully, target, and witness. Previous research indicated that cyberbullying is rarely pre-meditated like traditional bullying, where the bully plans his or her line of attack." Cyberbullies play on the idea that the things they said were jokes, while their comments could clearly be construed as an attack. To their victims face, they may act kind, but when they can hide behind technology, their tone changes.

Federal and state government have taken strides to make changes in laws to protect students and children from bullying. The state has more control to make laws and policies regarding bullying, since education is addressed at the state level. Stopbullying.gov, managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, explains that "There is no federal law that specifically applies to bullying. In some cases, when bullying is based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion, bullying overlaps with harassment and schools are legally obligated to address it" (2013). While there is no federal law that has been established against bullying, cyber or traditional, all of the Midwestern states have instituted anti-bullying laws. Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio have all adopted both policies and laws regarding bullying.

Minnesota, Illinois, and Indiana have all adopted laws, but have not established policies at this point. All of the state laws vary to some extent; however, all of the laws established account for cyber and traditional bullying in an attempt to protect students from falling victim to the repeated, harsh ridicule of a bully.

Types of School Districts:

There are considerable factors that affect different types of schools, even those in the same part of the country. Funding, parental guidance, and income are among the factors that confine or support rural, urban, and suburban school districts. Expectations for school outcomes also vary among the types of school settings. "Public schools are a product of their communities" (Debertin & Goetz, 1994). Salaries, class availability, and transportation are all affected by the location and population of school districts. Lower income communities with lower levels of education typically have fewer elective courses offered for grades nine through twelve. At the same time, the parental influence on children in these settings is quite different. In a study done by Prater, Bermudez, and Owens (1997), they evaluated parental involvements in the various school settings: Rural, urban, and suburban. Their data suggested that, "parental involvement does vary across community settings" (p. 74). Their suggestion from the study provided that "Schools and agencies alike should develop strategies to increase community and parent involvement in rural schools" (Prater, Bermudez & Owens, 1997, p. 74). While this suggestion remained, the study did show that parents in rural regularly attended events that were highly publicized, such as sporting events, but they were not as involved in the students' curriculum or interactions with their teachers. Prater, Bermudez, and Owens (1997) also explained that parents in a suburban setting were less likely to regularly

check their children's assignments to make sure they were completed for homework; however, the researchers accounted for this difference because there are a higher number of "dual career families" in suburban settings than in rural or urban.

On the completely other end of this is the higher socioeconomic population with more advanced education. The schools that subsist in districts such as these, tend to benefit in a variety of ways. The students and schools are typically supported more by the parents and the community. Education is emphasized and expected. Teachers' salaries tend to be higher, which likely encourages more applicants, and in turn, a better selection of educators. If the schools are supported by local tax levies, populations such as these are more likely to be financially supportive as well.

Depending on the state, the funding varies. Even among the Midwest states, the funding is not consistent. Some states rely more on local funding, while others are supported more through state funding. Because some rural and urban locations are typically lower income areas, being supported and funded by local taxes can be difficult. Often these locations struggle to get the support they need. Unfortunately, the state decides on the funding of schools instead of the districts. Much like the diverse needs of students in a classroom, varying districts across a state have diverse needs and accessibility to funds. Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction in the classroom to meet all of the students' various learning needs, while school districts are expected to conform to one standard for funding, even though their needs and likelihood for success at acquiring funds are completely different.

The types of school settings typically affects the school size and the offerings provided for students. Urban and rural settings are typically at opposite ends of the

spectrum as far as the size of the district is concerned. McCracken and Barcinas (1991) found that "urban schools were larger; had more teachers, administrators, and support staff; and offered more courses and extra-curricular activities. They were also more costly to operate on a per-pupil expenditure basis" (p. 38). While the size was very different, the difference in the number of administrators per student, was not significant. Size and location seemed to account for the major differences in the schools. Larger schools have more staff, which allows for more course offerings. Also, with larger schools, there are more students to participate in extra-curricular activities.

As with most people, children tend to become interested in areas of study in which they observe or have knowledge; therefore, many students aspire to careers they recognize from their youth. The population or role models students observe tends to affect their desires for their adulthood. The students the witness agriculture as a major lifestyle and career choice are more likely to follow that path than those that grew up in a metropolis. Students and children become knowledgeable, interested, and curious about what they see.   This not only affects their career choices, but their attitudes and behaviors. The culture of rural communities greatly varies from that of urban and suburban communities and vice versa, which produces vastly different behaviors and perspectives in education and in the population. Educational curriculum must account for these differences and encourage students to understand vastly different lifestyles and cultures to create a more unified and empathetic society.

Curriculum:

Educators often think of curriculum as the material which they have to cover throughout the school year as dictated by the state or their district. Indicators and

standards have been identified by representatives at the state level. Those representatives classify and organize a list of items that students "should" learn at each grade level. In the process of identifying skills that students are supposed to learn throughout school, the purpose is somewhat lost. Students should be at the forefront of all decisions that schools make; that goes for the state too. However, it is quite unclear how and if students are part of the decision making process when curricula are established.

Since curricula guide education, it seems as though they should be readily reviewed and understood by everyone in the educational world; however, teachers seem to have the most knowledge about curricula, while administration and state representatives devote most of their attention toward numbers and test scores. Without an understanding of the curriculum, the numbers seem rather insignificant. Knowing a schools' test scores gives a person very little information about the school if they have no idea what was on the test.

Even parents and guardians seem to be in the dark as far as what their child is supposed to understand and learn while at school. While they may understand that the state develops guidelines for student learning, very few of them understand the specifics of their child's learning. Often the number that is assigned to the test is more important to the student, teacher, school, and state. Joseph (2010) explained that, "administrators and parents tout curriculum as something instrumental, not worthy in itself, but as the means to get to an explicit end" (p. 37). Often the curriculum is thought of as a way to get students to pass tests, graduate, and go to college. Some believe that if those things are accomplished, the items in the curriculum are inconsequential.

Explicit Curriculum:

The explicit curriculum is much as it sounds; it is that which is obviously stated and made public to its stakeholders (Joseph, 2010; Eisner, 1985; Henslin, 1999). That curriculum which has preemptively been established by the state resides as the explicit curriculum for districts in the Midwest; however, schools provide more specifics by outlining their courses and using pre-assigned text books.

In the Midwest states, learning indicators are developed through state departments of education based on standards intended to direct school curricula. Teachers are expected to teach all students in their classes the specified number of standards in order for the students to take a standardized, high-stakes test a month and half before the end of the school year and show effectiveness by having the students pass with at least one year of growth from the previous year. The growth factor (sometimes referenced as Adequate Yearly Progress) is calculated based on an equation that was developed to illustrate if the student grew one school year in knowledge from the previous year on a different test over changing standards. David (2011) explained that, "As worries about adequate yearly progress increased, teachers matched the content and format of what they taught to the state test. These researchers concluded that the content of the test had effectively become the learning goals for the students" (p. 79). When the goals of curricula become based on state testing, the student focus is lost. Teachers begin to see the school year as a practice session for a test instead of a cultural and ethical learning ground for the students.

Educators are also expected to teach the students to respond to questions at different levels based on Bloom's Taxonomy. The students are expected to, not only remember the information they learn in class, but also synthesize and analyze the

information and make connections to their own lives; however, the focus on having students answer questions that allow them to truly analyze information they learn is lost in the mix as students replicate test style questions with two and four-point responses.

As the focus and pressure increases from the state and national level to produce high scores on standardized testing, classroom teachers guide their curriculum more and more towards test preparation. Teachers feel the need to control their learning setting since they are judged by the students' test scores. Some districts have integrated and negotiated student progress into their contracts as a means of teacher retention or dismissal. Since teachers have to rely on one day, one test, and one example of their students' performance, they feel the pressure to make their classroom strictly test preparation. Their curriculum becomes one that is solely guided by a standardized test.

Due to inconsistencies among states, a new curriculum has been developed to become more of a national guide for student learning. David (2011) explained that "A curriculum derived from what's on the test cannot be as comprehensive and coherent as one designed around content standards that reflect what is most important" (p. 79). Unfortunately, depending on the stakeholder, their opinions of what is important may vary. Goals for education are rarely the same. While some stakeholders are interested in education for the sake of learning, others see the broader scope of education, being a means of getting into college. Some see education as a must in order to pass a test. And yet others see education as way to get a job directly out of high school.

With the explicit curriculum reflecting the priorities of those that encounter it, there is a movement to make the stated curriculum more common across the United States. The Common Core State Standards Initiative has created standards that have been

adopted by 45 states across the United States. The Common Core State Standards

Initiative (2012) clearly states their goal of the Common Core in their mission statement,

which reads:

> The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of
> what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need
> to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the
> real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for
> success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the
> future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the
> global economy. (Implementing the Common Core State Standards, 2012)

The Common Core seems to have been developed to provide common grounds

for the states to compare progress in an overly competitive and business-driven

environment. The mission statement states that, "The standards are designed to be robust

and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people

need for success in college and careers." This statement proves that the goals of the

curriculum are to get students to college and their careers afterward. While mentioning

that the skills need to be real-world, the creators of this statement imply that those real-

world skills are aligned and driven by careers, and forego the social aspects of the world.

Language arts and math are focal points; however, tolerance and empathy are left

unmentioned.

While an explicit curriculum is developed by each state for the students, in some

cases, specific expectations are listed for teachers as well. In 2005, Ohio developed

"Standards for the Teaching Profession" based on Senate Bill 2 and its implications.

While these are different from the standards developed to convey to the students, there are aspects of these standards that affect classroom teaching and curriculum. One of the standards stated by the Ohio Department of Education (2005) is that "Teachers model respect for students' diverse cultures, language skills and experiences." While this standard does not specifically express that teachers must teach their students to respect other cultures and model this behavior, trying to imply skills like this sometimes makes them ineffective. Also, diversity in schools varies greatly to allow modeling less frequently in some schools than others; therefore, integrating tolerance into the classroom becomes more explicit in this case than mentioned in the student standards. Undoubtedly the stated or explicit curriculum in education varies depending on the stakeholders, priorities, and perspective.

Clearly students need to understand skills that will allow them to pursue successful careers in a world focused on math and science and being competitive at a global level; however, a major downfall of the United States and other nations has been our lack of understanding of cultural differences. Wars and conflicts arise due to a lack of understanding and willingness to view situations in a different light. While not all conflicts can be avoided, many of the wars in our history's past have involved intolerance from one, or several, of the parties involved.

Hidden Curriculum and Critical Pedagogy:

The hidden curriculum is not a new concept, but rather, has been the topic of conversation for decades. With its continued support from professors and researchers, discussion of the hidden curriculum and critical pedagogy endure. The state and nation, however, have found other standards to guide student learning that do not include a moral

and ethical education. Many descriptions of the hidden curriculum have come to pass

over the decades that allow a multitude of similarities. Kohlberg (1970) explained the

hidden curriculum as a "moral education" (p. 62). He went on to explain that children are

presented with much information that is not part of the explicit curriculum as developed

by the teachers, school district, or state. The hidden curriculum is affected by setting

(Martin, 1976, p. 125). While settings change, so does the curricula presented to the

students. As time and place change, so do the importance of world events and current

events. As time has moved on, historical events have been portrayed differently to allow

for more discussion of the rights and wrongs of the events. The hidden curriculum is

influenced by many aspects and cannot be confined to one definition.

Within the hidden curriculum comes the practice of a critical pedagogy. Again,

as the concept of a hidden curriculum has reoccurred in education for decades, so has the

idea of critical pedagogy. Depending on the author of the comments, the description

changes; however, the concept is always similar. Henry Giroux holds a background in

education. His careers and literature show his passion for critical pedagogy. Giroux

(2006) explained critical pedagogy as the following:

> Critical pedagogy attempts to understand how power works through the
>
> production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular
>
> institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as particular subjects and
>
> social agents. It is also invested in the practice of self-criticism about the values
>
> that inform our teaching and a critical self-consciousness regarding what it means
>
> to equip students with analytical skills to be self-reflective about the knowledge
>
> and values they confront in classrooms (p. 31).

As with many other philosophers and educators, Giroux adamantly supported an educational curriculum that would not shape students into specific molds, but rather provide them with information and critical discussion to allow those students to grow into dynamic, aware adults (Giroux, 2011). Being a part of a democratic society alludes to this type of education. Students should be responsible for the environment around them, and they should care enough to make changes in order to create a more just world (Giroux, 2006; "What is Critical Pedagogy?", 2010). Children must learn about the "real" world around them in order to understand the need for change and to gather the motivation to become an agent of change.

The government, both state and federal, seems to support a more capitalist society due to the fact that money drives decision-making. There seems to be a constant effort to transform schools into businesses; however, the product of schools is very different from a product manufactured through a business. In a democratic setting, students should learn that they can make a difference in society; inequalities can be corrected and changed if students learn about them in schools (Groenke & Hatch, 2009, p. 2). "Academics must take a principled and non-negotiable stance against exploitation and oppression of all living creatures, one that strives for social justice and dignity for all human beings" (McLaren, 2008, p. 474). Educators must be willing to see the value of teaching beyond the stated curriculum and continue to reflect upon their jobs as an educator.

Many studies, articles, and books have been written about the importance of teachers integrating social justice issues in the classroom through the hidden curriculum to educate students about the problems our society faces and encourage their tolerance of

differences. Many students are not aware of what they do to support intolerance; therefore, it is in parents' and teachers' hands to bring it to the children's attention. Laoughran, Hamilton, Laboskey, and Russell (2007) claim that "mostly education reinforces this inequity, with wealthier children receiving the training to keep them wealthy and poor children receiving educational experiences that perpetuate their poverty" (p. 663). While the curriculum itself cannot entirely change the ills presented by intolerance, teachers can take a large step by incorporating the topics in their classrooms and instilling knowledge of the issues within the students. Purpel and McLaurin (2004) explained that teachers must be "prophets" and show their perspectives of the happiness that lies behind justice and love, and the unhappiness that comes from injustice (p. 114). Many authors discuss the necessity of including topics of justice and tolerance in a curriculum for students to have a clearer understanding of the world around them, but to also become a mature contributing part of society. For example, Beckner states:

> Educators must not lose sight of their long-term purposes of preparing students for life in the adult world of work and family and society. To do so becomes an ethical matter as legitimate purposes of schools are neglected. Standards for justice, equity, freedom, and attention to human rights must be made to fit the purposes and context of schools. (2004, p. 94)

The responsibility of schools and teachers goes far beyond a single grade level classroom. Kohl (2001) supported the idea that teachers must do more than just teach and inform students about tolerance, but also, must prepare those students for the rest of their lives as "a community activist, a good parent, a decent citizen, and an active

community member." Schools have a large responsibility to prepare students for more than just the next grade level, but also for the rest of their lives.

The support for utilizing a curriculum that teaches tolerance is rooted in the engagement of the students. In education, one of the most important pieces of putting together a curriculum is developing one that will engage students. When students are engaged in what they are doing, they are more likely to retain the information provided to them. Schlecty (2005) explained that including real-life situations in education makes the material more engaging for students (p. 220). Even if the situations are not completely familiar to the students' everyday lives, students are likely to become more involved in the lesson if they know the situations are real. Thomas (2007) explained it as "working on both the immediate context and the larger picture, teachers who embrace this conception of teaching for social justice are engaging on two levels simultaneously" (p. 3). Presenting students with information they can use for more than the specific subject areas provided in a school setting is essential. Finkbeiner and Koplin (2002) referenced cultural literacy when they illustrated the importance of understanding and accepting other cultures and the differences that accompany them. They explained that cultural literacy is an integral part of education today due to the strong diversity that students face every day within schools and in life.

Teachers must step in to show students that understanding people's differences and accepting diversity is an important life skill. Gardner (2008) stated that, "The task for educators becomes clear: if we are to fashion persons who respect differences, we need to provide models and offer lessons that encourage such a sympathetic stance" (p. 110). Gardner goes on to explain that there are certain subject areas that should be taught

relatively uniformly across the board. Science and mathematics are topics that leave very

little room to interpretation or presentation. Skills and knowledge are presented to

students, with little leeway for the educator; however, history and language arts leave

room for choices. The way this information is presented to students and the types of

literature that is taught allows students to get a broader view of different cultures, races,

and ethnicities. The way that teachers discuss this information makes a deep impact on

the students. Gardner explained that, "Models set by teachers constitute a crucial starting

point. Students take keen note of how teachers treat one another, how they treat other

adults, and how they treat students- particularly those who come from a nonmajority

group" (p. 110). Educators hold a lot of power on how students are going to understand

information and what they will take away from a lesson.

Accepting others and developing tolerance and respect is a life skill. Teachers

must encourage the skills that go beyond schooling. While learning what a verb is or

learning order of operations may come in handy during school, there are many jobs out in

the world which will not require those types of skills. Educators have a deeper

responsibility of giving students the tools they need to develop life-long skills like

tolerance. Trilling and Fadel (2009) stated that, "The ability to work effectively and

creatively with team members and classmates regardless of differences in culture and

styles is an essential 21st century life skill" (p. 80). Companies and businesses are more

interested in hiring a person that can adapt to working with different groups in a

productive and creative manner. Students should learn to be open-minded and consider

other's ideas. This shows a respect and tolerance for people's differences.

Some lessons can be controversial but still hold a place in schools. Students must have a place to learn about different cultures and religions to be able to understand people in a diverse society. Schools are typically warned about their discussion of religion, especially with including opinions. There is often a question raised about including religion in the curriculum and what its purpose is. "Students need to gain fluency in talking about religion and its role in society. They need to recognize how religion influences our public square and learn how to talk across religious and other ethical differences as we navigate our public life together" (Kunzman, 2012, p. 44). Without an understanding for other religions, students seem to use slurs and offensive language to describe people of other religions. Sometimes, the students simply do not know that the terms they utilize are offensive. Other times, they mimic the language they hear at home or from other role models.

With the same theory in mind, other controversial topics may have a place in school as well. Social stigmas do not allow most students/children to discuss issues and topics that are controversial. Some households are not accepting of discussions about people that are different from them, whether it be their description of religious or moral values. At one point in history, the differences that were prevalent are still acknowledged today with new ones added. A topic that often arises today is sexual preference. Teenagers rarely have an outlet for discussing issues regarding sexual orientation. While some of them go through major struggles in their lives with trying to decipher their physical changes and sexual preferences, there is rarely a safe outlet for discussion. Bailey (2012) stated that, "Teachers should not underestimate the importance of simply mentioning GLBT people when discussing diversity. When students hear the words

spoken in an unembarrassed and accepting tone, it contradicts the idea that the topic is forbidden or shameful" (p. 24). Students need to understand that talking about their concerns and questions regarding their society is acceptable, and that there is a safe place to do so.

Curricula must be built to include texts and content that are relevant on a larger scale than just for reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. Students need to see that the study has a more profound purpose then to get an "A". Purpel (2002) stated that "education for increased knowledge and understanding should be grounded in a deeper commitment to pursue a larger good than studying for its own sake" (p. 95). Education should truly mold and shape students to make their own decisions and analyze situations and tasks. Not all students are going to walk out of school with the same knowledge even if they are all taught the very same material; therefore, it is the educator's job to give students information they can use for the next forty years of their lives, not just the next forty minutes or until the test is over. "Not only do classroom studies have to be linked to the study of larger society, they have to be connected to a notion of justice, one that is capable of articulating how certain unjust social structures can be identified and replaced"(Giroux & Penna & Pinar, 1981, p. 215). Curriculum setup must include teaching tolerance and understanding, to serve the needs of students and to encourage engagement in the classroom.

Many students struggle with retaining information from lessons. When students do not feel connected to the information presented to them, it is difficult to remember it and use it for future endeavors. Increasing students' retention is not an easy task, but by changing the presentation and adding issues of tolerance, students are more likely to

retain information. (Groenke & Hatch, 2009, p. 201). By allowing students to connect with the information presented to them, they are much more likely to use it later in life.

Christensen (2000) wrote about her struggles as an inner-city school teacher. She felt the battle every day in her classroom. She struggled with getting students to read, write, and retain the information. Christensen completely reorganized her teaching to focus on issues of tolerance and justice. All of her reading and writing had a larger purpose for the students. The students quickly became engaged and used their literacy to communicate their feelings. Christensen gave the students more than just reading and writing practice and knowledge, but also, opened their minds to the intolerances that happened around them every day. Christensen proved that by giving the students a broader reason to learn than just school, she was able to engage them.

Allowing students to see the wrongs of the world and encouraging them to make a difference is the larger purpose of schools. Students must learn more than their core content areas in schools; they must learn to be activists, good community members, and strong people. They must learn about what it means and why it is important to be tolerant of others. Creating an understanding of others while students are in school is essential. Tolerance is a quality that all people need in order to have a clearer understanding of others, no matter their situation. Tolerance goes beyond the classroom; it will carry a person through life happier and as a more contributing member of society.

Intolerance in the form of bullying has become very predominant in schools today. While bullying has always taken place in schools, technology and weakening foundations at home have made the effects of bullying and intolerance newsworthy. The United States government and state governments have taken steps to discourage acts of

intolerance. A critical pedagogy is a necessary stride teachers must tackle to educate today's youth about the diversity of society. In order for students to understand each other's differences, they need to walk a mile in another person's shoes, so to speak. Most adolescents and young adults struggle trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. What they need to absorb is that many of the people that are intolerant of others are lacking the resolve to learn about differences, or they are severely insecure within themselves and are trying to divert attention away from them.

Students must learn to be tolerant and positive contributing members of society. Teaching tolerance has not always been at the forefront of education; however, in a day and age when bullying and intolerance of differences is at an all-time high, educators must make teaching tolerance a focus in the classroom. Middle school is repeatedly shown to have the most incidents of bullying; therefore, teaching tolerance at this level is incredibly important. All types of school settings should make this a focus. Teachers, administrators, and curriculum leaders must understand the importance of breaking the chain of intolerance in society, which needs to begin by teaching about it in schools.

Summary of Literature Review:

This study derived from my interest in social justice and tolerance and their place in public schools' curriculum. Literature utilized in this study addressed the following components: The history of education in the United States and the importance of teaching tolerance. Through those headings, the focus concentrated on tolerance, bullying, the government, types of school settings, and curriculum.

As an educator, I always felt that schools must provide more than the explicit curriculum. Children must be taught what will help carry them through life and make

them thoughtful, contributing members of society. My research led me to the same conclusion. Whether referring to the government and their limited view of school districts (being that of numbers and figures) or the states' views of curriculum (one that will allow students to pass a test), students must be more than a representation of a success or failure. Students must be taught as a whole person. As an educator, the frustration consistently lies in the same areas: Lack of support and funding, and worrying about elements that should be inherent in education. The focus of public education has been removed from the students and moved to communities and state and federal government. Instead of people having discussions about what children are learning, they are focusing on how students are products of a business and how to increase numbers (test scores, funds, college graduates) to surpass those of other countries.

