

Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Richard Grove, Moravian College  
Doris Correll, Moravian College  
Tara Charpentier, Bethlehem Area School District

**Incorporating Different Cultures into the Curriculum**

Jennifer L. Linkert

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## **Abstract**

In this action research study, different cultures were incorporated into the curriculum. Students were assigned math and english language arts projects that required them to research cultures other than their own. Each student was given a pen pal from a more diverse school to communicate with throughout the study. Three culturally diverse books were also read aloud to students and discussions were held about the books. Lastly, students researched various cultures and created projects based on their research. The effects on student engagement, academic achievement, and student cultural competence were examined. Ten third grade students participated in this study over a period of four months.

Surveys were given to students before, during, and after the study. Observational data was collected while students participated in discussions and activities. Student work was collected and analyzed. Students were also interviewed at the end of the study. The findings suggest that incorporating different cultures into the curriculum help improve student engagement, academic achievement, and cultural competence. When writing pen pal letters, students added more details to their writing and made fewer spelling and grammar errors. Students began to speak about different cultures more respectfully after discussing the read alouds. Students also showed more interest in the read alouds from

various cultures. When completing projects, students needed less assistance from the teacher and often went beyond teacher expectations.

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## **Researcher Stance**

As a teacher I realize that though I may have different experiences in where I have lived, worked, and attend school, I have not brought them into my classroom enough. Looking back into my teaching practices, I have not exposed my students to other cultures enough in the past. I want to give my students the chance to have the same experiences with the diversity of their city as I have had at an older age. I believe that if I am able to include different cultural experiences into my teaching that it will greatly benefit my students, myself, and the community.

The school district I attended and within which I teach is extremely diverse, but I feel, based on personal schooling experiences, substituting experiences, and teaching experiences that the children in the elementary schools do not get to experience this diversity. As a student, I did not experience much diversity until I was in high school. I was not aware that students spoke other languages than English. My classes were all or mostly White. I thought everyone had the same amount of money as I did.

There were three types of schools in the district when I was a student. The upper class schools, like the middle school I attended, had very few students of color, very few students who were living in poverty, and very high expectations for their students. Many projects were completed at home with the help of

parents. Many of the projects required a trip to an expensive art store. They often included things like flashing lights or buzzers. It was common to have a stay-at-home mom. The school band had more students in it than the high school and many of the students could afford their own instrument and private lessons. Most students lived in a family owned home, some of which had rooms the size of my entire house.

The middle class schools, like the elementary school I attended, were a bit more diverse. Some students lived in a family-owned home and others lived in an apartment with at least one or two extended relatives. Some families had two working parents and others had one. The expectations of the students varied depending on the teacher, class, and grade level. When students were assigned projects, some included fancy lights and buzzers and others were made from a teacher provided poster and markers.

The lower class schools, like the elementary and middle school my husband attended, were extremely diverse with a high level of poverty. In some of the schools, expectations were lower than other schools. The friends I had in high school that came from those schools often had a lower GPA than myself due to the difference in school expectations. There were very few students in the school band and most were assigned to a specific instrument because they had to use a school-supplied instrument. Most students came from families where both

parents had to work. Many families from these schools lived in an apartment or with other families.

When I got to high school, there were clearly formed cliques, and many students formed extremely biased opinions. I joined a social group mostly made up of the few band students that came from the lower class middle school. They saw me as the spoiled rich kid from the upper class school. When we went to dances they would say, "You can't dance, you didn't go to our school. Kids from your neighborhood can never dance." Usually the rich kids stuck with the rich kids and the poor kids stuck with the poor kids. The rich kid groups were mostly White and the groups of kids living in poverty were separated by race. When classes had a mix of students they would occasionally get into arguments with each other because one student was not sensitive to another student's culture.

My experience with these different schools made me decide that I wanted to become a teacher. I wanted to make a difference in students' lives. I knew I wanted to work in a school where I was needed. I wanted to give all students a fair chance to succeed. I also knew that I did not want to work in an upper-class school.