The shift in education should be moved from the outcome to the process. What are we providing for students while they are in school? What are they going to carry with them for the rest of their lives? Teaching children the importance of tolerance and understanding of others is an immeasurable skill. The test scores, facts, and figures that are evaluated for importance by the government will not show these skills, but maybe fewer crimes, vulgar behavior, and hatred toward others will decline. Maybe kindness will spread. Maybe parents will teach their children more accepting behaviors. Maybe bullying will decrease. Maybe teen suicides will decrease. The answers to what teaching tolerance will accomplish are not predictable and are not measured by a test; however, the reward could be much greater than a figure.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter explains the procedures and methods utilized throughout the process of gathering participants, collecting data, and analyzing the accumulated data. The information gathered is presented in the following sections: Research Questions, Research Design, Participants, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Significance of Study, and Limitations of Study.

Research Questions:

This study employed a qualitative research design to answer the following research questions:

1. Is tolerance addressed in seventh grade language arts?

2. How aware of tolerance are seventh graders?

3. Does school setting affect students' awareness of tolerance?

4. Are teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward tolerance affected by the school settings?

5. Does the type of school setting affect teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards including social justice issues into a seventh grade language arts curriculum?

The purposes of answering these questions are:

1. To establish whether or not teachers address issues of tolerance in seventh grade language arts.

2. To have a greater understanding about seventh grade students' awareness of tolerance or the lack there of.

3. To understand if school setting has an effect on students' awareness of tolerance.

4. To develop a better understanding of teachers' attitudes towards teaching tolerance.

5. To understand if school setting affects teachers' attitudes towards teaching tolerance.

Research Design:

The mandates from the state continually change regarding the content for which to focus classroom curriculum in all content areas. Many of the schools in the Midwest are moving from state standards to the new Common Core curriculum. I began my research with the intention of gathering more information concerning seventh grade language arts curricula in various school settings and their likelihood to teach tolerance in accordance with the state standards. With the ever-changing requirements afforded to schools in relation to the curriculum, my hope was to examine what other lessons in the classroom went beyond the state constraints. I wanted to find what made up the implicit curricula in the various school settings.

I used qualitative research in this study to have the flexibility to explore areas of education that, while they play a large role in an everyday school setting, are sometimes

brushed to the background to address more seemingly-pressing issues. Staller (2010)

acknowledged qualitative researchers as those whom:

> Are interested in studying social processes how people make sense and create
>
> meaning, and what their lived experiences are like. They are interested in
>
> understanding how knowledge is historically, politically, and culturally situated.
>
> They concern themselves with notions of power, privilege, positionality, and
>
> social justice. (p. 1159)
>
> Given (2008) stated that qualitative research with a basic research focus:
>
> encourages the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in the belief that it is only
>
> by also encouraging research that is outside the box – even though this innovation
>
> involves incurring all the dead ends and false leads that such research inevitably
>
> will include – that one also finds jewels of understanding that can open new doors
>
> and new possibilities that applied researchers, operating within a limited frame of
>
> reference, are unlikely to have considered. (p. 58)

Qualitative research was chosen for this study as it is a method for understanding

a new culture and environment from which I was not familiar. While I am familiar with

seventh grade students and teachers, in general, I am not familiar with the students and

teachers in the setting where the study took place. While some of the assumptions and

connections I made would hold true from seventh grader to seventh grader and teacher to

teacher, the setting and culture of the school would impact my findings. I began this

study as a mixed-methods research study; however, over time, I realized that qualitative

research provided me with the necessary tools to acquire a realistic view of various

school settings and curricula. Eisner's (1991) explanation of qualitative research was that:

> Qualitative inquiry – in this case the study of schools or classrooms – can provide the double advantage of learning about schools and classrooms in ways that are useful for understanding other schools and classrooms and learning about individual classrooms and particular teachers in ways that are useful to them. (p. 12)

This qualitative research was accomplished through the use of a basic interpretive qualitative study. This looked at how the school setting affected educators' awareness of issues of intolerance and their view of its importance in a middle school language arts curriculum. The study did "seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of people involved or a combination of these" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Since the qualitative method is inductive, I "developed concepts, insights, and understanding from patterns in the data, rather than collecting data to assess perceived models, hypotheses, or theories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 5). While I had some preconceived notions about the data I would gather, I began the study with an open mind. My thoughts became focused on the process rather than the results.

As supported by qualitative research, I used an informal interview to address the seventh grade teachers in each school. Eisner (1991) expressed the importance of the interview in the qualitative research process as being "second in importance to direct observation" (p. 183). During each interview, I tried to put myself in the teacher's shoes, so to speak. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) expressed that, "Qualitative researchers empathize and identify with the people they study in order to understand how they see

things" (p. 5). The interviews took place toward the end of the school year in the various

school locations. To better meet the teachers' needs and have them feel comfortable, I

worked around their schedule to interview them in a time and place that was convenient

for them.

Addressing the students' awareness of tolerance was accomplished through

qualitative techniques in the form of a focus group. Focus groups have a history that

stretches far beyond that of educational research. Over the years, focus groups have been

a method to guide advertising for products. In this case, at each school, a group of

students was gathered to give me insider perspective into the culture and climate of their

school. When discussing the focus groups with the coordinator at each building, I

requested to assemble groups of 8-12 students with a nearly even number of male and

female students. Due to lack of time with each school and the nearness to the end of the

school year, I grouped the male and female students together instead of dividing the

students in gender groups. Clark (2010) illustrated that, "Focus groups are optimal when

the participants are a homogeneous group, rather than drawn from dialectically opposed

factions (p. 106). While the group composed from each school for this study were not

homogeneous through gender, they were all students from the same school, with the same

language arts teacher, and all in the seventh grade. The students experienced similar

settings in regards to their language arts classes and the curriculum that it entailed.

Each focus group took place at a different location within the school that the

students attended. Clark (2010) expressed the importance of creating a comfortable

environment for the children involved in the focus group. The environment included

having a relaxed setting, but also a moderator that was "seasoned" in working with

children and understanding their communication. The setting was somewhat beyond my control in this situation because the schools were kind to allow me to perform the research in their schools; therefore, I was accepting and appreciative of the location they provided for the focus group discussion. In most cases, the focus group discussion took place in a classroom that did not have a class in it during the period the focus group took place. In several instances, the discussion took place in other locations within the students' schools. To maintain anonymity, the names of the schools are pseudonyms. The focus group at Kelton was held in a teacher's lounge. At Madison, the focus group was held in the guidance counselor's office. The discussion at Amber Middle School took place in the school's conference room in the main office. The media center was the setting for the Downing Middle School focus group. Finally, at Skapik, the focus group was held on the football field following a physical activity with the whole seventh grade.

Each location provided a different feeling or environment for the students. The unused classrooms were probably the most comfortable for the students because they had all been in those classrooms before the focus group. The environment was not new to them and therefore, did not provide nearly the distractions that may have arisen in the other settings. The students at Kelton and Amber were probably the most enchanted with their surroundings. Both groups were held in areas of the school that were unfamiliar to them and were typically reserved for teacher use. One of the most distracting locations for the focus group occurred at Skapik Middle School as the discussion occurred on the football field. The day happened to be fairly windy and the students not involved in the discussion and attending the grade-level activity remained outside near the location of our discussion. Some of the students had a difficult time focusing on and hearing the rest of

the students' responses. The media center and the classrooms seemed to be the most

conducive environments for thorough and attentive dialogues.

Having experience working with seventh grade students contributed to a more

comfortable, open environment with the students during the focus groups. Being a

"seasoned" moderator allowed me to feel more at ease during the discussions, which

seemed to keep the settings more informal. One of my concerns going into this process

was that the students would not contribute to discussions with an adult with whom they

were not familiar; however, I was pleasantly surprised with my findings regarding this.

While I did not receive the most informative answers from every group of students, I did

not feel that the less enlightening responses stemmed from the students' uneasiness with

working with me as the moderator, but rather, was caused by the students' interest in

being more socially involved with the other students in the focus group.

Clark (2010) also expressed the importance of screening participants prior to the

focus group (p. 109). Because of timing and being at the liberty of the schools that

allowed me to do research at them, I did not pre-screen the students that were involved in

the groups. The focus groups were gathered by a coordinator at each of the schools

included in the study. The coordinators' position and role varied depending on the

school. Most of the coordinators were the seventh grade language arts teacher that I later

interviewed; however, the coordinator at Madison was the guidance counselor. The

coordinators compiled, what they felt to be a more diverse group of students in regards to

clique, race, religion, and socioeconomic status; however, most coordinators attempted to

include students they felt were more outspoken and likely to contribute to a group

discussion. While I did not personally screen the students, the coordinators at each

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building used their prior knowledge of the students to cultivate a vocal group willing to participate.

In an attempt to encourage student participation and comfort with me as the students' focus group moderator, I told the coordinators that I would provide snacks for the students that were willing to participate in the study. My prior knowledge of and my experience with seventh grade students, and most students, has shown me that they like to work for rewards, especially those that come in the form of food, snacks, or candy. Knowing that gave me the idea to bring snacks to the focus groups to encourage the students' participation and willingness to be involved. I told the teachers in advance that I would be bringing snacks to the discussion in order for them to tell the students prior to my arrival. My hope was that more students would want to be involved and remember to return their permission form because there would be an incentive to being involved.

As Eisner (1991) stated, recording is an essential piece of doing qualitative research. In both the focus groups and the teacher interviews, I used audio recordings to keep track of the data from the schools (p. 188). The recordings were incredibly helpful as I went through to analyze and code the data I compiled from the schools. While I could not see the interviews again, as I only had an audio recording, I felt that I could still get an idea of the students' and teachers' feelings in the way they answered the questions and their tone of voice. Trying to take notes during the actual interview and focus group would have required me to miss the visual cues. Also, I would certainly have missed quotes and many comments if I was trying to keep up with the responses and discussion of eight to ten students.

Remaining entirely neutral when evaluating, coding, and discussing the observations and data provided by this study was not realistic. While I did try to remain objective, my experiences and knowledge guided me to make decisions about what I saw and heard from the students and teachers. A constructivist view would suggest that I described situations and data based upon my own experiences, which in a sense, meant that I constructed the truth that I observed (Eisner, 1991, p. 176). While as Taylor and Bogdan (1984) specified the importance of putting aside one's perspectives or values when analyzing data, keeping opinions and experiences completely separate from the analysis was challenging (p. 8). Keeping an open mind to what I observed and heard during the study became very important to me; I had to move my focus from what I had experienced in my career as a teacher to what I viewed and listened to during the interviews and focus groups with the teachers and students, respectively.

Besides keeping field notes, I kept a journal of my reflections and reactions after performing each informal interview and focus group. The journal reflections added to my process of analyzing data. They gave me the opportunity to sort out my feelings after leaving each school setting. By keeping my comments and thoughts separate through the use of the journal, I was able to keep my opinions away from the coding and analysis more easily. While I felt that my thoughts and opinions held a place in this research, I wanted the results of the interviews and focus groups to stay separate from the perspectives of the settings I encountered and the process that I experienced. My field notes served as factual information that I recorded while I was with the focus groups of students and interviewing the teachers. On the other hand, I used the journal as a means to express my feelings and reactions after I gathered data in each school setting. The

journal also allowed me to make some comparisons of the schools' cultures as I encountered them as an outsider.

As stated by Eisner (1991), I felt there were two areas of extreme importance when analyzing the data I compiled during the focus groups and teacher interviews: the curricular dimension and the pedagogical dimension (pp. 75 – 77). Eisner (1991) stated, "One of the most important aspects of connoisseurship focuses upon the quality of the curriculum's content and goals and the activities employed to engage students in it" (p. 75). In order to make an informed diagnoses of the significance of the content being taught, I had to better understand the curriculum being taught at each school. This is what was actually being taught in the classroom versus what was simply stated as the curriculum. In order to obtain a clearer view of each teacher's classroom curriculum, I had to analyze the student and teacher comments; without having the opportunity to observe in the classroom, I based my analysis on the descriptions as provided by the students and the teachers. Eisner (1991) explained this analysis to be driven by certain questions:

Is this content up-to-date?

From a disciplinary perspective, is it important?

How is it being interpreted by the teacher and understood by the students?

And what about the means through which this content is encountered?

Do the activities engage students?

Do they elicit higher order thinking?

Is the content being taught and learned in ways that enable students to apply it or to perceive its relevance to matters outside the subject? (pp. 75 – 76)

Using the aforementioned list of questions to analyze the data I compiled, guided me toward a more thorough investigation of the curriculum that existed within each school. The curricular dimension lead me to a focus on the pedagogical dimension. The pedagogical dimension refers to how educators address and teach the content addressed in the class (Eisner, 1991). While the curriculum from classroom to classroom might be the same, the actual content being taught may be different if the teachers approach topics with altering methods. The other element that plays into the pedagogical dimension is that students learn far more in a classroom than what is specifically stated in the curriculum. The implicit curriculum makes up a significant part of what the students learn in their classes. Since students learn by examples and role models, not only do lessons come from activities and planned elements in class, but they also derive from what they witness from their educators.

The themes addressed in this study emerged as I found repetition in the students' and teachers' responses in the focus groups and in the informal interviews, respectively. As I saw discrepancies between the teachers' and the students' responses, some of the themes were more poignant. As an insider to public education, some of the themes arose from connecting my knowledge of current school issues to the reoccurring topics mentioned in the data collected. All of the themes have relevance in public education's existing state and also connect directly to the comments the students and teachers made.

Some of the questions I posed throughout my research and analysis stemmed from a critical qualitative research stance. While my view and questioning seemed to refer to a critical qualitative research stance, my actions beyond the student focus groups and teacher interviews was lacking. While I feel there are changes that need to be

implemented in curricula across the state, I have only stated that viewpoint and not taken action to apply those alterations.

Participants:

Participants in this study were asked to be involved through various contact methods. Some schools received letters asking for their assistance in this process, while others received direct correspondence. The districts and students that were included in the research are meant to represent schools in the Midwest United States. Direct correspondence was required for the qualitative research done on the study. A focus group represented the students at each school. A group of six to twelve seventh grade students were asked nine open-ended questions in about a 20 to 30-minute informal interview setting. During the informal interview setting, some of the discussion led to other questions for the groups.

In addition, a semi-structured interview took place involving one seventh grade language arts teacher per school. The semi-structured interview included nine questions and included conversation to allow other items to be discussed. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded for further analysis after the fact. All participants included in this study will remain anonymous when reporting the details of the study.

Data collection in this study gathered data surrounding students' awareness of issues including intolerance and bullying, their awareness of tolerance, and teachers' perspectives about teaching tolerance in a language arts curriculum. The data provide a clearer image of the students' awareness of unjust issues around them in school and in society. From a broader stance, the interviews and discussions provide data to show how students' awareness and involvement in issues of intolerance will differ among school

settings. The data was compiled within each level: rural, suburban, and urban schools.

Two rural schools, two urban schools, and four suburban schools were included in the

data collection.   After the data was compiled, it was compared and evaluated against the

other school settings.

The interviews and discussions took place during the fourth quarter of school.

The information and curriculum material was fresh in the students' and teachers' minds.

The concern with doing the study at the beginning of the school year was the lack of

information students receive during summer break. While some schools in the area

attend year-round, most of the schools in the Midwest are still on a three-month break

over the summer; therefore, the information should be more reliable if coming from the

students and teachers at the end of the school year versus the beginning, after a long

break away from the content.

To conduct the research, two to four schools from each type of setting, rural,

suburban, and urban, were included. The schools that were included in this study are in

all in one state in the Midwest, but will represent each setting. At no time during this

study were students' identities associated with the research or results.

In addition, teachers went through semi-structured interviews that showed their

awareness of tolerance, and their opinions on the importance of teaching tolerance in a

seventh grade language arts curriculum. Teachers were only identified by the school

setting in which they taught and the grade level which they taught. Using the qualitative

data shows the teachers' awareness and view of including issues of tolerance in a middle

school language arts curriculum.

Sample Selection Process:

For the means of reporting the data from this study, all of schools have been renamed to maintain anonymity. Each school collected their sample for the study differently. Each of the eight schools the researcher visited had a contact person that distributed and collected student consent forms. The choice to include participants remained in the hands of the contact person from that school.

Data Collection:

To collect data from the students and teachers, focus group and semi-structured interviews were used, respectively. The proposed research and data collection methods received IRB approval. Data from the student focus groups and teacher interviews were coded and compiled in a qualitative manner. The basis for the questions used for the semi-structured interviews and for the focus group discussions were developed from a questionnaire used by the magazine *Teaching Tolerance* (See Appendix A). The magazine questionnaire was intended for the use of exploring schools' climates; so instead of directly using the questions from the questionnaire, I formatted questions that fit the purpose of my study. The student focus group questions (See Appendix B) were used with a group of students allowing them to make comments at their will. The teacher semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix C) were utilized in a one-on-one, interview setting. With both sets of questions and with both the students and the teachers, I allowed other questions to surface based upon the responses I received.

Using focus groups and semi-structured interviews encouraged honest responses without guiding the students or teachers in any specific direction. Also, for the sake of reporting the information through the study, the students' focus groups and teachers'

interviews were also anonymous. The students' responses and discussion opened up the truth about the state of schools and the tolerance, or lack thereof, which they see in each of their schools. The teachers' responses were crucial to this study. Creating an informed society begins in the classroom, and the teachers' responses allowed me to see if they believed it is their responsibility to include issues of tolerance in the middle school curriculum. By ignoring the importance of teaching about issues of tolerance, educators are encouraging inequalities. Without the knowledge of the problems of society, no one will look to fix them, and in turn, the problems will replicate themselves from generation to generation.

Selection of Schools:

To select schools for this study, the State's Department of Education's (SDE) definition of each type of school was used to find rural, urban, and suburban districts. The SDE classifies each type of school with a number from 0-8. Within these descriptions, the researcher combined two and three as rural schools, which were defined as "Rural/agricultural" and "Rural/Small Town" by the SDE. Type four and five were combined to describe schools in an urban setting. The SDE classified schools in level four as "Urban" and schools in level five as "Major Urban." Finally, I combined levels six and seven, which were defined as "Urban/Suburban with high median income" and "Urban/Suburban with very high median income and low poverty", to describe a suburban school setting. Categories zero, one, and eight did not fit into the three common types of schools, and were therefore, left out of the study.

After evaluating the schools that fell into each category, I selected schools that were within a two-hour distance of a larger city in in the state. These schools were meant

to be representative of other schools with similar demographics in the Midwest. Letters were distributed to twenty-nine schools. After a week had passed, some of the letters were returned to the researcher. Several schools had not yet responded, and were then contacted via email or phone call. With the completion of the emails and phone calls, I had gathered one rural school, two urban schools, and four suburban schools. To better meet the needs of this study and gather more sounds results, I went on to find another rural school for the study. To gather the final school, I corresponded in a variety of means to several different locations to finally have one more rural school allow research to be carried out in their building.

As the process went on, I had an appointment to perform the interviews with students and a teacher at one of the suburban locations. When I arrived on site, the contact person was not prepared and had forgotten that the interview was to take place. At that point, the contact person wanted to reschedule to a new date, which was set at that time. As the new date approached, the contact person from the school said she was unable to gather the consent forms as needed, and therefore, did not think she would be able to have enough participants for the study. Since this school was a suburban setting, and one of five in the study, the situation worked best for the contact person to cancel their participation in the study.

Table 3.1

Participants – 7th Grade Language Arts Students and Teachers

School Type	Number of Students Interviewed	Demographics of Student Focus Group	Number of Teachers Interviewed	Demographics of Teachers Interviewed
Rural 1 (R1)	8 Total (3 females, 5 males)	8 White	1	White, Female, ~55 years old
Rural 2 (R2)	8 Total (4 females, 4 males)	8 White	1	White, Female, ~ 23 years old
Urban 1 (U1)	7 Total (5 females, 2 males)	2 White, 1 Black, 2 Biracial, 2 Hispanic	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old
Urban 2 (U2)	9 Total (5 females, 4 males)	1 White, 4 Black, 2 Biracial, 2 Turkish	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old
Suburban 1 (S1)	11 Total (6 females, 5 males)	10 White, 1 Black	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old
Suburban 2 (S2)	7 Total (3 females, 4 males)	5 White, 1 Black, 1 Indian	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old
Suburban 3 (S3)	9 Total (3 females, 6 males)	7 White, 1 Black, 1 Indian	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old
Suburban 4 (S4)	8 Total (4 females, 4 males)	7 White, 1 Biracial	1	White, Female, 35-40 years old

As the research concluded, I gathered data from eight schools total: two rural schools, two urban schools, and four suburban schools (see Table 3.1). Each school provided a group of 7 to 12 students for an informal interview in the form of a focus group. Also, each school allowed me to interview a seventh grade language arts teacher

that they specified. To protect the privacy of the schools, teachers, and students involved

in this study, all of the schools were identified by using pseudonyms to keep their

information anonymous to those that encounter this research; however, full anonymity

was not possible as I, as the researcher, facilitated the focus groups with the students and

the interviews with the teachers. Neither teachers, nor students were ever identified by

their names or their school to ensure confidentiality throughout the research gathering

process.

Selection of Students:

Each school handled the selection of the students to participate in the study a little

differently. Most of the schools used a convenience factor to get the students involved.

In some cases, students were informed of the benefits of being a part of the group that

was interviewed; for example, snacks were provided and the students were able to miss

one class period if they participated. Some schools intentionally gathered a diverse group

of students, while others gathered the students at random (see Table 3.1). Some of the

schools tried to compile an equal number of male and female students, while other

schools chose the students based on interest.

At Downing Middle School, a rural school, students were randomly selected as

they walked into the classroom; however, they were only selected from the contact

teacher's language arts class. The group that became the focus group consisted of three

girls and five boys. All of the students in the group were white. Based on the lack of

diversity in the district, the group was a realistic representation of the population in the

building.

Students from Amber Middle School, another rural setting, were also asked randomly if they would like to participate, with the incentive that they would miss one day of their eighth period class. The students were only chosen from the language arts teacher's class. The focus group was formed with four males and four females. Again, all of the students were white, which was an accurate representation of the population of the students in Amber Middle School.

At Elliot Middle School, one of the urban schools, the contact teacher chose a diverse group of students from her classes. She did not make the process as random so that she could give a broader view of the school. The focus group was made up of two males, both that appeared to be Hispanic. Five females made up the other part of the focus group. Among the females, two appeared to be white, one girl appeared to be African American, and one girl was biracial.

At the other urban school, Kelton Middle School, the contact teacher first tried to gather a diverse group of students, but had trouble getting the consent forms returned. After that, she randomly chose students that seemed interested in participating. The result of her efforts came together with a group of nine students. There were five females among the group and four male students. Two of the students were Turkish and siblings. One of the students was white, four were African American, and two were biracial. Again, since the school's population was more diverse, the focus group represented the diversity of the urban setting.

At one of the suburban settings, Bolton Middle School, the language arts teacher and contact person, began collecting a group of students through a group called Rachael's Challenge. After they could not get enough students involved through that group, she

ended up choosing students at random from her language arts class and ended up with 11 students for the focus group. Among the group, there were five boys and six girls. All of the students were white, with the exception of one African American girl. The majority of the population of Bolton is white, with very little diversity culturally among the school.

At Madison Middle School, another suburban setting, the guidance counselor was the contact person and assembled the group of students instead of the language arts teacher. He tried to accrue a more diverse group of students from the school; which made the collection of students less random than some of the other groups. The result was a group of seven students. There were three female students, two of them whom were white and one who was Indian. Three of the male students were white and one of the male students was African American. Madison Middle School provided more diversity among their focus group than some of the other schools.

At Middleton Middle School, the language arts teacher collected a group of students that volunteered out of a large group of students. Out of the volunteers, she chose the most typically responsible children that she thought would be likely to return the forms quickly. The focus group from Middleton comprised of nine students, 6 males and 3 females. All of the female students were white, while four of the male students were white, one was African American, and one was Indian. Much of the diversity within Middleton and Skapik (to be mentioned next) comes from socioeconomic status versus racial differences.

Finally, at Skapik Middle School, the language arts teachers chose a group of students based on volunteers. They two female language arts teachers explained to the

students that they would be able to miss a portion of class if they volunteered. The final

focus group was made up of eight students, four males and four females. Among the

males, three of them were white and one student was biracial. All of the female students

were white. Out of the suburban schools, Skapik has the second most significant racial

diversity, but the focus group did not represent this element well.

Most of the schools collected students using a convenience factor, choosing

whomever was available at the time they were distributing consent forms; however, some

structured it a little differently than others.

Selection of Teachers:

The principals from each of the schools directed me toward a contact person. In

most cases, this was one of, or the only, 7th grade language arts teacher in the school.

This allowed me to interview the teacher that was the contact person. At Madison

Middle School, the contact person was the guidance counselor, but he chose the language

arts teacher for whom the researcher interviewed. In Amber Middle School, a rural

setting, and in Elliot Middle School, an urban setting, there was only one 7th grade

language arts teacher at the school, which made the selection simple.

Great differences existed among the population of the schools in the study,

especially when looking at the varying school settings; however, the educators

interviewed during the study showed very little diversity. Even with the different

settings, the teachers had very similar descriptions. All eight teachers interviewed were

white females. Five of the eight teachers interviewed were around ages 35-45. Two of

the teachers were in the end of their career and were probably between 50 and 60 years

old. Finally, one of the teachers interviewed for the study was only in her second year of

teaching and was still very young being in her early twenties. The most advanced in her career and the earliest in her career both came from schools in a rural setting. All of the educators in the suburban setting had been teaching between 12 to 16 years.

Demographics of Selected Schools:

To accumulate a wide range of data for the study, rural, urban, and suburban schools were included. The demographic information varied greatly among the different schools, even within each of the categories. All schools have been assigned a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity through reporting the findings in this study. All of the demographic information (see Table 3.2) provided in this section was gathered from the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) and the State's Department of Education. In addition to the demographics of each school, each school's percentage of students that were proficient in reading on the state's achievement assessment in 2012 is listed (see Table 3.2).

Amber Middle School was in a rural setting and housed grades six through eight. The school had around 220 students and 60 students in the seventh grade. There was very little diversity among race and ethnicities in this school, with only one student of Asian/Pacific Islander decent. The rest of the students in the school were considered white. The pupil per teacher ratio was about 15 students for every one teacher.

Downing Middle School, the other rural school in the study, housed grades five through eight. There were about 360 student in the school and around 98 seventh grade students. The school had two black students, with all other students considered to be white. The pupil per teacher ratio was 13 students for every teacher.

Elliot School was an urban school with students in grades prekindergarten through eighth grade. The school had about 500 students total, with 52 seventh grade students. The school had around 80 black students and around 16 Hispanic students. In seventh grade specifically, there were around eight black students and three Hispanic students. There were about 15 students for every teacher at Elliot School.

At Kelton, the other urban school setting, the school had about 520 students in grades prekindergarten through eighth grade, with around 50 students in the seventh grade. Kelton had around 260 black students, 185 white students, 45 Hispanic students, and 6 Asian/Pacific Islander students. In the seventh grade there were about 30 black students, 3 Hispanic students, and about 15 white students. At Kelton, there were nearly 18 students per every teacher in the building.

Bolton Middle School was one of the schools in a suburban district. The school had about 622 students in it, and it housed grades six through eight. There were about 200 seventh grade students at Bolton, with around 546 white students, 24 black students, 14 Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 1 American Indian student. At Bolton, the pupil per teacher ratio was 18.6 to 1.

Madison Middle School was another suburban location with around 643 students and holds grades six through eight. Madison had about 490 white students, 60 Asian/Pacific Islander students, 43 black students, 16 Hispanic students, and three American Indian students. There were around 200 seventh grade students. Madison also had a student to teacher ratio of almost 18.7 to one.

Another suburban location, Middleton Middle School held about 505 students, with about 115 seventh grade students. In the school, there were about 461 white

students, 7 black students, 7 Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 6 Hispanic students.

Students in grades five through eight attended Middleton. There were approximately

13.5 pupils for every one teacher at Middleton.

Finally, Skapik Middle School was in a suburban setting and housed students in

grades five through eight. There were approximately 530 students in the building, and

about 125 seventh grade students. Skapik had a diverse population consisting of about

433 white students, 43 black students, 11 Asian/Pacific Islander students, 6 American

Indian students, and 3 Hispanic students. Skapik had nearly 13.7 pupils per one teacher.

Table 3.2

7th Grade 2011-2012 Data for Schools Presented in Research Findings

Building Name	Number of Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Asian/Pacific Islander decent	Pupils per Teacher	Reading OAA Percent Above Proficient
Amber (R1)	60	0	0	1	15	86.7
Downing (R2)	98	2	0	0	13	91.5
Elliot (U1)	52	8	3	0	15	59.4
Kelton (U2)	50	30	3	0	18	51.2
Bolton (S1)	201	8	0	14	18.6	93.2
Madison (S2)	200	16	3	18	18.7	89.6
Middleton (S3)	115	2	0	1	13.5	84.4
Skapik (S4)	125	9	0	2	13.7	88.1

Data Analysis:

This study employed a qualitative method for gathering data among the students.

Focus groups of middle school students were used to evaluate their awareness of

tolerance. The data gathered through the focus group discussion was compiled, analyzed, and coded. While the students were responding to my questions, I recorded field notes that I later incorporated into my evaluation of the data. The recordings of the students' responses allowed me to look for reoccurring information, which lead me to the themes in chapter four. These themes also were developed because of their relevance in present-day education. While the students were from different schools and settings, many similar topics and discussions arose during the focus groups. When all the data were analyzed, it was compared to the schools in other settings in order to evaluate if there was a difference in the level of tolerance awareness among different school settings. Not only did this give a clearer vision of the school's climate, it also provided information about students' awareness of the intolerance around their school. In addition, this data was compared among the three school settings in order to get a better understanding of the students' knowledge about issues of tolerance based on their school's setting.

Analyzing the data for the teachers' semi-structured interviews began by coding the data based on their responses about teaching tolerance. Finding common themes among the responses and the use of the data for comparison among the different school settings was the goal of analyzing and coding the data from the interview. In addition, the data showed trends in the results with the teachers' interview data and how it related to the students' questionnaire data.

Significance of Study:

Investigating students' awareness of social justice issues, when comparing the setting of the schools, is a topic that has not often been addressed in educational research. The theory, methods, and pedagogy support the significance of including and studying

tolerance in education. The research done in this study will be completed from a qualitative analysis. This study will exhibit, in general, which types of school settings are focusing on or including issues of tolerance in their middle school language arts curriculum. The implications of this study will reach beyond that of simply finding which settings are more aware of social justice issues, but rather viewing schools as students' ethical and moral framework builders.

Ethical behavior and acceptance for diversity in society is not innate to all individuals. Middle school students see differences in one another, and instead of exhibiting interest for the differences, they show disdain and indecent behavior. Gardner (2008) explained in *5 Minds for the Future*, that he "prefers the concept of respect. Rather than ignoring differences, being inflamed by them, or seeding to annihilate them through love or hate," he "call(s) human beings to accept the differences, learn to live with them, and value those who belong to other cohorts (p. 107). In a time, when reported bullying seems to be at an all-time high, learning to understand, respect, and value other's differences is an important skill. Great minds must establish empathy to truly grasp others' perspectives and to be able to synthesize information to its fullest potential. Trilling and Fadel (2009) explained that "the ability to work effectively and creatively with team members and classmates regardless of differences in culture and style is an essential 21st century life skill" (p. 80). Understanding where the lack of awareness is among students may make clearer the issues of intolerance and inequality which have arisen in society. Lack of awareness implies a lack of understanding.

Limitations of Study:

The limitations of this study will pertain to the methods for retrieving study participants. Neither the teachers nor the students necessarily will be representative of society. Due to situation and position, the participants to be addressed in this study will represent a certain state in the Midwest and maybe representative of the Midwestern United States as a whole. Selecting participants for this study was dependent upon position and time. Rural, suburban, and urban school districts across the country differ, even though they may be classified as the same type of school setting; therefore, the data gathered from the students in these types of schools may vary to students in a similar school setting in another part of the country.

For a qualitative study, the concerns surrounding validity and reliability focused more directly toward the instrument used to gather information about the students' awareness of tolerance and teachers' perspectives about including issues of intolerance into their language arts curriculum. Due to the lack of instruments made for gathering data surrounding this topic, the interview has not been used prior to check for validity and reliability. The new instrument could impact the intended results of the study; therefore the validity and reliability of the study could be compromised. In addition, there was no triangulation of the data. As the researcher, I solely devised the coding process and the interpretation of the data. By not incorporating other researchers into the data interpretation portion of this study, the validity of the study was threatened.

Timing played a large role as a limitation in this study. I gathered data from the schools and ran the interviews toward the end of the school year. This timing worked against me in a number of ways. First of all, the number of schools that were willing and

able to participate was limited because teachers and administration felt the end of the school year pressures and simply did not have time to add another item to their already full schedules; therefore, I had several schools that found the timing troubling and chose not to participate. In addition, I asked the students questions that pertained to the entire school year. Clearly some students were not able to remember texts they read early in the year and lessons they encountered. While most of the time, other students were able to remind the rest of the group about the books they read, there may have been information left out of the interviews since I was asking the students to recall the entire school year.

Another limitation of the study was the reliability of the schools to have a group of students established when I arrived. When I first spoke to the schools, I asked to have a group of eight to ten students, nearly evenly split between males and females. In some cases, I had to scramble to get additional students involved in the focus group interview due to students being absent or the students suddenly not showing up for the interview. When I did have the group established, some were more articulate than others. Some of the combinations of students seemed to be more interested in socializing with one another and making each other laugh than honestly answering the questions that I presented to them. Knowing whether I was gathering accurate and complete information from the students was somewhat of a struggle and limitation of the study.

In some instances, similar to the students, the teachers did not provide as much data as I had expected. In some circumstances when the teachers were self-reporting, the teachers seemed to be cautious of their responses. With all of the challenges and uncertainty teachers face, there seemed to be a barrier between expected responses and complete self-disclosure.   While teachers may have experiences and education that guide

them toward teaching certain things, the state and national government may drive them in another direction. State mandated testing now plays a role in teacher evaluations in some states, which, in turn, can affect teachers careers and income. Teachers have begun to feel more pressure to prepare their students for state testing than to incorporate elements of a character education, including tolerance, into their language arts curriculum. Even with the occurrences of bullying on the rise, some teachers are looking to the administration in the schools to take a stand instead of taking that on as another responsibility, when time with students is already lacking. Pressure from parents, the community, and the state have become very powerful and prevalent in public education. As many teachers already feel like the target in a battle where they have very little control, many teachers are extremely careful about the impression they are portraying. Many teachers do not want to "rock the boat" so to speak, but prefer to do what is required as well as they can, and hope that it shows in their evaluations and test scores.

With that said, instead of elaborating on answers that were contrary to my expectations, several of the teachers left their responses ambiguous. Part of this limitation stemmed from my lack of follow-up questions to responses that were unpredicted. I failed to keep the conversation flowing to gather as much data and information as possible. Another part of the limitation came from the teachers seemingly keeping me "at arm's length." Whether purposely keeping some answers vague or not, some teachers did not elaborate on their responses to allow me to have a clearer understanding for their choices in regards to their classroom curriculum. For many of the teachers, a curriculum rich in teaching tolerance and striving for a critical pedagogy seemed far from their desires and passions as educators.

Summary:

Curriculum has always been a major focus in education. With this qualitative study, I hoped to "make descriptive or explanatory inferences on the basis of empirical information" (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 7). The data I compiled from the interviews with middle school teachers and the focus groups with seventh grade students contributed to the knowledge base regarding the awareness and understanding of teaching tolerance in seventh grade language arts.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between the setting of

the school and the students' awareness of tolerance. Also, the study examined the

relationship between the setting of the school and the emphasis the educator placed upon

integrating issues of tolerance in their seventh grade language arts curriculum. The

intention of this chapter is to show background for delving into the topic of tolerance, and

also to show a thorough analysis of the compilation of research gathered.

Background:

I began this study several years before the research became a reality. As an

educator, I longed to teach something real, beyond the textbook. I wanted students to see

that there is so much that has happened and is happening beyond the walls of the schools.

As a young teacher, I knew I wanted to learn more. I began this process at the

University of Dayton. In my first quarter, I took classes that allowed me to see that

teaching tolerance was a highly discussed topic and something that had been involved in

education for years. This class also allowed me to realize that the importance of teaching

tolerance and discussing social justice issues while also noting that including issues such

as these in the classroom has never been mandated or even heavily stressed from the state

level. This struck my passion for teaching tolerance to students. Making students aware

of the intolerance in the past and those that still exist today became a major focus of mine.

Throughout my years as a doctoral student, I guided all of my work towards researching injustices and intolerance in education. I developed small-scale research projects on teaching tolerance in the classroom and the effect it had on student retention of information. I believed that if students could read about those occurrences in our society that oppressed those different from them that students would see how wrongly people can be treated and have the profuse desire to do something about it. My hope was that students would begin to understand how deeply wrong it was to treat people unjustly.

Everything that I learned through my program and in my years of teaching showed me that teaching tolerance in the classroom was something that I had to practice through my own actions and through my research. This chapter will focus on seventh grade students' awareness of tolerance. Seventh grade students were selected for this study for several reasons. In my practice as a teacher and now as my role as student coordinator, seventh grade students seem to struggle the most with intermingling peacefully. Many of the students visit me in the office for issues dealing with bullying or issues with students that, at some point in time, were referred to as friends. Also, seventh grade was the focus of my teaching for seven years. The literature and content standards are familiar to me. When speaking to teachers about the literature they include in the classroom, I was able to understand the topic being introduced to the students. Along with that, I am knowledgeable in regards to the state content standards expected to be addressed by all seventh grade language arts teachers in the state; therefore, I was able to

develop informed questions quickly with substantial knowledge and experience to support them.

My past experiences lead me to this point of gathering information from schools from each type of setting: rural, urban, and suburban. My goal was to accumulate information about the students' awareness of tolerance in the three types of school settings. Along with that information, I wanted to see what role the educators in those buildings believed teaching tolerance should be in a language arts curriculum. I wanted to know if including a critical pedagogy in the classroom was a priority for any type or all types of schools.

Process of Gathering Data:

As I interacted with students and teachers at each setting, I recorded factual information from the setting through the use of field notes. I also maintained my subjective data through the use of a journal. The students' and teachers' responses were audio recorded for my use at a later date to allow my full attention to be directed on the focus groups or interviews at hand. All of the focus groups and interviews were completed prior to my analysis of the data began. With that said, my journal entries also allowed me to voice some comparisons among the settings and people I encountered during the process as I wrote the journal entries following each school visit.

Once all my visits were completed, all the field notes were written, and all the journal entries were finished, I began to evaluate the audio data I recorded at each school setting. I began by transcribing the focus group recordings and teacher interviews from each school. I, then, delved through each focus group and interview as a means of finding repeated themes or ideas. Some themes were more prevalent in the teacher

interviews, while others were more so in the student focus groups, which provided an interesting comparison for analysis. For example, the implicit curriculum was a more common occurrence in the teacher interviews because they were more aware of their intentions as teachers. Without the curriculum actually being stated, the students were less likely to pick up on that content.

As themes began to emerge from the content, I examined how each theme fit each schools' responses for both the students and the teachers. As I found some continuity in the themes and their connection to all the responses, I also began to tie in the information I obtained through my field notes and journal entries. As all of the information began to coalesce, I began my evaluation of the research through writing my analysis and researching the themes that emerged.

I found each school to be very different in the way they handled me coming to their schools. Some were very prepared and extremely welcoming to me as I began my research. Other schools seemed to be less prepared for my arrival. While this information did not fit into the data that I recorded from the focus groups or interviews, I included this in my field notes from each setting. The two rural schools varied greatly in their preparation and interactions with me. As I arrived at Downing Middle School for the first time, I intended to speak to the principal to introduce myself and set up a time to interview the students and a teacher. When I arrived, I told the secretary my intentions and that the principal suggested that I come on the morning which I had arrived. Instead of telling the principal that I was there, she had me wait until he was available. After waiting for over 45 minutes, I had to leave to get to the next school without ever getting the opportunity to speak with the principal.

After not speaking with the principal upon my first attempt, I made several phone calls until the principal and I were able to set up a day to interview the teacher and students. The principal was quite helpful over the phone and told me the person I should be in contact with for the remainder of the research. From that point, the research went more smoothly as far as preparation was concerned; however, my experience with the students was not as open as expected. After each focus group, I recorded information about my experiences in a journal. After working with the students at Downing, I recorded the following statements:

> I explained to them the definition I was (using for tolerance), but their responses were still not very informative. I was a little disappointed in their responses. I felt like I didn't get as much information as I thought I would. My first interview with the first school (Bolton Middle School) was definitely the most informative at this point (May 23, 2012).

After accruing all of the information from the schools, I carefully reviewed, coded, and divided the data into themes in order to present them. This chapter will show the findings of my research with a qualitative presentation of themed paragraphs about the students and the commonalities and differences among the settings. I carried out a basic interpretive qualitative study to find data surrounding students' and teachers' awareness and focus on integrating issues of tolerance in the classroom. This chapter will also speak about the teachers in the various school settings and how they viewed teaching tolerance. The first part will address the students through the following themes: Getting along with peers, Understanding the word *Tolerance*, Bullying, Explicit curriculum, and the Hidden curriculum. The second part will address the same topics from the educators' perspectives. The list of questions for the focus groups with the

students and teacher interview questions are included in the appendix (See Appendix B

and C).

Students - **Relationships with Peers:**

The population of the students in each school setting greatly varied to reflect the

somewhat stereotypical descriptions awarded to each school (See Table 4.1). Within the

rural settings, racial diversity was lacking. Also, seventh grade classes at both rural

schools remained under 100 students. At Amber Middle School, one of the rural settings,

eight students participated in the focus groups. Among the eight students, there were four

boys and four girls. All of the students in the group were in seventh grade, and all of the

students were white. At Downing Middle School, the other rural location, there were

eight students included in the focus group. All of the students were white, and there were

three girls and five boys that participated. The rural schools lacked in the racial diversity

that is seen in the urban setting and sometimes exhibited in some of the suburban schools.

Table 4.1

2011-2012 Building Data for Schools Presented in Research Findings

Building Name	Number of Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Asian/Pacific Islander decent	White Students	Pupils per Teacher
Amber (R1)	220	0	0	1	216	15.17
Downing (R2)	360	2	0	0	358	13.7
Elliot (U1)	501	79	16	0	390	15.18
Kelton (U2)	519	260	45	6	185	17.9
Bolton (S1)	622	24	6	14	564	18.61
Madison (S2)	643	43	16	60	491	18.7
Middleton (S3)	505	7	6	7	461	13.47
Skapik (S4)	527	43	3	11	433	13.7

The data gathered and coded surrounding the students' peer relationships seemed familiar from school to school. The students provided information that neither seemed unexpected nor unreasonable. They viewed their schools as places where cliques form. Students that are alike one another gather together and become friends. The clique becomes a tighter, more cohesive group that does not welcome intruders. The students within those cliques tend to express themselves in a certain way, which becomes established as the new norm. Those students that do not fit their norm do not stand a chance among that group of students.

The students in the rural schools found that the cliques of students were not typically accepting of those outside the clique unless they were the rare breed of student that happens to fit more than one mold. With that said, the view from within the clique greatly varied from the view outside the clique. Those that fit into the group were not as lucid to the deliberately mean people within the group and their hasty denial of those that did not belong; however, the students that were not in the cliques, mentioned that they felt that people outside the clique to be bullied. Not all groups or all cliques were as openly mean to students outside their groups as others. One of the students claimed that, "because some of the groups don't have as many people in them, (they) will be more accepting because they want new friends to hang out with."

Depending on the cliques the students were in, some seemed to see more examples of bullying and intolerance than others, as related to the UNESCO definition of tolerance that acknowledges "respect and acceptance" of "rich diversity". This goes back to all the different stereotypes that exist within a school. The sports participants and other students that were "popular" may claim to see less bullying than those expressed as

nerds. Some of the students claim to fit into other cliques depending on the situation; again, those students are probably less likely to witness intolerance and bullying because they are easily accepted into more than one group.

Another factor that appeared to impact students' responses about their interactions with peers was gender.   At Downing Middle School, when asked about students interactions with one another, one of the female students said, "I see a lot of bullying in my opinion." In response to that, a male student retorted, "I hang out with the same types of people as her, but I don't see it happening." Another male student then commented, "It could be between two people but everyone is laughing about it." Male and female students in seventh grade are so different in their approach to interactions with one another that these responses do not seem surprising, however contrasting they are. While the students may all have images in their heads of situations they have witnessed, they all witnessed them in profoundly different ways. The female is much more personally affected by the situations she has witnessed and actually feels that she sees people being mean to one another, while the male students just see them as students messing around and having fun with one another. This situation also raises many questions about the students involved: Is it actually a matter of gender? Has this girl been personally bullied previously? Are the students in this group actually bullying other students? Is the girl overly sensitive?   With the limited information I was provided through the interview, the situation is unclear, but regardless, the students see the same situations in very different lights depending on their views of the incidents.

At Amber Middle School, when asked about the students' interactions with one another, again, gender may have been a factor that affected the students' responses. A

female student responded to the question by saying, "Um, well, if they're not, we intend to form like clans and if they're not a part of their group then they treat them with disrespect and bully them." In response to this statement, a male student said, "I disagree because I hang out with a variety of groups." Again, a situation arises in which a female student views a situation with cliques and bullying, while the male student sees the situation as a place where he can fit into more than one group.

When asked how the students get along or interact in the urban setting, the answers at Kelton and Elliot Pre K-8 Schools were very similar. Both schools had rather small class sizes. Since the schools housed grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, each grade level was smaller with around 50 students per grade level; however, the population of students was more diverse at Kelton than at Elliot. While both schools were considered urban schools, Kelton's location was much more centralized in the city, versus Elliot, which resides closer to a suburban school district on the outer edge of the major city. When the students were asked how they get along and interact at Elliot, one student responded by saying, "There are some people that are really close and some people can't stand being around each other." Another student stated, "We are kind of like family in a way." The students explained that there tend to be a significant number of arguments among the students in the school. With the students describing themselves as a family, this perspective seems to make sense. Since there are only around 50 students in each grade level, the students know each other very well. If they have been in this school for the entire eight or nine years, they probably have established very close relationships with the other students in their grade. Like most families, there will be arguments and disagreements; however the students do see the school as a "pretty nice"

place "all in all". The students felt that they have a close relationship with the teachers as well. Again, having smaller class sizes allows the students and teachers to have closer relationships and know each other better.