As an adult I have had the chance to live in three fairly different neighborhoods within my city. I currently live in a middle class neighborhood where there are all family owned houses and police officers are rarely seen. My

husband and I are the youngest family on our block. I have lived in the lower class neighborhood where there were mostly run down apartments. I remember not being able to get to my apartment in the back because there was a drug deal going on in the alley between my building and next door. I also remember armored cars at six o'clock in the morning outside of the house across the street I recently heard was "Hot" or under surveillance by law enforcement. I have also lived in the family-oriented lower class neighborhood, which included both houses turned into apartments and family owned houses. I remember one morning, I ran into a cop and asked, "Do you need to get into my building?" because I saw the police around maybe once a month for family arguments. Other than that, I felt that the neighborhood was fairly safe.

Each of these neighborhoods is a world of its own even though they are all in the same city. Students from each of these neighborhoods also attend a different elementary school. Remembering my own experiences as a student I wonder if the students today realize how diverse their city actually is beyond their neighborhoods.

Once I started to substitute, I felt that schools were still segregated by financial status. I also felt that the expectations of students were very different from school to school. I recall substituting for a fifth grade classroom one day at an upper class school. The teacher left plans full of what I call "fillers" or work

for the students that required little to no effort on the substitute's part. The students sat there all day completing the work in mostly silence. There was a block of homework time at the end of the day for them to get started, and I got to take a look at what their math teacher assigned them for homework. I was stunned. The students had at least a few hours worth of work. They had multiple pages of math problems to solve from the book they had to take home.

When substituting in middle class schools I have heard teachers say, “This student transferred from X school (a school with students from low-income families) with all Bs which means he or she is below grade level.” I also remember substituting in a lower class school on a Friday. Fridays are usually the spelling test days but there was no test in the plans. I asked another teacher about it and her response was, “We don't give them spelling tests; they just fail the spelling tests anyway.”

There are so many ways various students are put at a disadvantage. I want to be part of getting rid of these disadvantages now and in the future. Too often, schools do not incorporate diverse cultures into the curriculum. I feel that schools have always been a melting pot. Melting pot refers to when people from many different cultures with many different traditions come together and lose their uniqueness. Those from different cultures stop speaking other languages. They stop following their family's cultural traditions. They begin to speak and act like

someone from the dominant culture. A lot has been done to fix this issue, but it is not completely fixed. Having ESL specialists and sending home letters in English and Spanish is not enough. Students from different cultures will still feel a disconnect between their cultures and school when their school curriculum only focuses on a culture other than their own. The background knowledge diverse students possess is not celebrated or used in school. Students who have grown up in a culture much like the school culture will have an advantage over other students who come from different cultures. Another problem that is created by not including different cultures into the curriculum is that students are developing into adults who have only experienced one culture. When students are not exposed to different cultures at a young age, they struggle to understand differences between various cultures. Students develop biases that could be avoided by exposing them to different cultures earlier in life.

This dilemma is very important to me because I was not exposed to diverse cultures when I was a young student. I enjoy learning about new cultures. I feel that a deeper understanding of different cultures helped eliminate some of the hidden biases I did not realize I possessed. This dilemma is also important to me because, as a teacher, I see students struggle with assigned curriculum and standardized tests because they do not possess the background knowledge being used to teach the academic subjects.

Many students living in a specific location do not get a chance to experience the different neighborhoods in their own city. They may think, like I did, that the entire world is like their neighborhood until they get to high school or become adults. I want to ease the shock of entering a different, adult world by showing young students that there are cultures other than their own. It took me a long time to settle into my high school and I never really felt safe there. I want my students to grow up feeling at home and safe in all of their schools and communities, not just the school and community they grew up in.

As I continued to substitute and became a teacher I observed students from different cultures, who did not possess specific background knowledge, struggle with academics when education only drew from one culture. Students have a huge tool that can help with their learning! Students each have their own culture. By incorporating different cultures into the classroom, students will show more interest in academics. This gives students from various backgrounds a chance to share their culture through their academic projects with pride. Students can better understand, and apply, both ELA and math concepts when culture is incorporated into the lesson.

I believe that incorporating different cultures into the classroom will also create a more accepting classroom culture. Students will feel more comfortable with their own cultures and respect other student cultures when diverse cultures

are incorporated into the curriculum. Students will become more accepting of peer differences when they learn about those differences at an early age.