At Kelton, I found similar responses from the students. Their immediate answers were a little vague, with responses like "good" and "bad" when asked how they interact with their classmates; however, the trends remained the same at both urban settings. One of the students at Kelton responded by saying, "We sometimes say things to each other, but we play with each other." Again, there is a commonality with the students kidding with each other versus actually being mean and bullying one another. While there seemed to be some inconsistencies within the rural setting between the genders and their responses, in the urban setting, the responses from males and females were much more consistent. Males and females in the urban setting seemed to see situations more similarly than they did in a rural setting. From an outsider's perspective, it is difficult to see if the interactions were actually any different or if the students' perspectives were different. Maybe since the students in the urban setting have smaller class sizes, they are used to the students' interactions with one another. The students in the urban setting have potentially been with the same students for eight or nine years, and could consequently, be used to the interactions, positive or negative, among the students.

In the suburban setting, there were many similarities in the students' responses to how the students interact with one another. While some of the schools were more open and had more to share, the main theme from each school was similar. In the suburban setting, there was a common theme of cliques among all the schools. While there was some discussion about students getting along well with one another, it was more common

that the students claimed bullying existed within their school. The students stated that it existed more among certain groups of students and not necessarily with the whole seventh grade class. The class size at the suburban schools was the highest among the rural, urban, and suburban settings. The class sizes at the suburban setting more than doubled those at the urban setting.

At Bolton Middle School, the students were very open and willing to share their experiences at their school. The students wanted to share, and I felt as though I got a good sense of the students' experiences at school. I also felt like I got several different perspectives from the students. Bolton was the first school where I performed research. They left me with very high expectations for the type and amount of information I would receive from each school. After working with the students at Bolton, I recorded the following statements:

> I explained to them the process and a little about myself. I then started asking questions. The students responded well to the questions. There were moments when I felt like they were defending some of their actions from the past because they knew things they did were wrong. Some of them seemed like they were defending their school. They all seemed to be engaged in the conversation. Some of the students were more vocal than others. The girls were more vocal than the boys. I really enjoyed the discussion, but I felt a little pressed for time. (May 18, 2012)

The instant reaction for the students at Bolton was to say that students get along "badly"; however, after allowing students to be more specific, they clarified what they meant. The students explained that "nobody eats lunch alone." At the same time, students do have cliques where each student belongs. One of the students stated that, "There are always those mean kids that are jealous of you, and have nothing better to do with their lives." Another student claimed that, "Some people have a natural instinct to hate." Another student retorted, "There's got to be good with the bad, because if not you

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don't know what good and bad is." The students at Bolton seemed very insightful to the situations that happened around them. While they explained what they saw, they also read into why they thought those situations existed. They saw the cliques that existed in their school, but they also talked about how to handle those situations, and why they thought those situations happened. As far as reporting the incidents of bullying, one student claimed, it is "only good to tell teachers if it is physical, if not, it doesn't help." The students at Bolton had some sense of responsibility for their actions and the way they dealt with people that bully them. They felt as though they could not rely on others to solve problems for them. This provides an interesting perspective from seventh grade students. The students in the group that I interviewed seemed to reflect on the incidents they witnessed and in which they were involved. As mentioned earlier, self-reflection is a more mature skill that many seventh grade students do not seem to exhibit; therefore, some of the students' responses were unexpected.

After interviewing the students at Madison Middle School, the common theme of cliques arose again. One student stated, "There are groups that don't accept other people into their group." The responses at Madison were much more vague than those from Bolton. Another student claimed that "Some people get along and some people don't." The students did not specify which groups were less or more accepting than others. In one instance, a student stated, "No, there aren't racist people in the school – coming from a black guy." In response to this, another student stated, "Yes, there are racist people." This raises the question; do people act differently to this student's face than they do behind his back? A white student claimed that racism does exist, while a black student says it does not. Again, this could go back to perspectives. If the black student looks at

the situations and sees them as non-threatening and joking, maybe he does not see it as being racist; however, if a white student overhears students making jokes or remarks about race, they could see this as an act of racism.

At Middleton Middle School, the theme continued of students being in cliques and some groups being less accepting of others. The students claimed that there is a lot of "drama" at their school. The students explained that there are "a bunch of different groups of friends." Another student stated that "Some groups don't accept other groups." Much like the other school settings, cliques are established with some being more accepting of different students than others. The students claimed, "Most of the time it's not very good"; however another student expressed that, "It depends if you try to stay out of it or not." Most of the students seemed to be agreement that while there is a lot of drama among the students, there is some level of being able to choose one's involvement.

At Skapik Middle School, another suburban setting, I received the least specific answers about students' interactions with one another. As with nearly every other school, the theme of cliques or various groups of students arose again. The students claimed that "specific people and groups" were responsible for bullying. The students alluded to the idea that not all students were responsible for bullying and being mean to one another, but that certain groups were could be held accountable for the majority of the negative actions. I have some personal connections to this school, which I felt affected the students' answers to the questions I was asking them. I felt as though they were not as open and honest about their feelings, which left their responses a little vague.

In reflecting over the students interactions with one another, it was clear that some common themes arose. Among all the schools, there was a connection with the theme of

the cliques students established and in which they participated. A common connection was also that some cliques were more willing to accept new people than others. While few students directly stated this, I could draw assumptions that the groups classified as being "popular" were probably less likely to accept new people into their group unless they really fit the mold. Students that are less likely to be accepted into the "popular" group may be more likely to accept other students into the group. In addition, in the rural setting, the theme of gender arose with the students' responses. The males and females seemed to respond differently based on how they view situations in their school. While this theme did not seem to carry on to the urban and suburban setting, it was prevalent in the rural setting. The varying male and female views were fairly obvious and stood out as a difference in the rural setting, but not in the suburban or urban setting.

Understanding the Word Tolerance:

The next theme that I explored was the students' understanding of the word tolerance. In the rural setting, the students had heard the word tolerance. Some of the students in the groups had brief explanations for what the word tolerance meant based on context clues they have heard that are related to the word. All of the students at Amber Middle School in the rural setting had heard the word tolerance before; however, not all of them knew what the word meant. One student stated, "I think it means like the level you deal with something like…how long you can put up with something." Another student stated, "because I have heard like I have zero tolerance for that and I guess like that means I don't deal with it all so, I don't know." The students were on the correct track with their meaning of tolerance as related to the definition provided by UNESCO; however, none of the students claimed to have understood the word based on their

discussions of tolerance in school or the connections they made with literature they had read. The connections that the students made were through hearing the word in relationship to "zero tolerance" or from their parents saying they would not tolerate certain things. The students at Amber Middle School had more thoughts and ideas of what tolerance meant than at Downing; however, the students at Downing claimed that they had heard the word used in the past. One student said they believed that it meant, "How much you can handle," while another student said, "The ability to stand something." The students were on the correct track with their ideas, but clearly tolerance was not a topic that was heavily discussed in their classes or associated with the literature they encountered in their classes.

The trends were very similar in the urban settings. The students had heard the word tolerance before, but their definition and understanding of what tolerance meant was not common. Some of the students seemed to have a clearer understanding of the word, but again, their knowledge was not established in school. They had taken context clues from hearing the words used in the past and made assumptions about the word's meaning, while not understanding it clearly for the use of my study. The students made the comment that they had heard the word used in reference to drinking alcohol, but the students did not mention hearing the word in reference to language arts. The students more commonly heard the word tolerance in reference to health class.

In the suburban schools, three of the schools were very similar in their responses, understanding, and familiarity of the word tolerance. One of the suburban schools, did not fit the mold of the other schools. Bolton Middle School stood out amongst the group because the students had discussed tolerance in health and language arts. The students

understood that tolerance had more than one meaning depending on the way that it was used. One student stated that tolerance means, "You need to live side by side and tolerate each other." The students discussed racial tolerance when they read *The Watson's Go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis. This story is about an African American family that lives in Flint, Michigan. Kenny is the narrator who is ten years old when the story takes place. He has an older brother Byron, who continuously has behavioral problems. As a method to cure some of his problems, his parents plan to take him to stay with his overly strict grandmother in Birmingham, Alabama. As he arrives, his behavior almost changes immediately, but he goes through some life-changing events. Since Birmingham was a place of much unrest during this time period (1963), the boys witnessed and heard about things that they were not exposed to in Michigan. Both boys were in town during the church bombings, and the narrator, Kenny, believed his sister was killed during the event, until she showed up at his door at home.

This novel shows many of the struggles and hardships that African American people endured during this time period. In addition, the book showed how some of their struggles could be that of any family. The family had problems with one of the sons and his behavior, which could have been an issue of any family during this time period.

Bolton Middle School clearly stood apart from the rest of the schools, in that the students were aware of what tolerance meant, and they could make connections to where they had heard it in school. Not only that, but the students made quick reference to their language arts class and a novel they had encountered there. There were more connections with what I found at the other schools. The students seemed to share the same lack of understanding for the term tolerance. While many students had heard the

word in the past, they did not really understand what it meant. Also, many of them did

not recognize the word from language arts class or novels they had encountered there.

Being that Bolton Middle School was my first place of research, I expected

different results than I encountered, as reflected in my journal notes. Based on the

information and the open responses I received from the students at Bolton, I presumed

that I would find similar responses from the other schools, at least those classified as

suburban school districts; however, even with those not classified as suburban districts, I

felt disappointed in their lacking responses. My second stop was at Kelton, and I felt

disappointed with the students' responses and recorded the following statements in my

journal after interviewing the students at this school

> Interviewing this group of students was much less informative than my first
> interview. The other school had definitely discussed the topic in depth and all the
> students had a lot to contribute about it. On the other hand, at Kelton, the
> discussion seemed to go back to the individual every time. They had a difficult
> time staying focused, and even a bigger struggle, answering questions in a broader
> sense. They would answer with responses about what they say and do but had a
> more difficult time focusing on the school as a whole. (May 21, 2012)

I struggled to understand the difference in the students' duration and content of

their interview answers. I could not comprehend why certain groups and certain schools

contributed significantly more information and took the interview process much more

seriously, while others seemed to use it as an excuse to get out of one of their classes or

interact with their peers. I expected there to be variance in the students' responses, but

not the vast difference that was exhibited. I suspect that preparation the teachers

provided played a role in the students' responses. Also, I would imagine that the

teachers' expectations of the students also play a role in how they perform when the

teachers are not present. I would also assume that one of the largest effects on the

students would be the group of students that was compiled for the group interview. Group dynamics play a very large role in their performance in the classroom and on teams; therefore, I would expect no different from a group interview.

Bullying:

The next theme that I drew from the results, which has become a focal point for staff, students, parents, communities, and government, was bullying. Bullying has become the "go-to" word in education with the problems that arise in schools. With the increased use of the internet to communicate with each other, cyberbullying has become a new term that has become associated with bullying in the recent years. A question arises to whether or not bullying has increased in the past 20 years or so, or if it is just more prevalent in the media now than it was. Hartnig (2010) revealed some of the information she found from doing interviews by stating, "Eleanor W. Lee is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and works as an individual psychotherapist in Atlanta, Georgia. 'It is now permissible for those who are bullied to tell someone,' Lee said, 'I think that now it is an open subject so it does get reported more by the kids that are being bullied." While studies show that bullying has increased over the years, it is unclear if the difference is students' likelihood to share their experiences or if it is because bullying has actually increased. There was definitely a point (which may still occur) where men were encouraged to "take it like a man" and deal with the situations that were presented to them. Now, the stigma has changed in schools. All students are encouraged to share their problems and let administration or counselors know if students are treating them unfairly, and not showing "respect, acceptance, and appreciation" for their differences,

which UNESCO defines as tolerance (Article 1.1 of the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, 1995).

In the rural setting, the students at both schools responded similarly that bullying does in fact happen at their schools. At Amber Middle School, while the answer was common among the group, that bullying does happen in their school, when it came down to describing the types of students that were bullied, it seemed that the students seemed to be in agreement on the student that gets bullied. While the students ended up providing information about the types of students that are generally the target, the group I interviewed had one particular student in mind. I was incredibly surprised by the response I received from the students. While the student seemed to fit the category they described later, I was surprised a student with such an unfortunate situation became the target of students' ill behavior. The students seemed to target the student that struggled the most. The students described the individual that was mocked and bullied regularly. He was short, had a higher voice, played soccer, and lived with his grandparents. The students explained that kids made fun of him for being short, having a high voice, and living with his grandparents. The students shoved him into the trashcan, asked if he had gone through puberty yet, and called him a grass fairy. In this case, the students targeted the student that had many things going against him.

When looking for more trends, I found that the bullies and those that witnessed the bullying most often saw the targets as the "gamers". One student from Amber Middle School stated that, "A lot of the bullying for the kids who don't really…, they're the gamers that never go outside and kind of stick to themselves, that like anime and stuff like that." The students viewed the type of students that generally get bullied, but did not

focus on the students that are typically the threats. When asking the students at Downing Middle School, their focus shifted to the students that were guilty of the bullying. Again, they stated that bullying is definitely visible at their school, and one student said, "Bullying happens in every school." This statement is painful for every educator that has ever tried to help students. The fact that students see bullying as so inevitable is frustrating. It makes educators question what they can even do to help; however, the students at Downing focused more on the types of students that bully versus the types of students that get bullied, as the students at Amber did. The students at Downing believed that most of the students responsible for bullying were the 8th grade students and the football team. The students saw that the students that were in leadership roles were the most responsible for the bullying.

At both rural settings, cyberbullying is mentioned by the students. Both groups of students have a strong stance on the subject; they believed that the students that cyberbully are cowards. One student said, "They aren't brave enough to say it to their face," making reference to a student that sends means text messages or uses Face Book to convey mean messages.

Again, I found a trend with the students understanding and having engrained in them that cyberbullying can be the cause of depression in students and violence in schools. A student at Amber Middle School stated, "If you are texting somebody, they can't see the expression on your face like you could be laughing when you send a text but they could be crying because they don't understand." The students at Amber focused more on the mixed messages that can be sent through texting and messaging. The tone of a text, message, or email is not clear. Even if another student sends something with

innocent intentions and means for it to be a joke, the tone can be unclear, which results in hurt feelings and, over extended time, can result in depression.

Another effect that was discussed during my interactions with the rural setting was the violence that can follow these cyber interactions. One student from Downing Middle School claimed that, "Cyberbullying can result in big things like school shootings." Whereas, another student added, "They aren't brave enough to say it to their face – don't have enough nerve to say it to their face." The students wanted to stress how cowardly cyber-attacks are. In both rural settings, the students involved in bullying and cyberbullying were areas that I coded similarly and that arose as similar themes.

The urban setting provided some unique codes with less similarities than I found in the rural setting. Kelton Pre-K-8, again, provided me with the least specific information. Only four students provided any information, and it provided me with very little insight into the school culture and atmosphere. One student explained that there was, "Tension among the people in this room," which allowed me to understand the vagueness of the responses a little more; however, I was still disappointed to have missed the larger picture of the school and the students in it. Two of the responses fit into the category of who gets bullied. Instead of making general comments, one of the students makes a comment directly about a student in the room being interviewed, and said, "He gets bullied because people says he has a big head." While another student made a back-handed comment about a student in the room. Without specifically saying that she was referring to another student in the room, the tone was clear as I sat as a part of the interview. She stated, "People think they are better than everybody…bully other people."

This statement showed the tension in the room, which made the likelihood to share even less than when we began.

When coding the responses from Elliot Pre-K-8 School, there were very few similarities to Kelton, the other urban location. The responses overall were more light-hearted and open than the group at Kelton. Like the rural settings, the group at Elliot spoke about who is the target of bullying. The other focus of their interview was how they interact, which went back to the first theme. The students at Elliot explained that the students that become the target of bullying are typically students that have disabilities. One of the students responded that, "Everyone picks on everyone." With that said, the students claimed to be more of a verbal group and they say a lot of things, maybe not the most complimentary things, to one another. Since the students really get to know one another and their personalities, they know how to get under each other's skin and make disparaging comments toward one another.

In the suburban settings, many codes developed from the theme of bullying. The students' responses in the suburban schools were more complete and thorough than I experienced at some of the locations. Three of the four suburban schools had a focus on the types of students that became the targets of bullying. At Bolton Middle School, the students claimed that students that are "really, really different" become targets. Also, looks are a method for deciding factor for bullies to direct their aim. One student stated, "I see the same kid get bullied every day by the same people about the way he looks; he looks ragged and poor." One of the students in the interview claimed that he gets "bullied like every day of every school year…same things every day." Another student added, "He is really smart. People say he has a big head." At Bolton, the main focuses

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for targets were if the students were different, their looks, and their intelligence level.   In the reference the students at Bolton made about looks, the actual reason for the student's looks may have been more associated with finances than the student's actual looks; therefore, instead of looks, the reason will be adjusted to socio-economic class.

At Madison Middle School, two comments are made about the types of students that are bullied. One of the students explains that, "I used to be a nerd, then I started playing sports and making more friends," which establishes that he believes being a nerd makes students a target for bullying. Another student claimed that, "Usually the people that get made fun of are the people that are really weird." This statement reflects what the students stated in the beginning about cliques; if students can find a group to belong to, they are less likely to become the target of bullying. Similarly at Skapik Middle School, the students claimed that who a student hung out with made a difference on if they are the target of bullying. Also, a student that is popular and dresses well will be less likely to be bullied. Finally, again, similar to Bolton, socio-economic status affected the students' likelihood to be bullied.

While Middleton did not make the types of people that get bullied a focus of their interview, they expanded on the idea of the types of people that become bullies and the reason they become one. The students claimed that the people that become bullies are those that are "trying to show off," or are trying to "make themselves feel better." The students also stated that bullies are "people that other people don't like." I felt that these answers were very insightful for seventh grade students. These students also mentioned that in the group I interviewed, there were no bullies in the room. This could be a large reason for the astute responses from the students. If the students in the room were guilty

of being bullies, they may not have been so judicious on their descriptions of those students.

The students at Middleton also provided me with their explanations on where bullies learn their behavior. Several of the students claimed that bullies learned their behavior from their parents, while another student stated that they learned their behavior from the students with whom they interact. Similarly, students at Skapik Middle School credited bullying behaviors to how students were raised, if they had been bullied too, and if they were treated badly at home.

Again, I found the students to be overly aware of the situations that surround them.

At Bolton, Middleton, and Skapik Middle Schools, one common answer was expressed by at least one student at each building. Based on the responses from the group, I did not feel that this was a unanimous feeling across the group; however, at least one person from each school felt or stated in some way that basically all students in the school get bullied at some point or other. A feeling like this stated from one student created many questions for me as the researcher:

Did that student witness bullying on a regular basis?

Does he/she get bullied regularly?

Does he/she have friends that express their frustration with getting bullied?

Does he/she truly understand the definition of bullying?

Does he/she feel like the problem is hopeless?

At both Bolton and Madison, two unique codes arose. Some of the comments the students made coded under the title, "cyber", because they mentioned cyberbullying and "why" was coded to reference the reason students bullied others. The comments

surrounding cyberbullying referred to the act as being one that frequently happens in their middle school. One student stated, "Face Book, lots of people make fun of people on there." Face Book regularly comes up as a place where bullying happens. Results of studies done by The University of British Columbia (2012) explain that, "Results of the studies show that about 25-30 per cent of youth report that they have experienced or taken part in cyberbullying, compared to 12 per cent of youth who say they've experienced or taken part in schoolyard bulling." Often when students are face-to-face, they no longer feel the animosity or can understand why their words were taken in a fashion other than what the student had intended, and the two students are able to work out their differences.

The students at both suburban locations also mentioned why they felt students chose to bully others. One of the students at Bolton Middle School actually responded with personal experience. He stated, "Getting bullied makes me want to it to other or maybe do something even worse back to them." A response like this is worrisome; drastic measures are made by people that feel they have been bullied for long periods of time. Hearing a seventh grade student make a comment such as this makes me curious what his more drastic measures would include.

Sometimes students feel there is no way to avoid becoming the target of a bully. The students from Madison also discussed the reason why people try to bring down their classmates. One student claimed, "Most of the time it is, eat or get eaten. If someone is going to bully you, you go ahead and bully them." This student uses bullying as a defense mechanism. Instead of allowing someone to say something and ignoring it, they believe the best method is fight back. This seventh grade student sees the initial situation

improve, but does not understand the long-term effects of their behavior. Also, the student does not understand that a student that is able to make comebacks is probably not actually, by definition, being bullied. Bullying is more one-sided and includes a victim. If a student is being picked on, and they come back with aggressive words or physical behavior on a regular basis, there may not be a victim. Another student at Madison stated, "If someone bullies me, I would just give them a comeback and leave it at that." Again, I am not sure the student understands that bullying is a repeated act that tears down the target involved. If a student feels that they are able to say something back to the student that they believe is bullying them, it is probably the student making a mean comment, and not necessarily bullying.

Bolton Middle School stood apart from the other schools in one more way. The female students mentioned that sexual bullying had been a large problem at their school during the 2011-2012 school year. The male students made inappropriate sexual comments to the females at school and through text messages. While this may happen at other schools, the students at Bolton were the only ones to mention it. Students are very unsure of themselves and what their bodies are going through at this age. PBS Kids (2005) explains to children that during puberty, "Maybe you're self-conscious and worried if you're normal. You might feel extra-sensitive to criticism, or teasing, or just about everything. Little things might set you off. You might think nobody understands you." Since all children hit puberty at different times, some students laugh at the sexual comments and believe the comments are jokes; however, other students feel completely uncomfortable with others making sexual comments. Girls typically mature more quickly than boys; therefore, when boys make comments to or about the females, the girls

typically feel uncomfortable and do not know how to handle the situation. More often than not, it appears that sexual bullying is overlooked because students are too embarrassed to bring it to an adult's attention.

Gender appeared to be a reoccurring factor among some of the different schools, but it did not necessarily apply to one school setting. Gender appeared to be a contributing factor to students viewing bullying in different perspectives, but was only discussed in one school in each setting. In Downing, a rural location, Elliot, an urban location, and Madison, a suburban location, male students made comments regarding bullying that was typically done in a "joking" manner. At Downing Middle School, a couple of students make comments about bullying that goes on among the 8th grade students toward the seventh grade students. Then another student makes a comment about the football team bullying others. A male student responds to these statements and says, it's "more of a joke." Based on the other students' responses, they did not seem to feel this way. At Elliot, an urban location, one of the male students said that, "There is a friendly picking on and there is a serious way (of bullying)." Again, I am not sure that all students feel this way. Sometimes students say they are "joking", but their message is true. While their intentions are relatively innocent, their statements cause harm. Finally, at Madison, one of the male students claimed, "I will only bully if someone is going to mess with me, more joking than bullying." Again, joking is not always as innocent as students want to believe it is. Often, the "joking" is just as harmful as bullying. When a "friend" says something that is hurtful, it can sting worse than having a school bully make a malicious comment.