I hope that creating an awareness and acceptance of the other cultures before biased and stereotypical opinions are formed will help to eliminate social cliques of wealthy and not wealthy. I hope to eliminate cliques from the South side and from the West side. I hope to eliminate cliques of educated and not educated. I believe that if I share other cultures with my students and give my students a chance to see that there are many different people in their city it will help them accept others once they reach high school or the adult world. I hope that by experiencing other cultures my students will realize that there is no reason to be afraid of, or avoid, a student from another culture. I hope to open my students eyes to a world other than their own so they can learn to accept, and even appreciate, everyone's differences.

I believe that future biases and racism can be decreased or eliminated when students are introduced to diverse cultures at an early age and taught how to accept, and respect, those differences. Students will develop into adults that respect all cultures and beliefs. Students will learn to appreciate and celebrate those who have different cultures and beliefs, even when different cultures and beliefs conflict with the students' own cultures and beliefs. Students will need to

interact with diverse people with different points of view in the future. The earlier they are introduced to this, the better prepared they will be.

It is best practice for teachers to use every tool available to reach as many students as possible when teaching. Student culture is a huge learning tool that is often ignored. This research designs a curriculum that does not put students from other cultures at a disadvantage. By incorporating different cultures into the curriculum, students from various cultures can use their diverse background knowledge to fuel their learning. Students will struggle with academic concepts that they have mastered when the lessons are based on background knowledge the students do not possess. All students should experience rigorous learning. Teachers must use every tool available to provide rigor for all students, including student culture. This research targets using the background knowledge of some students to advance academic knowledge while exposing all students to different cultures. These beliefs and experiences have led me to ask, what are the effects on student engagement, academics, and student cultural competence when different cultures are incorporated into the curriculum?

## **Literature Review**

Schools and communities are rapidly becoming more culturally different each day. There are constantly issues in the news about negativity that stems from different cultures struggling to coexist. For example, according to an episode of CNN, a neighbor called the police to report a robbery when, in fact, a Black man was simply opening his own store. Another example occurred only a few days ago. A man was shot to death for defending his Black friend against racial slurs (Archie & Ly, 2018). The public often looks towards schools to prepare students to become productive adults who can survive in this culturally diverse society. Based purely on the news reports, something is clearly not working.

Even though public schools in the United States, on average, are made up of less than 50 percent of White students (NCES, 2017), students attend schools that only value and teach one culture: the American Caucasian Culture. Students who belong to that culture learn that their culture is the only acceptable culture. Students from other cultures learn that the culture they grew up with is unacceptable and they must leave it behind to fit in with others. This issue has a solution: Schools must include different cultures into their curricula. I plan on including different cultures into my third grade classroom by incorporating pen pal letters with students from a more culturally diverse school, reading aloud

culturally diverse books, and having my students create research projects based on different cultures.

Before exploring this issue, there are some terms that need to be defined. *Culture* can be defined in many different ways. For the purpose of this thesis I will define culture as the traditions, interactions, habits, and heritage of a group of people that are from the same area (Song, 2018). To have *cultural competence* a person must understand how to respect the differences in different cultures and show respect towards people from different cultures (Moule, 2012). *Bias* occurs when a person supports or opposes someone or something unfairly. It often stems from racism, prejudices, and stereotypes (Moule). People are not always aware of bias they possess. When a person *assimilates* that person becomes part of a group, country, or society. People often do this by getting rid of their differences (Freeman, 2006). *Institutional discrimination* or *institutional racism* is when institutions like schools or governments discriminate against a person or group and treat them unfairly. Institutional discrimination is not always done on purpose (Moule). A *stereotype* is an untrue or exaggerated generalization people place on a person or group of people often based on their habits, traits, abilities, or expectations (Moule). People may move their purse to the otherside when they see a minority walk by, or check their wallet due to stereotypes and bias that they don't realize they possess (Moule). Seeing a woman as weak or a person living in

poverty as lazy would be examples of stereotypes that many people knowingly, or unknowingly, believe.

Both Moule (2012) and Lewis (2003) believe that stereotypes can result when students are not exposed to different cultures. Moule believes that schools create an unfair environment when different cultures are ignored. They also believe that incorporating different cultures into the classroom, exposing students to different cultures, and giving students a chance to communicate with people from different cultures can help students stand up against stereotypes and create a more fair and equal classroom(Hajisoteriou, Karousiou, & Angelides, 2017; Song, 2018).

In this literature review I will begin to explore these issues by discussing the history of curricula without different cultures. I will then discuss the problems this has caused. After that, I will discuss the lack of different cultures in schools today. Next, I will describe the benefits of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum. I will continue by sharing successful attempts made to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum which will lead into a detailed explanation of the three methods I will use to incorporate different cultures into my curriculum.

## **The History of Curricula Without Different Cultures**

Many schools have a history of avoiding different cultures and encouraging students from other cultures to assimilate to their expected roles (Anyon, 1981). For example, schools that include students from different cultures have chosen social studies curricula that are the least honest and focus only on the positive aspects of American history (Anyon). Many classroom habits and curricula are created from the European culture (Moule, 2012). Students from other cultures have not been given the same voice as their White peers, and schools have been ignoring this problem (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017). Different cultures are even ignored and silenced in the classic literature used in schools. McNair (2010) found that most books that are considered to be classics have been written by White authors. The few books considered to be classics that have been written by minorities are often outdated and difficult for today's students to relate to.

The history of education basing its values and curricula on the White culture has not only forced minorities to assimilate to the school, but it has also caused them to feel unwanted and undervalued (Moule). When minorities see their cultures being ignored, and when minorities are forced to adapt to the school's White culture, they are shown that their culture is not valued and they may feel unwanted because of their different culture. For example, Freeman

(2006) found that Black children had to drop their cultural values to assimilate with their White peers or they would be alienated, which led Black students to want to lose their cultural values and habits. Squashing the voices of minority students has led to a history of promoting stereotypes and discrimination (Ciechanowski, Bottoms, Fonseca, & St. Clair, 2015) among many other problems. For example, when students from another culture are pressured to assimilate to the White culture, it promotes the negative stereotypes of their original culture and encourages students to continue viewing different cultures negatively.

### **Problems Caused by Avoiding Different Cultures in the Classroom**

When different cultures are not incorporated into school curricula, many problems occur. I will focus on three of the most common problems that occur when different cultures are avoided in schools (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017, Song, 2018). First, students may already possess bias against people from cultures other than their own. Often, this bias is supported by a lack of different cultures in the curriculum. Second, students from other cultures are put at a disadvantage when their culture is ignored or portrayed as a stereotype. They can develop a disconnect between their family, culture, and school. Lastly, students that are not exposed to multiple cultures in school may not be exposed to different cultures outside of school. When students only experience one culture they are more

likely to have difficulties understanding people from other cultures with other viewpoints (Song, 2018).

**Supports student bias.** One major problem avoiding different cultures in the curriculum causes is that it supports, or increases, student bias against people from other cultures. Schools should help students understand different cultures and school staff should correct stereotypes. When schools ignore different cultures it allows students to continue to believe stereotypes, and it suggests to students that the White culture is the culture everyone should have. When students are not exposed to different cultures they struggle to understand cultural differences when they encounter people from other cultures. This lack of understanding can lead to bullying and discrimination (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017; Song).

For example, a principal from Song's study believes that students in the school bully and discriminate against their peers from other cultures due to a difficulty in understanding the other cultures their peers are from. It is difficult to understand different cultures when students are only exposed to one culture. Similar to Song's study, Hajisoteriou and colleagues found that students struggled to understand, and get along with, their immigrant peers when they could not understand the language their immigrant peers spoke, or the actions their immigrant peers took. In interviews with students about their peers from other

cultures, the students claimed their peers' other language took away from their education. They also felt that their immigrant peers were troublemakers and thieves (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017; Song, 2018). When students are only exposed to one culture, they often have difficulties seeing other cultural points of view and are more likely to believe negative stereotypes about other cultures (Moule, 2012).

Students also have difficulties communicating with, and understanding people from other cultures when they are not exposed to other cultures. When interviewing students, Hajisoteriou and colleagues also found that many students from the native culture avoided friendships with their immigrant peers. When asked about this, the students claimed their immigrant peers' language and behavior made it difficult to develop friendships. It is, of course, difficult to respect and value differences when students are not exposed to different cultures and properly prepared to understand the differences. When different cultures are not valued in school, students may only believe the negatives about other cultures, which only supports and increases student bias against others from different cultures.