One of the most troubling trends that I found in the data I collected appeared.   At both Skapik and Middleton, the students expressed how the teachers responded to bullying. At Middleton, the students explained that the principal has made some attempts to help the bullying situation, but they were ineffective. The attempts were meetings in which the students were not engaged. One of the students explained that bullying often happened behind the teachers' back. The students felt and also expressed that, "Sometimes the teachers just ignore it (bullying)." In similar form referring to teachers, at Skapik Middle School, one of the students claimed, "I don't feel like teachers are doing anything about it (bullying). They hear about it. There are some teachers who think it kind of builds character, they don't really do anything about it." The students view the teachers as being apathetic about their needs and concerns; however, without being in the school and viewing the teachers' in their normal atmosphere, it is difficult to say if the students' feelings would be supported by the teachers' actions. Some of the comments the students shared sounded as though they had brought issues of bullying to the teachers and were turned away to deal with them on their own.

After going through and coding the information from each school type, I found that, overall I received the most thorough information from the suburban school districts. With that said, I did not feel that I could see a significant difference or consistent trends within each school classification. There were many codes and similarities that arose between a couple of schools, but not enough to make a claim about the school settings overall.

Explicit Curriculum:

The stated or explicit curriculum is derived from the textbooks the teachers use and the curriculum provided in the state content standards meant for standardized testing. Textbooks often provide a limited perspective of an event and rather the facts of the event versus the in-depth analysis and discussion on why things have become the way they are. The explicit curriculum provides information to students and teachers, but does not provide the questions that encourage thought, analysis, and learning. The explicit curriculum for the state in which the study took place did not incorporate issues of tolerance as a part of the state mandated standards for teaching seventh grade language arts. Tolerance was not referenced in any way in the state standards, which suggested that the state does not require, nor encourages teachers to address "respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures…" through the language arts curriculum and the literature that is integrated into the class (Article 1.1 of the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, 1995). The explicit curriculum from the students' perspectives and memory may vary from that which is actually established by the teacher, state, and district.

When I discussed with students what they had learned throughout the year and if they had discussed certain terms, across the board, in all of the school settings, the students provided limited responses. While some of the schools seemed to have more information than others, the responses were vague. The students tended to refer to topics they recalled and novels they read throughout their seventh grade school year. Some of the students even mentioned novels they remembered reading in other grades.

The explicit curriculum was established by the students through their memories of what they read in class with their language arts teachers. The students explained the novels they read about people that were different from them. There were not any consistent trends within the school settings as to the types of books they read. Since there were four schools included in the suburban setting, there are more connections with the books they read than the other two settings.

In each of the schools that were included in the study, the students also read from textbooks, which typically include excerpts from longer stories or books. The textbooks also include both fiction and nonfiction short stories. Generally, the stories come from different cultures and include students with names that the students in the classes of the Midwest may find unusual. While the textbooks are not the same in every school, the style remains similar. Most of the questions throughout the textbooks are made to be supportive of the state content standards.

In the rural setting, the students at Amber Middle School remembered reading *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli, *Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, and what the students claimed was called *The Mazer*; however I was unable to find any book by that title. *Milkweed* is about a boy living through the Holocaust and traveling with another family, as he lost his at a young age. Misha, the main character, meets people along the way and learns more about himself and his identity in the process. *Milkweed* has a reading level of 3.6 for Accelerated Reader, which implies that the vocabulary is appropriate for that of a third grade student in their sixth month of school. The interest level is recommended for that of a middle school student because of the topics that are addressed throughout the book. *The Outsiders* was written in the 1960's but continues to be chosen as a method to teach

about socioeconomic status. The main character, Ponyboy, is raised by his brother and has a reputation as a "greaser". The struggles in the book are between the lower-class and upper class. *The Outsiders* has a reading level of 4.7 for Accelerated Reader, which suggests that the vocabulary is appropriate for a fourth grade student in their seventh month of the school year; however, the interest level is much higher, with that of 9-12 grade. In this particular situation, seventh grade students were reading the book in their language arts class.

At Downing Middle School, also in a rural setting, the students could only think of one book they read during their 7th grade school year, and it was *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The reading level of *The Hunger Games* is 5.3, and the suggested interest level is for upper-middle grade students. *The Hunger Games* has a female protagonist, and has a futuristic setting. As to avoid her sister being sent to fight for her life, Katniss volunteers to enter a "game" that has the lower-class people of the society fight to the death, while those high in society watch for entertainment. The students had just finished reading the book when I was at the school for their interview. Besides that, the students could only remember reading some short stories from their textbooks about Native and African Americans.

At Kelton PreK-8 School, an urban setting, the students had read *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen, and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. *Stargirl* has a male protagonist named Leo Borlock, who is in the eleventh grade. As with most schools, the students are expected to act certain ways and conform to the norm. Stargirl comes to the school as a new students with her own sense of being. Leo becomes friends with Stargirl, but does not have the strength to maintain uniqueness. The book is a 4.2

reading level but a 9th through12th grade interest level. *Touching Spirit Bear* is about a teenager, Cole Matthews, who is removed from his normal life after he makes the decision to severely injure a classmate in a fight. Cole goes to a rehabilitation center where he must live in nature. Through this process, he begins to understand his wrongdoings and learns from them. *Touching Spirit Bear* has a 5.3 reading level and is suggested for students in the middle grades. Finally, the students at Kelton read, *The Giver*, which is set in a futuristic setting. *The Giver* is told from the perspective of Jonas, an 11 year old boy in a utopian-like society. The society is uniform and structured. Jonas always enjoyed his life, but the career that was chosen for him, allows him to have information that changes his perspective of everything. *The Giver* is a 5.7 reading level and is intended for students in the middle grades.

At Elliot, another urban setting, the students read certain books in book club but did not have any books they provided that they all read. Some of the students read *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli, some read *Surviving the Applewhites* by Stephanie S. Tolan, and some read *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. In *Loser*, Donald, a boy in grade school, is the protagonist of the story. Due to his lack of skill with athletic events and his unique personality, Donald is deemed a loser by his classmates. His strong home life guides him through the difficult years. This book is a 4.3 reading level according to the Accelerated Reader program, and it is intended for students in the middle grades. *Surviving the Applewhites* is about a thirteen year old, named Jake, who ends up moving in with the Applewhites after he makes the rather large mistake of burning down his school. Jake has to learn to live with the rather eccentric family. This book is at a 5.5 reading level and is suggested for students in the middle grades.

In the suburban setting, some new books were introduced, but some books that were read in the urban and rural settings also appear in the suburban schools. At Bolton Middle School, the students read *The Watson's go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis, *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, and *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech. *The Watson's go to Birmingham* is about an African American family that lives in Flint, Michigan in the 1960's. One of the son's, Byron, continues to go down the wrong path and make bad decisions. In an effort to help Byron, the family takes a road trip to visit their grandmother in Birmingham. While there, negative race interactions and major events change Byron's and his brother's life forever. This book is at a 5.0 reading level, with an interest level for students in the middle grades. *Stargirl* was mentioned previously associated with the Kelton School in an urban setting. *Walk Two Moons* has many smaller plots within the larger story. Sal is a thirteen year old girl and is the main character. She goes on a trip out west with her grandparents to find her mother after she left suddenly. Sal tells the stories of her friend, Phoebe, as they are on the trip. The plot also includes some sad points for Sal before the resolution at the end. The story is a 4.9 reading level with and interest level in the middle grades.

At Madison Middle School, another suburban location, the students mentioned reading *Bystander* by James Preller, *Nothing but the Truth* by Avi, and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. *Bystander* is about a seventh grade boy named Eric. He is the new student in his school and tries to make friends. The school bully chooses Eric to be his new friend, but Eric begins to realize that he does not agree with the bully's actions, which in turn makes Eric the new target. *Bystander* has a 4.2 reading level and an interest level for students in the middle grades. *Nothing but the Truth* is about a boy

named Phillip Malloy. Phillip gets frustrated when he starts to fail English class with his teacher Ms. Narwin. He asks to get transferred out of her English class, but ends up getting moved into her homeroom. He spends several mornings humming the National Anthem, to which he is reprimanded for making noise. He was sent to the office twice in one week for the same behavior and then suspended. Instead of admitting his mistake, he altered the story and told others. Before long, the story was spread throughout the community and country. The result of Phillip's actions did not benefit him or Ms. Narwin. This book has a 3.6 reading level and an interest level in the upper grades. *The Hunger Games* was mentioned at Downing, a rural setting, and at Elliot, an urban setting.

Middleton Middle School, a suburban setting, provided some new books that they encountered throughout the school year, but also some that were mentioned in other settings. The students at Middleton read *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. The students also claimed that they read books about the Civil War and slavery. *The Lightning Thief* is about a boy named Percy Jackson, who is a twelve-year-old boy who has always struggled in school and never really felt like he fit in with his classmates. He ends up finding out he is a half-blood, which means he is half human, half god and son of Poseidon. Due to Poseidon being accused of stealing Zeus master bolt, Percy is lead on a series of adventures to find the bolt to clear his father's name. *The Giver* was mentioned previously by the students at Kelton, and urban setting.

Finally at Skapik Middle School, a suburban setting, the students listed numerous titles they had encountered throughout the year: *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, "The Nobel Experiment" by Jackie Robinson, *Swear to Howdy* by Wendelin van Draanen, *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, and *Bystander* by James Preller. In addition, the

students mentioned they had read several stories about racism. The only two books/stories unique to Skapik were *Swear to Howdy* and "The Nobel Experiment". *Swear to Howdy* is about a boy, Joey Banks, that has lots of secrets of the trouble that he encounters. He shares them with his best friend Rusty. Something happens in the story that challenges the boundaries of secrets and friendships. "The Nobel Experiment" is an excerpt from the autobiography of Jackie Robinson that expresses the racial boundaries Jackie Robinson had to cross to make his way into baseball. The other novels were mentioned by previous schools. Bolton (a suburban setting) and Kelton (an urban setting) both stated they had read *Stargirl*. The students at Middleton, a suburban school, also read *The Lightning Thief*. Finally, the students at Madison, a suburban school, read *Bystander*, as well.

The students understood they were reading books about people different from them, but they did not seem to have much discussion about the implications of being different. The main characters in many of these books had problems and struggles they endured; however, based on most student responses, the discussions seemed to stay around the book and plot and did not venture far from that. Of the eight schools, six of the schools mentioned that there was discussion of bullying in their classes; however, tolerance and empathy did not seem to occur. Teachers tend to integrate these topics into a lesson, unit, or discussion, versus making it the main goal of the learning.

Hidden Curriculum and Critical Pedagogy:

Very few of the focus groups from the schools recognized a concerted effort to address topics outside of that which was obvious. Despite the responses of the teachers, the students failed to express that they had engaged in lessons incorporating tolerance, as

it is defined by UNESCO (1995); therefore, students were not very aware of the meaning

of tolerance through their interactions with the term as it relates to language arts. The

students would affirm the novels which had been discussed throughout the year but rarely

felt a connection to any specific lesson, beyond the standards, was being taught. At

Amber Middle School, a rural setting, the students did not have a recollection of

significant discussion regarding intolerance of any sort in language arts class. The

students mentioned that they had discussed different socioeconomic classes, but that was

about all. Interestingly enough, Amber Middle School had one of the most homogeneous

populations of students that I encountered during my research. Based on discussion with

the students, it appeared that most of the students had not been exposed to many other

settings. After my experience at Amber Middle School, I recorded the following

statements:

> The school is new and beautiful. All grades are in the one building but it is
> divided into wings. The school is brand new and beautiful. The students were
> kind and willing to share information. (May 30, 2012)

With that said, incorporating experiences with diversity through literature seems

essential. Some students are given the opportunity to learn by being immersed in a

population or culture with diversity; however, that is not the case at Amber Middle

School.

At Bolton, a suburban setting, and Downing, a rural setting, both groups of

students said there was more of a focus on bullying in their classes, and less of a focus on

racism or other intolerance. While these two schools reside in different settings, neither

of them have a significantly diverse student body. The discussions surrounding bullying

were not necessarily part of their language arts classes, but just something they heard in

school regularly. At Bolton, the students explained that they read *The Watson's go to Birmingham*, but never mentioned a discussion about racism. At Bolton, the administration and teachers were pushing the issue of bullying by doing an entire school program called Rachel's Challenge; however, I am not sure that bullying was specifically addressed through language arts class based on the student responses. The students at Downing claimed that students use racial slurs as jokes, but it is not a major problem at their school. The students did not seem to feel that using racial slurs was wrong because they were calling other white students derogatory terms that they only felt were offensive for black students.

At both Skapik, a suburban setting, and Kelton, an urban setting, the two topics that seemed to arise were bullying and racism. Both schools, were more culturally diverse than their counterparts in the same classification. At Skapik, the focus seemed to be more on bullying and was presented through language arts class as they read *Bystander*. At Kelton, the focus seemed to be more on racism which was discussed mostly through social studies class as they watched *Tuskegee Airmen*. At Kelton, issues of intolerance were not addressed through language arts. Being that the school was more diverse, I expected the students to be more accepting of differences in culture and experience; however, one of the girls in the group claimed she did not like another girl included in the interview. Her explanation was that the other girl in the group thought she was better than everyone else. In the midst of the conversation, it came to my attention that the girl that supposedly thought she was better than everyone else was from a different country. One of the students mentioned that they should go back to their

country. This made me wonder if people were less accepting of her because of her culture than her attitude.

At Madison and Middleton Middle Schools, both suburban settings, the students made direct connections to several topics they discussed in school regarding tolerance and the hidden curriculum.   Both schools discussed bullying, racism, and issues with religion. In addition, Madison had discussions regarding socioeconomic status. The students specifically remembered discussing these topics in regards to novels they encountered in language arts class. Both schools are relatively diverse in regards to socioeconomic status and slightly so with diversity. A question arose with me when analyzing the data from these focus groups: Why did these two schools in the suburban settings address issues of tolerance more than the others? Or what about the methods the teachers used stuck with the students to relay this information back to me?

Finally, I will address Elliot School. Elliot stood alone among the group of schools. While the group at Elliot had similar responses to that of some of its counterparts, the environment there was much different. The students mentioned that they discussed the separation of classes through novels in language arts. They also explained that they have many debates about their views in social studies class. While the students have discussions about some of the topics that relate to intolerance in their classes, the interactions among this group varied greatly from that of any other group. There are only about 45 students per grade level in their school, and it was obvious from an outsider's perspective that the students knew each other well. Everyone seemed to be accepting of everyone else and not afraid to discuss their differences. After my experience at Elliot School, I recorded the following statements:

I was pleased with their participation and willingness to contribute to the discussion. Overall, it went really well. This was a diverse group and had a lot to share. Elliot is a unique setting being an inner-city school with only 35-45 students per grade level. The students referred to themselves as a family more than once. (May 29, 2012)

I felt like the experience at Elliot was unique to any other school visit I had. For the most part, the students showed that with knowledge comes acceptance. While they may not like everyone they go to school with, they have learned to accept them and make them part of the family.

Looking back at all of the schools, I was surprised with the irregularly that the elements of tolerance seemed to appear through language arts content, at least through the students' perspectives. If the teachers were addressing issues of tolerance more often, the means by which they were portraying the issues to the students did not facilitate retention. In this case, the hidden curriculum was either absent from the language arts classroom or was hidden from the students' awareness.

Beyond that of the hidden curriculum, critical pedagogy did not seemed to be addressed in the classrooms. Very few instances occurred where students seemed motivated to make changes in the world based on knowledge they obtained in their language arts classes. While I felt sparks of interest and awareness on the part of the students here and there, overall, the students were not shown how their actions could play a role in the greater good of society. Some students could see and feel that changes needed to be made. Some even saw that their own actions were questionable, at best, and needed to be altered to make them a better, more sympathetic person.

Teachers – Background:

The eight teachers I interviewed were at different points in their careers. While some teachers were similar in the amount of time they had been teaching, they taught in different settings and schools, which could certainly change their abilities and desires to venture outside of the mandated state curriculum. All of the teachers had been teaching seventh grade language arts for at least two years with one of the educators teaching language arts for 28 years. The teacher from Amber Middle School had only been teaching for two years and recently graduated from college. At points during this process, I wondered if the educators felt skeptical at all about the questions I asked them and whether or not they would come back to them for any reason. For the most part, I do not believe this changed the teachers' responses.

My interview with the teachers left some questions unanswered:

- Did the teachers' education courses in college have any focus on teaching tolerance?

- Have education courses in college created more of a focal point upon teaching tolerance than they did twenty years ago? Ten years ago?

- Have the teachers had any professional development on teaching tolerance since they have been an educator?

- Have there been programs in the school outside of the language arts classroom that have focused on tolerance?

Provided that the aforementioned questions were answered, I may have had a clearer view of why or why not the teachers included teaching tolerance as part of their curriculum. With that said, the information I gathered from the teachers was compelling

and unexpected. My assumptions of what I would find from interviewing the teachers was inaccurate at best. I found myself having more in common with some teachers than others. At Madison, I found the teacher to be incredibly helpful on a number of levels. She was very open and honest with her responses, but also provided me with significant background details about her life and career. She was also open to provide suggestions and share what she does in her language arts class, not only in a verbal sense, but she also sent materials via email to me once the interview was completed.

All of the seventh grade language arts teachers I interviewed were white females at various points in their careers. Most of the teachers were toward the middle of their careers with twelve to sixteen years of experience, but the teacher at Amber had only two years in as a teacher, while the teachers at Elliot and Downing were toward the end of their careers with 28 and 36 years of experience respectively. All of the teachers had more than one year of experience teaching seventh grade language arts. The teacher at Kelton was in her first year at the school, but had taught at other schools within the same district. The teachers at every other school had been teaching in their school for at least two years.

At Kelton School and at Downing Middle School, I found it more difficult to relate to the teachers than some of the others. Both teachers were incredibly helpful and kind; however, as an educator, we did not have as much in common. Also, in my teaching experience, I have never taught in an urban or rural setting. I felt that part of the disconnection may have been because of the experience we had or part of it may have been personality. Another factor could have been familiarity. If the lack of connection

was caused by personality or familiarity, I also wondered if students felt the similar responses in the classroom with the educators.

Overall, all of the interviews went very well. The teachers seemed open and honest with me. Despite the lack of connection in some instances, the teachers seemed as ease and willing to share their experiences. All of the teachers were very helpful with gathering students for the focus groups. Some of the teachers gave me more insight into their district than others. They gave me more of an insider's view into what the district was like than I would have gotten by simply getting responses to the questions I asked. The one-on-one interview with the teachers was an appropriate method to use to gain an understanding of the schools and districts from an insider's perspective.

Relationships with Peers:

For the interview, many of the questions looked at the larger picture, rather than a case-by-case basis. I asked the teachers about the climate at their school with the focal point being on student and teacher interactions. For the most part, the teachers responded positively about the interaction among the students at their school; however, a couple of the schools felt differently. There was not a connection in the responses based on the setting of the school. Six of the eight schools felt that, overall, the students had fairly positive interactions with one another. A couple of the teachers felt otherwise.

At Kelton, an urban setting, and Middleton, a suburban setting, the teachers felt that there was dissonance among the students. At Kelton, the teacher described the climate of the school and the relationships among the students by saying, "I definitely think there are lots of problems outside of this classroom." She went on to describe the school's environment and explain that she hears a lot of noise and lots of fighting. She

stated, "I close the doors and take care of the kids in my room." Since this was her first year at Kelton, she may not have developed strong relationships with her peers, so she was not comfortable in venturing out to ask for assistance. Her reasons for dealing with the turmoil with the students on her own is unclear; however, she did not seem distraught by her independence, just matter of fact about it.

The teacher at Middleton emphasized that she felt a difference from the beginning to the end of the school year. Middleton had a unique situation during the 2011-2012 school year because they changed buildings during the winter break. With that happening, there was some unrest among the students because of the move. As with most schools, students, and staff, a routine becomes established throughout a school year. All involved get used to the everyday processes. Throwing a new facility, bus routes, and lockers into the mix can create a whirlwind of changes and emotions in tweens that have already established a norm. The teacher also explained that around this same time (probably a couple of months after the move), her district had announced that they would be making significant teacher cuts in the district. With the new building and the news of the teacher cuts, students and staff alike, were thrown for a loop. The climate and interaction among peers was one of unrest. She described the environment by saying, "With the levy and changes, the tension is palpable." While the teachers obviously felt the changes, the students responded to the unrest as well. The environment and atmosphere of a school, business, or an organization are felt and responded to by all involved. In this case, the teacher could see a response from the students, as well as the staff.

The other six schools had relatively positive feedback regarding their school's climates, but more specifically, the students' interactions. At both Bolton Middle School and Madison Middle School, the teachers responded very similarly. Both teachers explained that their schools are not perfect, but they are "great" places to be. Within that, both female teachers mentioned that some students do not get along, but it tends to take place more often in pockets and not as a whole grade level. The teacher at Madison stated that, "It's not a perfect world by any means, but there is a nice vibe with the relationships." She went on to explain that the school is not without its issues but it is, overall, a great place to be. She did not necessarily go beyond the superficial to give me an understanding of the inner workings of the school, but she showed her positive viewpoints of the students' interactions and the place that she works.

While I received a very similar start to the response from the teacher at Bolton, I was fortunate to gain some insider's perspective. The teacher explained that Bolton is a fantastic place to be, but she also presented some of the disadvantages to working in a more affluent school district. The teacher spoke about her past place of employment and referred to the parent involvement and exaggerated as she mentioned that parents were afraid of the teachers there; however at Bolton, she did not have the same experience. She stated, "Here, the parents are in charge." Having this knowledge into the school and the culture of the district says a lot.

The teachers at both Amber Middle School, a rural setting, and Skapik Middle School a suburban setting, did not elaborate much on their responses about the school's climate and peer relationships. The teacher at Amber responded by saying, "Everyone pretty much gets along. Obviously, there are always a couple kids that aren't going to

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(get along)." This teacher had only been teaching for two years, so her focus may have been directed toward the classroom and her teaching versus the students and their interactions with one another. She did not elaborate on feeling like she might miss things with the students or their interactions, which left me wondering if she was unaware of her position and how it affected her perspective. Students are smart enough to make most of their snide and hurtful comments when there is no adult supervision. As a new teacher, I am not sure that was something that crossed the novice teacher's mind while answering the question. Also, with being a young teacher, I am not sure she felt entirely comfortable answering my questions completely openly for fear of how it may reflect on her.

The teacher at Skapik provided quite vague answers as well. She made a comment about wanting the students to have more opportunities to interact outside of their groups, which showed me that she sees many cliques among the students. Cliques seem very normal among staff and students. How the cliques interact with one another seems to be where many of the problems lie with peer interactions. This teacher thought that scheduling more Mix-It-Up Days might embolden the students to venture beyond their comfort zone and meet new people. Mix-It-Up Days were a concept that came from *Teaching Tolerance*, a magazine that provides lessons and activities that encourage students and staff to learn about people and interact with people different from themselves and their group of friends. Specifically, Mix-It-Up Day was something used to have students sit with new people during their lunch period. Different themes were used to have the students sit at different tables with a variety of new students. The feedback regarding Mix-It-Up Days from the students was always mixed. Some of the

students absolutely loved the opportunity to talk to new people instead of their norm. Other students felt completely uncomfortable with the situation and would try to bend the rules to end up sitting with their regular clique. The teacher at Skapik felt that it was important to have students learning more about one another as a means to create more positive peer interactions, while she did not mention there being any major problems among the students.