**Students from different cultures are harmed.** A second problem that occurs is that students from different cultures are harmed in multiple ways when their culture is ignored or devalued. When the curriculum is only based on one

culture, students from other cultures feel pressure to assimilate and lose their family culture (Freeman, 2006). Students from other cultures are not given the tools and information that they need to display their full knowledge when the curriculum is based on only one culture. For example, a monolingual English speaking student who excels at math would do very poorly on a math test written in Spanish. The student would not be able to display his/her full knowledge of math because he/she was not given the tools and information needed to succeed.

Song (2018) describes a world of increased cultural diversity and people struggling to learn to live together. When culturally different students are only exposed to one culture other than their own, they feel pressured to assimilate to the new culture. Hajisoteriou and colleagues (2017) explain that this pressure comes from the expectation that people from other cultures should adapt to the new culture and let go of their old culture. If students from other cultures do not assimilate to a school that ignores different cultures, they often become victims of bullying (Song). One way the students are bullied is by being alienated if they do not assimilate to the dominant culture (Freeman).

There are many negative consequences for students when they feel the pressure to assimilate. Assimilation can cause students to become embarrassed by their family and culture (Song). When only one culture is valued at school, students from other cultures may feel that their culture is something to be

ashamed of. These students can struggle to identify with their family and peers when the cultures conflict (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017; Song, 2018). This conflict can negatively affect culturally different students' academic experiences (Hajisoteriou et al.; Moule, 2012; Song). Moule states that Black males are referred to special education programs at a higher rate.

Being forced to assimilate is not the only consequence students from different cultures experience when their culture is ignored or devalued. Prior experience and knowledge fuels learning. Students need the proper background knowledge to begin to learn new topics, or to demonstrate their existing knowledge of a topic. “*Background knowledge* is what you bring to any learning situation. Kids with a sizable store of general knowledge, facts, and vocabulary have learning advantages” (Arsaga, 2012). When the curriculum is based on one culture, students from other cultures are put at a disadvantage. Students are often taught and graded with the same tools. These tools often come from the White culture, which gives White students an advantage and students from different cultures a disadvantage. Students from different cultures must learn how to use those tools before benefiting from them. Students must be able to relate to the curriculum in order to reach their highest potential (Ciechanowski et al., 2015). Students use their background knowledge to interpret, and model new learning. If the curriculum is based solely on an unfamiliar culture, students from other

cultures may struggle to model their understanding of new topics. They may appear to be failing to understand a topic that they do understand (Blue & Alexander, 2009).

**Students do not experience different cultures.** The third problem caused by avoiding different cultures in the curriculum is that students are given unequal opportunities with different cultures. Not all students have the same experiences in and out of school. Some students are able to travel the world and experience many different cultures, which helps prepare them for a culturally diverse world. Other students, however, do not have the opportunity to experience cultures other than their own outside of school. When schools avoid exposing their students to different cultures, they rob their students of new experiences and opportunities.

When students are not exposed to different cultures they can struggle to understand what diversity is (Song, 2018). Students from urban areas are often given fewer opportunities to experience different cultures (Shandomo, 2009), which can cause students to struggle to relate to peers from other cultures (Song). When students struggle to relate to peers from a different culture, they will have more difficulties developing relationships with peers from another culture.

### **Schools Continue to Avoid Different Cultures**

Despite the research that shows avoiding different cultures can hurt students, schools continue to avoid incorporating different cultures into their

curricula. Many school populations are becoming more culturally diverse each year. Unfortunately, school curricula often do not reflect that diversity. Hajisoteriou and colleagues (2017) point out that policies often say they respect and value different cultures, yet when students attend school they are still pressured to assimilate. Song (2018) takes this idea further by suggesting that the policies that do exist to address cultural diversity are very limited. Schools are not preparing students for the culturally diverse world they live in.