The teacher at Downing, a rural setting and the most experienced teacher, answered the question a little differently. She gave her perspective of the students, seemed to vent about this generation, and mentioned pieces about the interactions among peers within her school. She began by telling me that the students were "very happy." The next comment she made was that, "They (the students) are very spoiled." The teacher focused on the students being "entitled" and having "everything", with the example she used being phones.

The teacher at Downing honed back in on the original question by referring more to the school's climate and peer interactions. She referred to the cliques in the school and then went on to mention some of the different groups, like the "skaters." The teacher told me that, "The bullies, we have been really tough on." She discussed touched on the consequences for the students and brought up suspensions. The principal at Downing took incidents of bullying very seriously. She also explained that, "We don't have too much racial (problems)." In the rural setting, there was not much diversity in the school itself. There were only two black students in the school and no other minorities mentioned by the National Center for Education Statistics (2009-2010), which is not a setting that affords for many negative racial interactions. Finally, the teacher mentioned

one student in particular from the seventh grade that I would meet in the focus group. She explained her by saying, "People stay away from her." She did not go into great detail about the student, but mentioned that she did not come from a great family and has had a rough upbringing.

The last school that I am mentioning seems to stand out from the bunch in several categories and responses. The situation at Elliot seems very different from those at the other schools. While Elliot is an urban school, it is on the outskirts of the city and surrounded by a rather affluent suburban setting. Most of the students that go to school there live in relatively affordable houses in low-crime neighborhoods. Hearing the teacher's responses about the school's climate and peer interactions was quite intriguing because it varied so much from the other schools. The response seemed incredibly honest and aware. One of her first statements was, "We've done this for so long that everyone accepts everyone else." This statement referenced the fact that the school included students in grades Pre-K through eighth grade. With only around 45-50 students in each grade level, the students and teachers have all become accustomed to one another. While they still have their cliques, the students seem to have figured out ways to interact with one another. The teacher explained their cliques by saying:

> Kids hang out with who they are most comfortable with. The African American kids hang out with the African American kids. They get along in groups in class, but when they go off on their own, they hang out with each other. In class, they will intermix across ethnic borders. They will make cracks about people's ethnicities, but they are just joking with each other.

Her statements show that she feels fairly confident in the interactions the students have with one another. While they may say some things to each other that are not entirely appropriate, the students interact in this way as a joke.

Finally, the teacher from Elliot discussed how the adults in her building interact. As a seventh grade team, she explained that they are somewhat of a clique and separated from the rest of the building; however, they all get along with one another and work well together when put in that position. Also, she explained that the teaching staff is pretty evenly split race-wise. Elliot was the only school in the group that had a rather diverse teaching staff. In my short time there, I also observed several male teachers. I did not have the same experience in the other schools. The teaching staffs at the other schools were seemingly racially and gender homogeneous, more so racially than gender.

Overall, the teachers portrayed that they could provide an insightful view of the climate at the school and understand the peer interactions. Based on career experience, some of the viewpoints of the teachers may have varied. The settings in which the teachers taught did not seem to greatly impact their responses. The two rural locations provided very different responses, as did the urban settings. The teachers all saw positives in regards to the peer interactions in their schools. Even those that felt overly optimistic about their school and how the students interact could face that not every interaction would be a positive one.

Understanding the Word Tolerance:

Unlike the previous section, there are much clearer lines in regards to which settings have addressed issues of tolerance with their students. Out of all of issues and topics addressed in this study, this was the area that surprised me the most as the

researcher. My assumptions prior to doing this study was that students in more diverse schools would be more likely to have discussed and understand tolerance than those with less diversity. While this was somewhat correct, my overall assumption was blown out of the water. In fact, the suburban schools all mentioned in some detail how they had addressed issues of tolerance in the classroom with their students. While the students may have lacked in the ability to discuss the meaning of the word itself, they had been introduced to various novels and discussions regarding tolerance. At the two rural settings and Elliot, the topics had been brought to the surface with students; however, it was not a major focal point. Finally, at Kelton, an urban setting, the teacher blatantly said, they do not discuss issues of tolerance in language arts class.

All of the teachers in the suburban schools identified and listed several project/units/discussions they have with the students in regards to tolerance. Again, the teachers do not necessarily use the word tolerance, but they discuss acceptance and differences. At Bolton Middle School, the teacher explained that she integrated an Identity Unit to have students decide who they are and learn more about themselves. She also spoke about a Civil and Human Rights Unit, stereotypes, and a unit about *Stargirl*. With the lessons she provided, she touched on a number of differences students may have and encounter. In this way, she was not focusing on one example of intolerance, but several. Likewise, the teacher at Middleton spoke about doing units on Civil Rights, differences – including sexuality, and a unit on bullying with *Lightning Thief*.

The teacher at Madison also provided many similar examples. The teacher spoke about including discussions about *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, *Bystander*, and *The Ultimate Gift*. Each of these texts recognizes some skill that she felt the students

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were lacking. While *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* is more job oriented, it also

focuses on how to treat people. *Bystander* is a young adult novel that addresses the

nature of bullying. The teacher discusses bullying in depth with the students. *The

Ultimate Gift* is about the things one should be aware of in life, but also looks at the

whole person and how to be decent toward others. All of these books or excerpts that she

uses are important to her mission to create more mindful and aware students.

Finally, the teacher at Skapik reiterated some of the concepts and themes

addressed by the other middle schools in the suburban setting. The teacher explained that

she discussed and read about the Civil War and Race Riots with the students. In addition,

the class read *Bystander* and had discussions and journaling about bullying and the story.

Stargirl was also done as a read aloud in the class. She explained that her focus was to

see how the students changed their minds and their opinions evolved throughout the text.

As I move on to the next group of schools, Amber, Downing, and Elliot, the

results of my questions changed quite drastically. While these schools made reference to

one or two things that may have come up throughout the school year, their focus did not

seem to be on tolerance. At Amber Middle School, the novice teacher stated that they

discuss and read about the Holocaust, which is addressed in sixth, seventh, and eighth

grades. In response to how she addresses issues of tolerance in the classroom, she

explained that they discuss the Holocaust and she asks questions such as, "Wow, that's

really mean! Why are they doing that?" She also mentioned that they do a lot of

discussion and some other activities. She did not mention if they discuss tolerance with

anything other than the Holocaust.

At Downing Middle School and Elliot School, the teacher's responses were very similar. They each had about one example of some way in which tolerance was touched on during the school year. At Downing, the teacher explained that they read *Night* during enrichment class, which references the Holocaust. In language arts class, she read *Hunger Games*, but pointed out that she did talk about some of the differences with the classes; however, she did not go in to teaching the book with the intention of discussing this piece of the literature. At Elliot, I found much of the same. She explained that tolerance used to be referenced in a few of the books she taught. In the past, she used *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli to reference mental disability; however, she did not discuss it much during her current teaching year. With the nature of the questions, both teachers seemed to feel as though they needed to provide a reason for not addressing tolerance more thoroughly. Both teachers stated that state testing and district assessments had become a central focus for them, which did not seem to allow them the opportunity to make tolerance more of a focus in the classroom.

Finally, I asked the teacher at Kelton about tolerance and how she included the topic in her language arts classes. Simply stated, she said, "I did not." She said that she speaks about being nice to one another during homeroom or occasionally when it comes up in class, but it is not a central focus. To give some background, she told me about the other school she taught in previously in the same district. That school, she described, was a character education school and focused significantly on teaching tolerance. She told me that, "the lessons were kind of lost."

In looking back over the teachers' responses about administrative support, none of the schools seemed to be restrained as far as keeping tolerance out of the classrooms;

however, Bolton and Madison both seemed to be supported and encouraged to include

issues of tolerance in their teaching. Not only were the teachers encouraged to include

these issues in the classroom, but their administration had imposed school-wide

movements to create awareness of tolerance and bullying. The other teachers seemed to

think their administration and colleagues would be supportive, but they are not really

interactive with the process generating a program rich in teaching tolerance. Most of the

schools are given the autonomy to teach lessons in the classroom that they would like, so

long as it aligns to the state content standards. The teachers were not explicit about the

likelihood of the administration being willing to purchase materials that would support

teaching tolerance in the classroom.

The major difference that seemed to separate the teacher's likelihood of including

issues of tolerance in their classroom was passion. The four teachers that I encountered

in the suburban setting all felt that including issues of tolerance in their class was

essential to teaching the whole child. The teacher expressed that she felt that knowing

students were lacking in basic understandings with which they should come to school;

however, ideals such as understanding what kindness means is not common knowledge

anymore. She felt that simply thing like making small lies used to be "covert," but now it

is switching the other way. The students believe that "lying to your teacher now is

nothing."

The teacher at Madison articulated her experiences to show why she had a passion

for incorporating issues of tolerance in her classroom. She spent part of her career in

Atlanta. While she was there, she listened to a very dynamic speaker while she was

there, and teaching tolerance quickly became a passion of hers. In addition to that, she

taught as an intervention specialist and saw that many of her special education students had problems with bullying. Her experiences and desire for change led her to change the focus of her classroom curriculum.

The teachers at Middleton and Skapik had very similar responses. At Middleton, when I asked the teacher why she included issues of tolerance in her curriculum, she expressed herself by saying, "I have always done it, and I don't know why. I guess it's because I think that is how it should be. Everyone should accept everyone else." Clearly this is a topic she felt strongly about even though the exact time she felt this was an essential piece of classroom is unclear. Possibly, her parents showed her these values as she grew up, and she can see them missing in today's youth. Possibly, her college coursework focused on teaching tolerance. The source is unclear, but the passion is there.

The teacher at Skapik directed students to learn who they want to become. She had the students do a unit on answering the essential questions of "Who do we want to become?" and "How do we become that person?" Instead of making the major focus on learning context clues or writing paragraphs with a beginning, middle, and end, she used the essential questions to direct the lesson. Within that lesson about themselves, the students learned content that the state mandated within a different, more valuable context. She had the students step back and look at themselves to become more self-aware and able to critique their own behavior.

Teachers can create lessons with life skills in them that directly relate to the state mandated content. The teachers' desire must exist. Teachers must yearn to create an environment that influence students to become better, more caring citizens. Learning to

read and write is essential and must be a focal point, but can easily be integrated into teaching about character and tolerance.

Bullying:

Bullying has been in the headlines continuously over the past couple of years. While the issue of bullying tends to be a problem in schools, sometimes clarity of the definition of bullying is murky, at best. If a student makes a negative comment to a student one time, bullying is not the correct term; however, if the harassment takes place over a larger time period with the same students involved and becomes a repeated event, bullying is taking place. With that said, the teachers, as were the students, were asked if they believe bullying is a problem in their school. As with the previously mentioned pieces of this study, the teachers are immersed in the culture of the building and have their own social elements to address; therefore, how the students interact with one another may not be transparent. Often students try to hide their behaviors from teachers and supervisors, which makes tackling the issues of bullying even more difficult. Teachers do not see ever interact between students and can only answer questions based on what they view from a, somewhat, outsider's perspective.

Again, there is no clear line between the setting of the school and the teachers' responses. Four of the schools felt that bullying was a problem at their school, while four others did not. Among those that responded that bullying was not a problem were Bolton, Madison, Skapik, and Elliot. The first three were the suburban settings, and Elliot is an urban setting. Middleton, a suburban setting, Kelton, an urban setting, and Amber and Downing, both rural settings, all expressed that bullying was a problem at their schools.

All of the teachers that stated that bullying was not a problem in schools did explain that bullying does happen there, but it is not a huge problem. The teachers felts that not all students were getting bullied, but there were students that bully other students. The teacher at Bolton articulated her view by saying, "The problem is how kids react and what they do about it (bullying)." While some of the students saw bullying happening, they were not confident enough or compassionate enough to stand up for the victim or tell an adult it was happening. So many of the students' negative actions are done covertly, so that teachers and administration are not aware of them, and often, witnesses of the assaults do not come forward with what they had observed. By including discussions of kindness, tolerance, and understanding in classroom lessons, the teacher's hope was that students would learn to make better decisions and stand up for each other.

The teacher at Madison felt as though bullying was not "an ongoing, stand-out issue." She explained that there are pockets of it, but that it did not affect the entire student body. Similarly, at Elliot, the teacher stated that it is "not a huge problem, but there is bullying." She articulated that it goes on with a select few students instead of with all. Again, with teacher at Skapik, the response was similar. She expressed that a few students are the culprits, but that there are other students that are followers and "go along with or laugh because they don't want to be the target." She felt concerned that "some students get away with things that others don't." The teacher at Skapik did not express if she felt this way because the administration favored some students over others or if some students lied and were sneakier than others.

On the other hand, the teachers at the other four schools felt that bullying was a larger issue. Both of the rural schools mentioned that they felt bullying was a problem.

Contradictory to her previous statement about the peer interactions at her school, the teacher at Amber Middle School stated she thinks that, "to a certain extent" bullying was a problem at her school. She explained that most students try to cover up their mean comments by saying, "Just kidding." She made sure the students knew making those comments in her classes was inappropriate. Religious comments and comments about students' disabilities were never brought up at her school. She explained that students "are very supportive of students with handicaps." The teacher did not fully express what she meant by "to a certain extent." She could have been implying that since it happens, even occasionally, bullying is a problem; however, based on her previous response that "Everyone pretty much gets along," deciding her exact meaning of "to a certain extent" was difficult.

At Downing Middle School, a rural setting, the teacher plainly stated that bullying was an issue. She expressed that, "We are trying our darnedest." To provide some background, she told me that they used to rely on ISS, or in-school suspension, but they did not have that as an option anymore. She tried to explain that the school was on a "Swiss Pyramid" and that if there is too much discipline, the state will look down upon them. This was not something I was familiar with or have heard of previously. I was not aware that the school was obligated to report its discipline to the state. With that said, I was under the assumption based on what she said that the consequences that had to be shared were out-of-school suspensions, which is why it hurt them to eliminate in-school suspensions.

The teacher at Downing gave some examples of how students are singled out from the group. She told me about a student there that had two mothers. Typically, the

people do not make remarks to the person's face, but will say the student is "gay" and call him a "faggot" behind his back. The teacher felt that one of the most divisive elements at the school was whether or not the students had phones. She did not elaborate on this topic, but based on the statement, I would imagine she felt this because the phone became a sign of wealth.

At Kelton, the teacher felt that bullying was definitely an issue in her school, but she felt it was better at Kelton that the last school in which she worked in the same district. While the students intended, she felt, in most cases for the bullying to be covert, it was often done quite blatantly. She stated that the students are "not as quiet as they think they are." The teacher also provided a specific example of some of the incidents she has seen. She portrayed an incident with some American students giving a hard time to students from another country. In this specific case, there was an incident at the beginning of the school year with a "white" girl being rude to a Turkish girl because she was "very upset that they came to our country and take our jobs."

Middleton, a suburban setting, was the school that stood out to me in reference to the discussion about bullying. I felt that most of the teachers relayed information to me based on a teacher that was in the trenches with the students on a regular basis but took a step out to look at their experiences. The teacher at Middleton was so submerged in the everyday battle that her perspective seemed hopeless. She described the bullying problem as "huge." She explained her experience by saying, "I don't know how to fix it. Consequences don't work. I try to help the kids that are being bullied (by working with them and teaching them how to respond). The reason the kids are doing it (bullying) is because they (victims) react." The students are in a new building, which is rather large

and spread out. The grade levels are provided with barriers in the form of the different floors of the school. Most of the bullying takes place within the grade levels, since they are separated by the building. She expressed that she did not really feel like the administration is aware of what is going on in the building, which may be where some of her hopelessness originates. Without guidance and administration pushing for improvement, the progress is stagnant.

Knowing if the teacher's perspective are accurate is difficult to discern. Without knowing more about the school, the district's culture, and the teacher's personality, I really count not get a clear view of the accuracy of the teacher's responses. I have witnessed both very negative teachers and incredibly positive teachers. The pessimistic teacher could take an incredibly positive situation and make it seem miserable, while on the other hand, an optimistic teacher can see the positive even in the most disheartening situation. I was fortunate in that I was able to discuss similar questions with the students and gain their perspectives in order to have a broader view of the climate, culture, and environment of the school.

Explicit Curriculum:

The explicit curriculum, as stated by the state, was the same for all of the teachers included in this study. All of the teachers included taught seventh grade language arts. Through their required content standards, the teachers were required to teach certain skills. The manner through which they chose to teach those skills were decided on more independently. Some school districts specifically state which texts the teachers must use. Some school districts design the entire curriculum for the whole school year, which is expected to be followed verbatim. Others are given much more autonomy to create

lessons and choose textbooks and novels from which to teach. The one constant is the state mandated content standards. No matter what textbook is chosen and what the school administration says, the state mandates come first.

While clearly the teachers integrate novels that lend to multiple lessons, those from the state-mandated content and life skills, the explicit curriculum is that which is obviously stated. For all of these teachers, while reading a nonfiction novel or story, there are certain indicators the teacher must focus on to meet state requirements:

- Using text features

- Analyzing examples of cause and effect and fact and opinion

- Comparing and contrasting different sources of information

- Comparing an original text to a summary to determine the extent to which the summary adequately reflects the main ideas, critical details, and underlying meaning of the original text

- Analyze information found in maps, charts, tables, graphs, diagrams, cutaways and overlays

- Assess adequacy, accuracy and appropriateness of an author's details, identifying persuasive techniques and examples of bias and stereotyping

- Identify an author's purpose and explain an author's argument, perspective or viewpoint in a text

- Compare the treatment, scope and organization of ideas from different texts on the same topic. (State Academic Content Standards)

While the teachers are not required to address all of these indicator for every lesson on informational text, they are required to recognize it at some time.

Much like what is stated for informational text, the state provides indicators for many different standards. In reading, the state sets requirements for acquisition of vocabulary, reading process, reading applications for informational text, reading applications for literary text, writing processes, writing applications, writing conventions, research, and oral and visual communication. Any parent or teacher can find these explicitly stated requirements as developed by the state. These indicators are what drives the questions for the state assessments that are given near the end of each school year.

Besides the obvious curriculum that is directly acknowledged by the state through the mandated indicators, the teachers also mentioned some of the literature they chose to read in their language arts classes. While the novels they chose could have additional purposes beyond that of teaching the state indicators, they have stated them directly for the use of teaching in language arts class.

At Amber Middle School, a rural setting, the teacher directly stated that they do a unit on the Holocaust. She did not explain which books they read in connection with it. At Downing, another rural setting, the teacher mentions that they read *Night* through enrichment class, which has ties to the Holocaust. She also stated that the students in her language arts class read *The Hunger Games*. *Night* by Elie Wiesel is an autobiography about survival through the Nazi Death Camps and directly relates to the Holocaust. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a futuristic novel that would allow for connections to the literary text requirements as provided by the state.

At Elliot, an urban setting, she mentioned that in the past, she used the book *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli. This choice is fiction and would allow for connections to reading applications for literary text. At Kelton, the teacher makes no reference to novels she

includes in the classroom. My assumption based on her exclusion of novels they encounter throughout the school year leads me to believe she probably references a basal textbook as purchased by the school or district. Basal texts have excerpts from longer stories and also include both fiction and nonfiction short stories, which would allow the teacher to align the reading to the standards.

At Bolton Middle School, a suburban setting, the teacher mentioned that they do a unit on Civil and Human Rights, but did not reference specific texts. By doing a unit on Civil and Human Rights, the teacher is addressing informational text, which directly aligns to the state standards for reading. She also mentioned that they read *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli in her class. This is an example of a literary text and realistic fiction.

At Madison, the teacher explained that she uses *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey in her class. This text is nonfiction, which would allow the teacher to reference the aforementioned state mandated content standards for informational text. She also mentioned her use of *Bystander* by James Preller, which is an example of realistic fiction. Finally, she explained her use of *The Ultimate Gift* by Jim Stovall, which is a fiction story about a greedy, money-hungry family that is about to inherit money through a will, which will allow them to live a life without working. For one of the members of the family, the story is different. His inheritance is learning how to take care of himself.

The teacher at Middleton expressed that she used a collection of books for literature circles on Civil Rights and also used the basal textbook for short stories about Civil Rights. Within those texts, there could have been both historical fiction and nonfiction. This would allow the teacher to address many different standards provided

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from the state. She also mentioned her use of *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry.

Finally, at Skapik Middle School, the teacher mentioned her use of excerpts and texts about the Civil War and race riots, which were informational text, nonfiction, and/or historical fiction. In addition, she used *Bystander* by James Preller and *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, which are both realistic fiction and would align to literary text content standards.

The teachers stated which books they used in their classroom that could have ties to teaching tolerance; however, the explicit curriculum is the novels and stories actually presented to the class. In addition, the state mandated content standards are explicitly stated and published for all to see. Students, teachers, staff, and parents could go to the teachers and ask which books or stories the teacher addressed throughout the school year to better understand what their child will cover throughout the school year; however, that is only a glimpse of the surface of the teaching. What the teacher incorporates into his/her teaching goes far beyond the stated curriculum. Being in active member of the class is sometimes the only way to get a true sense of all of the other lessons that are taught and modeled through the school year.

Hidden Curriculum and Critical Pedagogy:

What goes beyond the clearly listed content in the classroom is the implicit curriculum. The teachers I interviewed all provided me with books, novels, or stories they utilize to teach tolerance in the classroom; however, very few examples were provided to show how the teachers actually addressed the issues of tolerance. Reading a book that shows acceptance or differences in characters may or may not be enough to allow the students to properly address or handle similar situations they encounter in real

life. The learning will, most likely, need to go beyond the reading. Students need to have connections with experiences that they see characters endure. They need to gain empathy for the characters to see how acceptance and tolerance is important. Teaching is not as simple as stating an idea or concept once throughout a school year and hoping the idea resonates with the youth in the classroom; teaching is reiterating through actions, words, lessons, and activities concepts that you expect students to retain for the next forty years to make them more thoughtful and contributing members of society. While teaching the state standards is important, lessons can and should go far beyond the indicators to connect with the students' lives and experiences.

I encountered teachers on all levels of the spectrum as far as their awareness, passion, and interest in teaching tolerance in their seventh grade language arts class. The teachers at both Madison and Bolton felt the strongest connection and desire to include a moral education. When asked if these teachers integrate issues of tolerance into their teaching their responses were, "Absolutely, I do," and "Absolutely," respectively. The teacher named a few of the texts she used in class, but also gave more details as to what topics she addressed in class and why she chose those topics. The texts she chose covered a wide range of topics, but many that focused on the student as a whole and the type of person they would like to be. She intended for the students to think about how to be decent to one another, and beyond that, how they would like to be as an adult through their career. The teacher explained that she used a certain text to discuss bullying and its effects on others.

I was fortunate that the teacher at Madison provided me with an explanation for her reasoning behind including these issues in her class. Her past experiences gave her

the drive to make her classroom a place to learn more than what the state required. Previously in her career before she worked at Madison, she expressed that she used to be an intervention specialist. Between that and listening to a "dynamic" speaker in Atlanta before coming to her current position, she realized teaching tolerance was a passion for her. She felt that by incorporating issues of tolerance into the classroom, that her students seemed more comfortable sharing their experiences with the class.

Along similar lines, the teacher at Bolton felt a passion about including issues of tolerance in her class. She addressed the students' identity and discussed who they felt they were and wanted to become. Also, she told me she created units on Civil and Human Rights, stereotypes, and belonging. Her passion surrounding her curriculum stems from her desire to teach students the moral and character values that are lacking from their home lives. As with the teacher from Madison, she felt that by giving the students an outlet for discussions about their differences, students were more likely to be open about their feelings in class, which she felt was a positive aspect of teaching tolerance. Also, the teacher at Bolton felt the importance of critical pedagogy. Not only did she discuss the need for larger change in society, she helped the students become change agents in society. The students researched charitable organizations in order to find out how to be involved and make changes. Their learning was followed by action, which is at the root of becoming a contributing member of society.

Both Madison and Bolton Middle Schools expressed their curriculum to parents at open houses by stating the texts with which the students encountered during the school year, but did not share how they would handle the topics and issues of these texts.

Middleton and Skapik Middle Schools were comparable on their approach to the implicit curriculum as well. Both teachers I interviewed reviewed topics they covered throughout the school year, such as Civil and Human Rights, stereotypes, and bullying. Both teachers seemed to believe that incorporating activities and discussion in the classroom about the differences in society was important, but neither of them seemed convinced of the greater good of their efforts. The teacher from Middleton expressed that she only believed it made a difference for some students. She explained that if a student got bullied all the time, he would probably not change and open up in a class even if the class discussed topics that hit home for the student. For those that are the bullies, she stated that, "They are taught from birth from their parents; you can hear them puking out what they have heard from their parents from birth. It is hard to combat that." Her responses felt somewhat hopeless. While she created lessons that when beyond the text to discuss differences, the belief that it changed anything was absent.

Similarly at Skapik, the teacher felt the importance of integrating lessons rich in diversity; however, she was not convinced of its practical benefit for the students. The teacher could see the students open up more about themselves when they contributed to discussions of tolerance; however, she was not convinced that the students actually changed their actions because of their knowledge. The students may have known and understood the most benevolent response; however, the teacher was not sure that the students altered their behavior anyway after these lessons. She stated, "I think they open up more about themselves, but I don't know if I see them change their actions. That is the part I struggle with." I understood the teacher's concern. I believe that is probably a fear, to some degree, for every teacher. What will the students do with the information

we provide to them? Knowing information is much different from using it. Even with spending a significant amount of time on teaching concepts, students may not take the information they learn and utilize it. While some students may not use their knowledge immediately, with maturity, the students may come back to what they know when they are brave enough to step out from behind leaders to make their own decisions.

The teachers at Amber, Downing, and Elliot schools had similar responses; however, the school settings did have some effect on the teachers' feelings regarding the need to include topics beyond the state mandated curriculum. Where I felt a strong sense of passion and/or awareness of the importance of making tolerance part of the curriculum with some of the teachers I interviewed, I felt this was lacking among the teachers at Amber, Downing, and Elliot. These teachers did not seem to think it was a waste of time since they addressed it is some manner in a small way throughout the year, they also did not make a great attempt to make this a focal point of the curriculum beyond the state indicators.

At Amber Middle School with the novice teacher, she explained that they did some activities with differences, but they were in regards to the Holocaust. She did not necessarily feel that the students were more likely to relate to the characters or situations discussed in class when they were connected to tolerance. The teacher felt that overall the students were fairly accepting of each other's differences. She expressed that the students rarely say much about themselves in the class. This led me to some questions about her classroom that were left unanswered: Has she established a classroom setting where students are uncomfortable sharing about themselves? Has she created an

environment like that on purpose? Does the teacher have a natural rapport with the

students? Is it more the content of the class that makes the difference or is it the teacher?

At Downing, the teacher does not intentionally focus on teaching tolerance. She

remarked that the topic had been vaguely discussed in connection with *The Hunger*

Games by Suzanne Collins. In this novel, socioeconomic classes rival each other. The

teacher mentioned to me that she did not have intentions to discuss the differences in the

social structures of the society, but it happened to come up in class. While the reading

level of *The Hunger Games* is around seventh grade, the concepts of the book are quite

mature. As entertainment for those in the upper class, children at the bottom are chosen

from each district to fight to the death for the others to watch. Students are typically very

interested in this book and series. With the release of the first movie and the remaining

two of the trilogy yet to come, students are quick to choose this book; however, the book

is very dark. With only the discussion of the state mandated indicators, and looking

simply at plot, vocabulary, and figurative language, the lesson or moral of the book is

lost. Even the overriding theme of the book is not enough to discuss to get past the idea

of teenagers killing each other as a form of entertainment. If this book is part of a

curriculum, there are lessons that reach far beyond the explicit curriculum.

In sharp contrast to the novice teacher at Amber Middle School, the teacher at

was in her final two years at Downing Middle School. While they were at much different

points in their career, their approach to addressing tolerance seemed similar. After

leaving the school and interviewing the teacher, I made the following note in my journal

> The teacher does not make a focus of teaching tolerance. She made the point of
> saying she was stretched so thin with assessments and meeting indicators that she
> doesn't have time to put a focus on teaching tolerance. (May 23, 2012)

During our interview, the teacher stated, "We don't teach social issues just to teach social issues." She continued to explain that the students discussed Hitler in eighth grade, but that was in connection with the Holocaust as a historical event, not as a subject of intolerance specifically.

At Elliot, there was not a major focus on teaching tolerance either. There had been times through the teacher's career when she had integrated texts that were helpful to address students' differences, but not it is not a much of a focus. The setting at Elliot was much different from that of Downing and Amber. Not only was Elliot an urban school, but it was also very diverse and had very small class sizes. The students knew each other very well and had been with each other since Pre-K in some cases. The teacher stated that Elliot "is probably a unique school. (It is) the best situation she has ever been in." After my experience there, I wrote the following statement in my research journal

> This was a diverse group and had a lot to share. Elliot is a unique setting being an inner-city school with only 35-45 students per grade level. The students referred to themselves as family more than once. (May 29, 2012)

While the teachers at this school do not focus on teaching tolerance at Elliot, the setting seems to have provided a learning situation for those students from early on in their education. The students are able to see their differences and also see they can accept one another even though they may not love everything about each other. Downing and Amber Middle Schools did not have a strong sense of family and acceptance among the students, which shows that they may have benefitted from a curriculum richer in teaching tolerance.

Finally, in the discussion with the teacher at Kelton, I felt that there was not much to the implicit curriculum. The teacher readily stated that she did not address issues of

tolerance in her classes. The teacher used stories to teach reading and writing skills, but she did not address issues of difference and tolerance.   The students were not aware of the term tolerance and after having the discussion with the teacher, I understood why. At the time, I felt at a loss for asking questions since most of the questions I asked discussed teaching tolerance, but I should have asked her specifically what drives her lessons. The only area that she mentioned was a discussion point in one of her classes was bullying; however, the topic did not arise in language arts class, but rather in homeroom.

Analysis Comparing Rural, Urban, and Suburban Schools through Teacher Interviews:

Interviewing the teachers was an interesting process with unexpected results. I created nine questions that I went into every interview with the intention of discussing; however, to my surprise, my questions were all written with the expectation that the teachers I interviewed would teach tolerance, in some form, in their classroom. What I found was that not all teachers include issues of tolerance in their classroom, and they strictly teach state indicators. A moral and ethical education was not involved in many of the teachers' curriculums. When I found this to be the case, my questions were lacking substance to get more information from the teachers. I found myself striving to generate new questions to find reasons for teachers leaving this information out of their classroom curriculum.

The interviews with the teachers all had one element in common: all teachers that I interviewed were white females. No matter which setting, I found myself interviewing a woman at various times in her career. Obviously teaching is a female dominated career. According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2010), in 2008, there were 754,000 males in the teaching profession and 2,248,000 females; therefore, it was likely

that I would encounter a larger number of female than male teachers. While the teachers

all had their gender in common, gender did not appear to be a factor in what they taught

or how they approached the topic of tolerance in the classroom.

After comparing the different school settings through the teacher interviews, my

assumptions I previously made about the setting and their awareness of tolerance greatly

changed. I believed I would see the most focus on teaching tolerance in an urban setting

due to the diversity that exists in these settings. While writing in my journal after

interviewing the teachers and students at Kelton, I wrote,

> I thought for sure that the teachers would integrate issues of tolerance into their
> curriculum. She made it sound like they rarely talk about it. Teaching tolerance
> is definitely not a large part of their seventh grade language arts curriculum. (May
> 21, 2012)

I considered that the teachers would incorporate teaching tolerance into their curriculum

to make students understand any incidents of intolerance they might have encountered.

Intolerance stems from people not accepting other people for some reason. Based on the

racial and ethnic diversity that exists in the urban school settings, I believed I would see a

greater likelihood for teachers to implement a curriculum rich with literature

encompassing intolerance or involving differences. I expected the teachers to use a

critical pedagogy because of the need to be change agents in society to create better

places in which to live.

My research produced some unexpected results. I found that teachers were more

likely to integrate issues of tolerance in their classrooms in a suburban setting than in a

rural or urban school setting. All four of the teachers that I encountered in the suburban

setting incorporated novels and lessons that encouraged students to accept one another for

their differences. With the remaining four schools, the teacher at Amber Middle School, in a rural setting, integrated tolerance through one unit during the school year. Neither of the schools in the urban settings divulged a critical pedagogy to promote understanding of one another.

At Downing Middle School, in a rural setting, the teacher elucidated her reasons for evading the topic of tolerance; the state tests have become such a focus at her building that there really was not time for her to discuss accepting one another. The teacher at Elliot School, an urban setting, also mentioned state testing. While state testing certainly impacts the district, there is much more to learning and teaching the one standardized test during each school year.

Analysis Comparing Student and Teacher Interviews:

In reviewing the answers the students gave compared to that of the teachers, I found some similarities and some conspicuous differences. At Amber Middle School, a rural setting, the students and the teacher both agreed that bullying does happen in their school; however, the teacher was not aware that the students mock and ridicule students with disabilities. Given that the teacher at Amber was young and in the beginning of her career, she may not have seen the students behaving negatively toward students with disabilities. Most of the teachers in each district explained the bullying happening in their school as being covert. By and large, most students try to hide their negative actions from teachers and administrators.

At Elliot School, in an urban setting, the students' and the teacher's responses were very similar. Most of their information aligned to one another. When asking the students who gets bullied or ridiculed by the students at their school, students with

disabilities was one of their responses. The students went on to give details about a student with Asperger's Disorder that is frequently mocked. During the teacher's interview, she never mentioned students with disabilities being a target for bullying.

The students at Kelton School, in an urban setting, did not seem to reveal as much information to me as some other students. With that stated, I am not sure if the discrepancies in the teacher versus the student results came from withholding information or truly a variance in perspective. The students averred that people in their school interact with little conflict; however, the teacher maintained that there are significant problems with students' interactions and many fights. This teacher has only been in the school for one year, so her perspective from her previous location may have impacted her response.

At Bolton Middle School, in a suburban setting, the teacher and the student responses were very similar. There were few discrepancies in the information I received from the two. Based on the interviews and the answers I received, clearly bullying and tolerance was a topic that was discussed widely and often in the school and in the language arts setting. This leads me to believe that the students have had a wide variety of opportunities to discuss or write about their concerns with the topic of bullying in the classroom. Given the chance to reveal their thoughts and feelings on the topic with their teacher, many of the students have taken that opportunity. The teacher had, therefore, been given information about the school's climate from her students' perspectives. Opening up this type of communication between the teacher and the students gave the teacher a greater understanding of what was going on in the building, even if the students tried to make their negative behavior covert. A very similar situation arose with Madison

Middle School, also a suburban setting. The student and teacher responses were very similar and contained very little infrequency.

At Middleton Middle School, a suburban setting, the students' and teacher's responses were also very similar. Unfortunately, the undertone of both was negative and almost without hope. Both the students and the teachers made it clear that bullying was a problem in their building. From the students' perspectives, the people that bullied the most do it covertly; however, when it is overtly done, the teachers sometimes ignore the problem instead of addressing it. The students see that the principals have had meetings about bullying throughout the year, but "no one cares," or changes their behavior after the meetings. From the teacher's perspective, she felt as though they (the teachers and administrators) have tried everything and that nothing worked to stop bullies from bullying. Both the students and the teacher saw bullying as a problem, but both of them also seemed to think there was no solution for it.

At Skapik Middle School, a suburban setting, there was also a variance in the responses when bullying is the topic. The teacher saw that some students in the building were able to get away with more than others, referring to the administration not giving everyone equal consequences. On the other hand, the students felt as though the teachers were not doing enough to address the bullies. One student stated, "I don't feel like teachers are doing anything about it. They hear about it. There are some teachers who think it kind of builds character. They don't really do anything about it." In Skapik, there was some lack of understanding between the administration and the teachers on who should take action against the bullying and what should have been done to resolve the issues.

The research questions generated for this study guided me to find if schools in various school settings were addressing issues of tolerance in seventh grade language arts. My findings showed that some teachers do focus their content on issues of tolerance in seventh grade language arts. In connection with the previous statement, some students were aware of issues of tolerance and their role in language arts class; however, there were also many situations where the students did not seem privy to these topics. In some circumstances, the students were confused about the term *tolerance.* While their teacher had incorporated issues that would encourage them to become more tolerant of others, the students were unfamiliar with the term. In other instances, the teachers had not merged issues of tolerance with their language arts curriculum.

Summary

Table 4.2

Research Analysis: Question 1

Question 1	Is tolerance addressed in 7th grade language arts?
How was data collected?	• Focus groups with 7th grade students • Informal interviews with 7th grade language arts teachers
What were the findings?	• Teachers – Yes, in some schools • Students – No, in most schools
What does it mean?	• Disconnect between responses from students and teachers
Quote	"You need to live side-by-side and tolerate each other." (S1 Student)

In response to research question one (see Table 4.2), I found that the answer varied between the students and the teachers. I answered the question through the use of

the student focus groups and the informal interviews with the teachers. All of the

suburban school teachers claimed that they addressed issues of tolerance through their

seventh grade language arts curriculum. One of the teachers in the rural setting

mentioned that she addressed issues of injustice in conjunction with studying the

Holocaust, but did not intentionally cover issues of tolerance for their own sake. On the

other hand, the students, for the most part, claimed that tolerance was not addressed in

their seventh grade language arts classes. There was clearly a discrepancy between the

students' and the teachers' responses. As teaching tolerance was not part of the explicit

curriculum, students were not as clear about how the topics they encountered in class

directly related to tolerance, with the exception of one school.

Table 4.3

Research Analysis: Question 2

Question 2	How aware of tolerance are seventh graders?
How was data collected?	• Focus groups with 7th grade students
What were the findings?	• Mildly aware • Associate with other settings or subjects • One setting was unique
What does it mean?	• Schools are not directly addressing • Using other language • Not a central focus
Quote	"Zero tolerance" (R1 Student) "The ability to stand something" (RI Student)

Research question two allowed me to focus on the data I gathered through the

student focus groups. The data showed that students were mildly aware of tolerance, but

typically associated the term to other settings or subjects besides language arts (see Table

4.3). For example, the a couple of students at Amber Middle School made connections to the word *tolerance* by associating it to their parents warning about not tolerating some behavior or attitude that the children had exhibited. Another student connected the term to health class and tolerance in reference to alcohol consumption.

Based on the findings from this study, schools are clearly not addressing the term *tolerance* through their language arts classes, with the exception of one school. With the information gathered from the students and the teachers, there is evidence, in some cases, that the teachers are addressing issues related to tolerance; however, they are using other language and not actually incorporating the term *tolerance.* On the other hand, clearly some teachers are not making issues of tolerance a central focus in their seventh grade language arts classes.

One school that stands out to be an exception from these statements was Bolton Middle School in a suburban setting. The students at Bolton clearly understood what the word *tolerance* meant, could explain the meaning, and make connections to literature and situations they have witnessed within their school. The teacher made tolerance, as connected with UNESCO's definition, a central focus of her teaching in seventh grade language arts and connected literature that was rich with instances of injustices for students to read and analyze.

Table 4.4

Research Analysis: Question 3

Question 3	Does the school setting affect students' awareness of tolerance?
How was the data collected?	• Focus groups with 7th grade students
What were the findings?	• No
What does it mean?	• The students did not relate the term to their lesson
Quote	"I think it means like the level you deal with something…how long you can put up with something." (R1 Student)

Using focus groups with seventh grade language arts students provided the

findings for research question three (see Table 4.4). Setting did not affect students'

awareness of tolerance. Since only one focus group stood out from the rest in regards to

their awareness of tolerance, setting was not linked to their awareness. While the

students in several schools were introduced to topics incorporating issues of tolerance in

language arts, the term *tolerance* was not presented to the students during their learning.

When asked about their knowledge of the word *tolerance*, students did not make the

connection with the concepts from class and the word.

Table 4.5

Research Analysis: Question 4

Question 4	Are teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward tolerance affected by the school settings?
How was data collected?	• Informal interviews with 7th grade language arts teachers
What were the findings?	• No
What does it mean?	• All teachers could see the value
Quote	"Lying to your teacher is now nothing." (S1 Teacher) "I did not (incorporate issues of tolerance)." (U2 Teacher)

Informal interviews with seventh grade language arts teachers from each school setting provided the data for the fourth research question guiding this study. After analyzing the data, the study showed that teachers' attitudes and perspectives toward tolerance were not affected by school setting. All of the teachers could see the value of incorporating issues of tolerance into their school settings; however, not all teachers felt that they had the time to add another piece of information to their all-ready packed curriculum.

Table 4.6

Research Analysis: Question 5

Question 5	Does the type of school setting affect the teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward including social justice issues into a seventh grade language arts curriculum?
How was data collected?	• Informal interviews with 7th grade language arts teachers
What were the findings?	• Yes
What does it mean?	• Less pressure • More support
Quote	"I think they open up more about themselves, but I don't know if I see them change their actions. This is the part I struggle with." (S4 Teacher)

As a result of the study, I found that school setting did seem to impact teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward teaching tolerance in their seventh grade language arts class (see Table 4.6). The teachers from suburban settings were more likely to address topics and texts that reflected situations that would lead to discussions and activities about acceptance and tolerance. In the rural and urban settings, one of the teachers provided an isolated incident of discussing issues of tolerance in connection with her unit on the Holocaust; however, it was not a central focus of her teaching. At the other three settings (one rural and two urban), the teachers all explained that the state assessments had become the central focus for them. While the state assessment affects all of the teachers involved in the study, the suburban teachers were less likely to mention the assessments as a major concentration.

While not all of the teachers made the issue of teaching tolerance their nucleus to guide their curriculum, all of the teachers seemed to understand the importance of a moral or character education. All of the educators could see that some of the life skills that used to be a part of children's home lives are now lacking. Within the focus groups, some students could also see that a few of their classmates were lacking the fundamental skills of knowing how to treat their peers. The students, in some cases, were intuitive enough to explain that they felt they learned their behaviors at home, or in some situations, they were not taught right from wrong at home. The teachers seemed to feel that teaching students right from wrong had become their responsibility, but felt torn on how to address all of the state mandated standards and incorporate an education rich in elements of tolerance.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching tolerance in the classroom must be a priority, even if alongside of the state content standards. Half a century ago, in the United States, people were fighting to have integrated school systems. Around eighty years ago, women were fighting for their right to vote. Today, students are fighting to be accepted for their differences that were fought for and won so long ago, and for some, the fight still remains. Seemingly, those struggles should be long gone, and everyone should accept each other's differences; however, we all know that, unfortunately, that is far from the case. Regrettably, the place that houses much of the torment for today's youth is in school. I often think about this and why it happens during this time in life. Then I wonder why people seem to grow up enough to stop and others do not. Middle school is such a difficult time for numerous reasons: typically, changing course schedules, having a locker, going through puberty, and sometimes, making new friends. Adding unaccepting and cruel people to that list makes it nearly unbearable and sometimes so. Unfortunately, some parents do not find the value in teaching their children the importance of accepting others' differences, and instead, actually make jokes and ridicule people in front of their children. This behavior then is perpetuated by their children. Often, the negative behavior comes out at school because there is such a variety of students there and also typically a supporting cast of other students that are not aware of the consequences of their harsh actions. Since not all

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parents are addressing issues of tolerance and acceptance at home, the job, consequently, relies on the teacher.

Teaching tolerance seems to go beyond the desire just to teach. Someone or something seems to spark educators to make a larger difference. Whether or not the larger difference is made is still questionable; however, I know that during an interactive lesson focusing on tolerance, the majority of the class was involved in some way. Even if the effects are not long term, the students were given the opportunity to think of something "bigger" than themselves for one period out of a school day or several times during a month, or however often the educators are providing those opportunities in class. As an educator, I have always felt that teaching beyond the text is incredibly important. Teaching tolerance can be done through reading and writing; the teacher just has to make a concerted effort for it to be a focus. Most states are not emphasizing the importance of learning beyond standards and indicators; however, teaching the whole child seems to be something that many teachers find important and are including in the classroom despite the states' apathy toward the subject.

The issue of bullying and a lack of tolerance in schools is a major concern. This study was an attempt to view and compare students' awareness of tolerance in different school settings. Addressing students awareness of tolerance is not necessarily a topic of unbridled importance to scientists and certainly contains no cure or outcome that will "fix" society; however, acknowledging a topic that is not commonly addressed allows researchers to add knowledge to the educational field. Educators cannot be satisfied with simply addressing the indicators provided by the state. Understanding why assessments and curriculum are derived by the state in a manner that does not address a moral and

character education is beyond my realm of understanding. Needs and interests of the state's standings in regards to test scores seem to take precedence over the needs of children. Students are seen as masses of numerical figures instead of individuals that need to grow to be positive contributing members of society. In a society driven by content standards and standardized testing, often the moral curriculum is put aside to focus on elements to help pass a test. Every year, students are aware of an assessment they are given and the relevance surrounding it because educators have made it a focal point for the school year. Teachers make the state assessments a focal point because the state and nation have given the assessments so much clout. State mandated student assessment scores play a part in educator evaluations, which, in many places directly affects teacher pay. As one affects the other, teachers feel tremendous pressure for their students to perform well on a singular evaluation of their performance for an entire school year of learning. The direction education has taken is no surprise when considering that so much weighs on the outcome of one state mandated assessment. Educators feel as though they will be trampled by the impending aftermath of one standardized assessment of student learning if they do not emphasize solely and specifically what they state dictates.

Where does this leave the hidden curriculum and critical pedagogy? Are the children in today's schools learning to be contributing, influential members of society? Are these characteristics valued by society in general or just certain parts of society? These questions led me to some of the questions that I developed for the students. From the students' perspectives, I was interested to see if teachers were addressing issues with the students that went beyond that of the seventh grade language arts content standards.

Language arts is an area that allows for a significant amount of autonomy on the teacher's behalf, so long as the district in question allows it. Often language arts teachers can advocate for their novel selection to include texts that will adhere to the state mandates and provide standards of learning, but will also allow for an educator to discuss issues and topics that go beyond the classroom. Teachers do well to choose texts that inspire dialogue regarding subjects needing clarity and comfort. Allowing students to discuss issues that are not typically a part of dialogue among teens is important. Children need to understand how to approach issues in a respectful, empathetic manner in order to become contributing and fair members of society. In order for students and children to have a more just approach to members of society, they need knowledge about people different from themselves. Making judgments about people is easier when ignorance exists.

Schools have a larger responsibility of having students learn how to synthesize information. Students need the skills to take information they are given and produce other ideas based on what they are provided. True pedagogy must provide more than facts and figures, but include useful skills to encourage students to think for themselves.

I have always felt a strong connection with teaching students about tolerance and understanding those different than themselves. Language arts is a subject area that has allowed me to integrate stories and characters to whom the students could connect. I was able to produce lessons and activities that encouraged the students to feel empathy for the characters. Creating atmospheres of understanding and comfort in a classroom is extremely important. Students should feel secure with their differences. While

addressing differences can, in the beginning, be somewhat awkward, the outcome is typically positive for the teacher and students.

After interviewing students and teachers at schools in rural, urban, and suburban settings, the findings showed that students in suburban school settings were most aware of issues of tolerance. The teachers in the suburban setting were most likely to teach about tolerance in their seventh grade language arts curriculum. The students needed to learn information that was not created for a state test or a school assessment, but rather that would enrich their lives and make them develop empathy for those unlike them. A lack of understanding typically represents a lack of respect. With researchers and writers expressing the need for students to have understanding, awareness, and respect for other cultures as a skill in the 21st century, an imperative is including issues of tolerance in the curriculum in middle schools. By including this type of information in the classroom, students became more aware of students' negative behavior and the need to find a solution for it.

Admittedly so, I went into my interviews with the teachers with a fairly biased feeling regarding the importance of teaching tolerance in the middle school language arts setting. As mentioned previously, I feel it is a necessity to provide more than state mandated content standards into a classroom setting as an educational experience. Students need more than to learn how to use context clues and identify similes and metaphors. Public education has a greater good that often gets lost among the enabling parents, the business driven school boards, and completely disconnected government decisions. Students must take skills with them that will get them beyond an achievement test. School skills are incredibly important, but a test is not the only focal point in life.

Students must learn how to peacefully and respectfully work and communicate with (all) others in society.

The Problem:

Taking a more worldly view of the problem is that overall there is a lack of tolerance among people. Unfortunately, children are raised in homes that encourage intolerance and foul behavior to those that are different from them. While teaching tolerance seems to be a task or responsibility of a child's parents or guardians, often times, it seems the focus on this has been devalued. Instead of learning to accept one another, children watch and listen to the people closest to them as they degrade or belittle certain groups. As the children move through school, the influence from their home lives makes an impact on their behaviors, attitudes, and actions toward others. Children need to learn the importance of tolerance in creating a more peaceful and understanding world. Not only will accepting others impact their own life, but it could greatly impact the lives of those around them. With another pending change on the horizon with the implementation of the Common Core, the discussion of what should be included in an effective curriculum should be had with key stakeholders.

Research Questions:

This study attempted to answer the following research questions, which focus on the role of tolerance in the language arts curriculum at the seventh grade level:

1. Is tolerance addressed in seventh grade language arts?

2. How aware of tolerance are seventh graders?

3. Does the school setting affect students' awareness of tolerance?

4. Are teachers' perspective and attitudes toward tolerance affected by the school settings?

The purposes of answering these questions are:

1. To establish whether or not teachers address issues of tolerance in seventh grade language arts.

2. To have a greater understanding about seventh grade students' awareness of tolerance or the lack there of.

3. To understand if school setting has an effect on students' awareness of tolerance.

4. To develop a better understanding of teachers' attitudes towards teaching tolerance.

5. To understand if school setting affects teachers' attitudes towards teaching tolerance.

Discussion of Findings:

Based on assumptions I declared prior to the performing the study, the results varied. Students and teachers were more aware of issues of tolerance in the suburban setting than in the rural or urban setting. To some extent, students in all settings were able to see the bullying that resulted from the intolerance of students to accept each other's differences; however, the students in the suburban setting not only observed the intolerance in their school, but had discussions about these behaviors in their language arts classes. Their education about issues of tolerance heightened their sensitivity to unjust actions around them. On the other hand, even though the students in the suburban setting were provided with a more inclusive education in reference to issues of tolerance,

their behaviors and actions were not necessarily affected by their knowledge. Even though they may have witnessed or been a factor in bullying or intolerance and knew the right way to react, they did not follow what their education taught them.

In looking back at the research questions that drove this study, I did find answers to my questions. The first question acknowledged whether or not tolerance is addressed in seventh grade language arts. I found that tolerance was addressed in some schools through seventh grade language arts, but the amount and the passion behind it varied. In all of the suburban settings, the topic of tolerance was addressed; however, the level of desire behind the necessity for it varied slightly, while all of the teachers seemed to believe incorporating elements of a character education that focused on issues of tolerance was important.

My second research question addressed how aware of tolerance seventh grade students were. My findings from this question were not as substantial. Many of the students did not seem totally aware of the meaning of tolerance, and because of this, could not accurately answer the questions about it until I gave them a clearer meaning of the word. With that said, after having more understanding of the definition of tolerance, as pertaining to this study, the students in some of the settings could make some relationships to their learning in language arts and how it pertained to tolerance. In most of the schools, the students could make connections to the topic of tolerance and their discussions about bullying. A couple of the focus groups made reference to their lessons in social studies class and how they had discussed tolerance as a part of that curriculum and not in language arts.

In reference to the third research question driving this study, school setting did appear to have some effect on students' awareness of tolerance, but their awareness was not established through asking the students the meaning of the word. The students at most of the schools seemed to have very similar responses about the knowledge of tolerance. Most of them had heard the term but did not have a clear understanding of it and could not make connections to the places in which they had encountered the word. At Downing (a rural setting), Kelton (an urban setting), and Elliot (an urban setting), tolerance clearly had not been discussed as part of their curriculum; however, while the suburban settings did not have a comprehensive understanding of the term, they had heard the term used and had some understanding of it. Bolton, a suburban setting, stood out from the rest of the schools. Not only did they understand what *tolerance* meant, they could explain to me the different uses of the word and make connections to the literature they had encountered that tied into their learnings of tolerance.

The fourth and fifth questions that guided this study addressed whether or not the school setting affected teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward including social justice issues into their seventh grade language arts curriculum and their feelings in general toward tolerance. The findings generated by this question provided me with the most observable differences among the school settings. All of the teachers included in the study seemed to understand the importance of providing students with the knowledge and understanding to be tolerant and accepting individuals; however, their passion for incorporating issues of tolerance into the curriculum and allowing it override other topics varied substantially. At Downing, a rural district, the teacher felt she did not have the appropriate amount of time to incorporate issues of tolerance into their curriculum in

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seventh grade language arts due to the high number of standardized assessments that the district has. Also, she felt that the state assessments had to be a major focal point for her teaching, so she did not have time to incorporate issues of tolerance and social justice in her class. The two urban settings did not make teaching tolerance or issues of social justice a focus of their seventh grade language arts curriculum. They seemed to understand the importance and benefit of it, but they simply did not incorporate those issues into their curriculum.

The findings met the purpose of the questions, in that I was able to establish some variance in the school settings as far as the teachers and their attitudes and perspective toward teaching tolerance. All of the teachers in the suburban setting included issues of tolerance and social justice into their seventh grade language arts curriculum. While the level to which they felt passion about the topics may have varied slightly, all of the teachers provided multiple ways in which they incorporated lessons and texts into the curriculum that allowed for discussions and activities about tolerance. Setting did appear to have an impact on the teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding including social justice issues in their seventh grade language arts curriculum.

Implications of the Study:

Based on the compiled data, a few themes shed light on the educational field, and seventh grade language arts curriculum, in particular. Bullying and intolerance appeared to be a problem in nearly every school that was approached for this study. With that said, only a few of the schools had a significant focus on tolerance in their curriculum. There is continually a shift with curriculum toward testing and assessment scores versus a focus

on a moral education. This study showed this to be true in some cases, but more often the situation in rural and urban schools, versus the suburban schools.

This led to me to question why I found these results. If I would have expected specific results from this study, I would not have hypothesized that urban and suburban schools would have had similar results. Being that the population varied so much between the urban and rural settings, I would have imagined that my findings from their schools would have been completely different; however, despite their differences, in the rural and urban settings, the students showed less knowledge about tolerance as did the teachers about including tolerance in the curriculum. The teachers in the suburban schools showed more of an effort to include teaching tolerance in their curriculums and the students showed more awareness about tolerance.

A common feeling among the rural and urban teachers was the consistent pressure to prepare the students for the state assessments. Looking toward the future of these schools, I would imagine without education surrounding issues of tolerance and justice, the teachers and students will find that there is no change in the students' behavior. With the continued popularity of social media sites, cyberbullying will likely increase without guidance and direction toward other behaviors. While language arts does not have to be the only subject in which to include elements of teaching tolerance, it provides many options for methods to include tolerance in the curriculum. While the state requires certain skills to be taught in association with reading and writing, the novels and texts that are chosen to include in a language arts class can allow for substantial conversation and dialogue among the students and teacher. The dialogue in association with activities

to encourage empathy can inspire students to think beyond their experiences to that of others.

The teacher and students at Bolton Middle School stood apart from the rest of the schools. The teacher expressed how imperative she felt incorporating a language arts curricula rich in elements of tolerance was. She explained the issues she sees concerning the relationships among students in the school. She also announced her frustration for parents that act as friends and constant defendants of their children. Instead of being accepting of the mishaps she saw, she tried to do something to make a difference. She used her position and autonomy to teach, not only the state-mandated material, but also that which goes beyond the classroom. Her attempt to have an effect on the students worked. The students could make relationships between what they studied in class and what they saw in school. While the students in the group admitted to not always making the accepting and tolerant decisions based on their lessons, they could make connections to others and seemed to have established a sense of empathy. Some of the students could reflect on how they had changed and began to make different choices. Thinking is a major point of this process of learning. If the students were thinking about their actions and reflection upon them, there is hope that at some point the students will change their actions due to their knowledge and analytical skills.

Given what I previously mentioned, the recommendations are twofold. First, educators should push the envelope, so to speak, in that they should reach into the implicit curriculum to include content that moves beyond that of the state indicators. Secondly, teachers need to be an active piece of state and/or national curriculum development. Being immersed in the culture of a school allows a person to see the

everyday struggles of the students. In the school setting in which I taught, I could see that students struggled with absent parents, students teasing one another, course content, puberty, and the continuous struggle to belong. As their teacher, I felt I could address most of those issues in at least one way or another. I knew I would not be able to fix all of every one of my students problems, but I thought at least bringing them to the surface through literature, discussion, and activities would at least allow students to know they were not alone on an island; other people shared their problems.

Allowing for this type of discussion and interaction in the classroom can open all kinds of doors for the relationship between teacher and student. If the students realize that their teacher is willing to talk about topics that are beyond state content standards, sometimes the students find they have someone to whom they may express their feelings and troubles. With the rise of absent parents and broken homes, many students are in need of a safe haven. Many students rely on their school to be a place of comfort and safety. Along those same lines, they rely on their teachers to be a sounding board, mentor, and/or their role model. Schools have become much more than a place to learn reading and writing.

As the state and nation begin to recognize the reality of what learning should be, standards for teaching will change; however, currently, the emphasis is directed toward assessments and the scores that are derived from magical equations that are intended to show growth from year to year. There seems to be a constant battle among countries to show which students are advancing the most, in so doing, the government emphasizes testing; however, what does not seem to be taken into account is how very different the lifestyles of our competitors are. The state departments of education seem to put their

own needs at the forefront of making decisions about the standards by which children should be taught without incorporating key stakeholders. While I understand how a democratic form of decision-making can be quite inefficient, including teachers, professors, and business leaders (among others) into meetings about what should be taught to students at each level conscientious way to include elements into the curriculum that are necessary and desirable. By including other stakeholders, my hope would be that assessment scores would not be the leading factor in making incredibly important decisions regarding curriculum.

From year to year, violence continues to find its way into schools across the United States. People want to find someone to blame for these violent actions; however, it seems that people from different groups just point their fingers back and forth at one another instead of finding a way to both take responsibility. So, to counteract the negativity surrounding troubled youth, schools, parents, or other community members must step in to make changes. By encouraging teens to work together and understand one another, there are possibilities of changing children's perspectives. Even if a teacher is not able to adjust all students' behaviors, if some are able to change, those few may reach out to other students in need. Teachers that are aware of the students in their classes and the experiences they have endured may be able to make connections with troubled youth and find available programs for them that could guide their wellness. Ignoring controversial and problematic topics in school could be detrimental for the students' growth and understanding of other cultures and circumstances.

As it stands, the curriculum in the Midwest states for seventh grade language arts does not establish standards for teaching tolerance. Even in the face of changing to the

Common Core Curriculum for language arts, guidelines were not established for teaching students to be more accepting of others in society. The whole drive for developing the Common Core curriculum was to prepare students for college and beyond and to encourage the growth of 21st century skills. Students need to learn how to think analytically instead of regurgitating information from which they have been presented. An essential piece of developing contributing, positive members of society is by teaching impressionable students to be accepting and tolerant of those different from themselves.

The messages sent through the news, media, and entertainment to society is incredibly violent and unforgiving. Children see examples of violence and anger on a regular basis. Many of them learn through video games and action movies that the way to "win" is to defeat one's enemy through violent fighting. These models of behavior are enticing to children and become their representations for imitation. Entertainment creates unreal images of people who make bad decisions but end up benefitting from them. Education must prevail in these situations. Students must be given opportunities to learn beyond reading and writing skills and focus on the content of their discussions and activities.

Instead of, or even in addition to, making test scores a central focus for showing growth in students, a curriculum rich in character education and issues of social justice should be the central theme of learning in grade schools with measures on student violence and interactions showing growth in students' levels of tolerance. Writing, reading, and math skills are the main links of the Common Core; however, these links could be taught in combination with content that encourages compassion and empathy for those in society for which individuals are unfamiliar. For views to change and

understanding to grow, policies should be in place at the state level to establish teaching

that includes issues of social justice, in order to offset the negative impacts that children

view and encounter on a daily basis.

Suggestions for Future Research:

As researchers look forward to studying the teaching of tolerance in the future,

there are several topics that could be helpful to investigate further:

- Can education be transformative?

- Will society in the United States be better off without addressing issues of

  tolerance?

- Where does teaching tolerance fit into the Common Core?

- How are issues of tolerance represented in textbooks and supplemental

  texts?

- Does students' awareness of tolerance affect their behaviors?

- How must issues of social justice be addressed in a classroom setting to be

  most effective in changing students' behaviors?

In regards to the first topic, with studying which school settings were more likely

to be aware of or teaching tolerance, I was able to draw some conclusions. For example,

the suburban schools were more likely to include issues of tolerance into their

curriculum; however, the data that I gathered did not provide information on whether or

not teaching tolerance transformed the students' behavior. If the students still showed

poor behavior in situations that required tolerance and empathy even after discussing how

hurtful and wrong those actions are, then is including issues of tolerance in middle school

curriculum worthwhile? So, the question remains, can education be transformative, in

that students change their actions based on their knowledge, understanding, and empathy?

In response to the second question, I have given my view throughout this paper to the importance of teaching tolerance in education. The implicit curriculum holds importance that is unaddressed by state assessments; however, is it possible that society in the United States would be better off without addressing issues of tolerance. The country has battled racism, discrimination, and gender inequality for decades. While there have been significant improvements, minorities and other targeted groups still desire equality in treatment and privileges. Is it possible that by silencing their desires for compassion, understanding, and equality that a group would more easily obtain their goals? This is a topic that I would find incredibly interesting to research. By standing out and being boisterous about the need for tolerance, I would imagine people are more likely to understand how many people are affected by the cause at hand; however, by being outgoing and in the public's eye, more opposing forces are likely to raise their voices. So, does keeping quiet and out of the limelight actually benefit those searching for equality and tolerance?

As the curriculum for many of the schools in the Midwest changes again, the standards still do not address teaching tolerance in the classroom. Research could be done by performing a content analysis of the Common Core and how to integrate issues of tolerance. By understanding the standards of the Common Core, educators could evaluate how to best incorporate texts and literature that could support the new curriculum and acknowledge topics that encourage more of a character education. In addition to this, teachers could evaluate how the new standards of the Common Core and

the old state standards compare. Research could show, through careful analysis, how the Common Core includes higher order thinking skills to integrate 21st century skills. Hopefully, with further research, teachers could find ways to create a character education through teaching about issues of social justice, while still combining the skills of the Common Core. States, like Colorado, have already begun the process of developing curricula incorporating character education, which address tolerance. Language arts is an area that lends itself to topics and literature that go beyond developing skills. Teachers do not need to abandon the Common Core or any other standard to incorporate issues of tolerance; skills and character education can be intertwined to better meet 21st century student needs.

Another suggestion for future research focuses on the textbooks and supplemental texts that are integrated into the language arts curriculum to complement students' learning. A content analysis should be done to show the topics addressed in language arts textbooks and supplemental texts to evaluate the issues of tolerance that are included. Textbook companies would do well to incorporate short stories and informational text examples that show issues of social justice to allow for student analysis and classroom discussion. The research done on this topic should be accomplished from a knowledgeable, open-minded perspective. A researcher should evaluate the texts, not only for the content in the stories, but also, on how the issues of social justice are addressed. Often, texts approach social issues from a biased perspective, which should be avoided when creating a text for impressionable students.

When my study was completed, I felt that my natural inclination was to want to know more about how students' awareness of tolerance affected their behaviors. My

study focused solely on whether or not seventh grade language arts students were aware of issues of tolerance. Based on the information I received and the concerns students voiced about the treatment and behavior of their peers, delving farther into the depths of the effects of teaching tolerance is pertinent. If teaching tolerance does, in fact, have an effect on students' behaviors, then in a moment when bullying is at an all-time high, teaching about acceptance would be essential and should be mandated by states.

My final suggestion for further research feeds off of the last question. If, in fact, teaching tolerance leads students to change their behaviors because they are more knowledgeable and accepting of differences, then how must issues of social justice be addressed in the classroom to be most effective in changing students' behaviors? Studies show that most children can only actively listen without being involved in activities for the number of minutes of their age plus two minutes. Having this type of information would lead me to believe that students would be more likely to retain and utilize information they learned from class if there is active learning involved. What types of active learning would encourage students to retain information about tolerance and acceptance to encourage them to change their behaviors in the future? This question should guide further research to find out how students would be most affected by receiving information regarding tolerance.

In conclusion, the suburban school teachers appeared to be more likely to incorporate issues of tolerance into their teaching than those teachers at the rural and urban schools. The teachers' focus in the urban and rural setting seemed to be more directly on the state assessments than on incorporating elements of an implicit curriculum with a critical pedagogy. With that being said, there did not seem to be a significant

difference in the school climate or the teachers' opinions or attitudes toward tolerance among the various school settings. All of the students in each setting saw bullying at some point in time or other. With that said, Elliot School stood out as being the most cohesive in regards to the students and the school climate. The students referred to themselves more than once as being like "family."

After going through the process of doing this research study, I was disappointed in my findings. Several of the teachers did not support the necessity of teaching students life-long skills even though they seemed to see the importance of it. State assessments only last one week out of every school year, whereas learning about acceptance and tolerance of others should be enduring. Journell (2011) stated, "As states and school districts across the United States continue to fight their battles over curriculum content, educators should not be satisfied – even if their state standards include the content they desire – unless schools make a commitment to also promote the values of ideological diversity and tolerance" (p. 86). Teachers can create classroom environments that encourage openness and discussion. Teachers need to allow the difficult conversations to happen in an environment that will allow them to be molded into a learning experience. Teachers also need to choose literature and articles that lend themselves to discussions and activities that address issues of tolerance. Teaching tolerance does not have to be difficult or a burden to educators; it just needs to be relatable to the students.

Acceptance and tolerance are skills that are essential elements in positive agents of change in our society. Locally, nationally, and globally, tolerance must be a skill that is revered and not only acknowledged, but celebrated. The only way 21st century skills will be thoroughly achieved and equality will truly exist is if students are given the tools

to learn how to be accepting and empathetic representatives in a movement towards undivided tolerance.

"Laws along can not secure freedom of expression; in order that every man present his views without penalty there must be spirit of tolerance in the entire population."

~Albert Einstein

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Student Questionnaire Used as Model

School Climate Questionnaire
MIDDLE/UPPER GRADES ACTIVITY

TEACHING TOLERANCE

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Agree Strongly				Disagree Strongly
a. Students in our school get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Students choose to interact primarily with people most like themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Students in my school know how to report harassment, bullying and racial abuse to school officials.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment, bullying and racial abuse to school officials.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment for every student.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Every student in my school feels like he or she belongs here.	1	2	3	4	5
g. My school creates opportunities for students to get to know each other.	1	2	3	4	5
h. At my school, adults and students listen to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
i. I look forward to coming to this school in the morning.	1	2	3	4	5

True or False?
In the last 3 months…

1. I've seen biased vandalism or graffiti at school.	True	False
2. I've heard a student use a slur, epithet or other derogatory put-down.	True	False
3. I've heard a student tease or ridicule another student.	True	False
4. I've heard a teacher or other adult in the school make disparaging remarks about a particular group of students.	True	False
5. I've seen—and analyzed—our school's safety data and reports.	True	False
6. I've had a conversation with someone about our school's climate.	True	False

HOW TO USE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE
• As a tool to diagnose differences in perception between teachers and students
• As an opening activity for professional development programs dealing with school climate and safety
• As part of a larger school-climate assessment that also includes face-to-face interviews, focus groups and other tools

Adapted from Responding to Hate at School (www.tolerance.org/rthas/index.jsp), Mix It Up (www.mixitup.org) and the U.S. Department of Education's "Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate" (www.scusd.edu/safe_schools/Docs_PDFs/Creating%20Safe%20Schools.pdf)

Appendix B

Student Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe the way students get along and/or interact in your school?
2. What does the word tolerance mean to you?
3. Have you ever heard/used the word tolerance?
4. Are people tolerant or accepting of people's differences in your school?
5. Does bullying take place at your school? If so, who gets bullied? What do they look like or where are they from?
6. Do you ever hear people at your school use racial slurs or derogatory put downs?
7. Does your teacher talk to you about racism? Tolerance? Bullying? How do the students in your school feel about these topics?
8. Have you ever discussed the struggles of different groups of people or minorities? Do the students contribute to these conversations?
9. Think back over the school year. Have you read books or stories in language arts class that are about people that are different from you?

Appendix C

Informal Teacher Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?
    a. In this school?
    b. Language arts?
2. Do you integrate issues of tolerance into your teaching?
    a. How? Describe a lesson or a unit in which you teach and address issues of tolerance.
    b. Using what types of materials or activities?
3. Do you have your colleagues support to integrate issues of tolerance into your teaching?
    a. Administrative support?
4. What made you decide to integrate issues of tolerance into language arts class?
5. Do you feel like you are crossing the border to teach in this school, or do you feel this is a homogeneous setting?
6. When you discuss issues of tolerance in the classroom, how do students respond?
7. How do you view your school's climate?
8. Do you view bullying as a problem in your school?
9. Do you think that following your discussions of tolerance that your students open up more about themselves?