One way schools avoid different cultures is through literature (Martens et al., 2015). In 2006, 40-80% of the published children's literature in European and Asian countries came from publications outside of the country. Many of these stories were translated from a foreign language. In the United States, less than 2% of their published books were originally published in other countries (Martens et al.). This statistic suggests cultures other than the dominant culture are not valued in the United States. It is difficult for teachers to find authentic literature about different cultures when very few resources come from cultures outside of the United States.

Another way schools avoid different cultures is by keeping students enclosed in a monocultural classroom. Students spend much of their education in the same classroom or school. They are not given many opportunities to leave their classrooms and experience the world outside of their classroom and

community. The only culture many students are given the opportunity to experience is the culture of their school and the community they are living in (Wiener & Matsumoto, 2014). According to Shandomo (2009), this issue is magnified in urban areas. For example, students who live in suburban and rural areas have more opportunities to travel and interact with different cultures. Students who live in urban areas have fewer opportunities to travel and interact with cultures outside of their schools and neighborhoods (Shandomo). By avoiding different cultures schools are taking away one of the few opportunities urban students have to interact with different cultures.

Schools also continue to contribute to institutional discrimination by avoiding different cultures, or adding them to the curriculum in a superficial or stereotypical way. According to Hacker (2003), White students are almost twice as likely as Black students are to go to college for at least four years. Moule (2012) believes this is a result of institutional racism or discrimination. For example, the school curriculum and policies are based on the White culture which causes students from other cultures to appear to struggle academically. The school then contributes to institutional discrimination by putting these students into separate classes for struggling, or low level students (Moule, 2012). Tracking students in this manner causes schools to segregate themselves even when those schools claim to be desegregated. Brown and Wiessler (2009) claim

that schools have unconsciously segregated Black and Latino students more than ever since the civil rights movement. Institutional discrimination will not be reversed when schools avoid the topic of different cultures. It will also not be reversed if schools continue to add cultural diversity into the curriculum in a way that only supports the school's existing culture (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017).

Schools are beginning to understand the importance of including different cultures into the curriculum and the dangers of avoiding different cultures. Unfortunately, schools are not currently taking enough steps to prepare their students for the culturally diverse world that exists outside of school. Many schools attempt to incorporate different cultures into the classroom in small, stereotypical ways causing students to feel that cultures other than their own are weird or different (Hajisoteriou et al.). Classrooms may have a reading unit about different cultures that focuses on the differences in culture. Schools may have a multicultural heritage potluck meal. They use different cultures to support their existing curriculum and culture instead of modifying their curriculums to support authentic learning of different cultures (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017). For example, schools may have "how to" writing in their curriculum and they may incorporate different cultures by encouraging students to write about how to make food from different cultures. This does not, however, give the students authentic experiences with different cultures. It just puts a bandaid on a wound that needs

stitches. Another example, instead of completely changing the curriculum to include authentic experiences with different cultures, schools may just edit the materials to change White names to names from different cultures. Schools may be making an attempt to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum, but if schools begin to successfully incorporate different cultures into their curricula many benefits will begin to occur.

### **Benefits of Including Different Cultures into the Curriculum**

Students are given equal opportunities to learn and experience different cultures (Song, 2018) when including different cultures into the curriculum, which provides multiple benefits. First, the classroom environment and student achievement can be improved by exploring different cultures in the classroom (Blue & Alexander, 2009; Ciechanowski et al., 2015; Hajisoteriou et al.). The classroom environment is improved by creating a more accepting atmosphere for all students. Students learn to accept their peers from different cultures. Student achievement is improved by providing all students with the tools they need to reach their highest academic potential. Second, by introducing students to different cultures, students can be better prepared for the diverse world outside of their classroom. Third, students are given the opportunity to develop valuable relationships with people from different cultures which can lead to a decrease in

discrimination (Ciechanowski et al., 2015; Hajisoteriou et al., 2017; Merryfield, 2004; Song, 2018).

Schools should give students fair and equal opportunities. They should provide students with experiences that the students may not have a chance to experience outside of school. By including different cultures into the curriculum, students who can not travel the world are given the opportunity to experience, and learn about, cultures other than their own (Song).

Another benefit of incorporating different cultures into the classroom is that student achievement and the classroom environment can both be improved. Hajisoteriou and colleagues interviewed students and found that many students felt that their immigrant peers improved their classroom atmosphere by bringing culturally different experiences to the classroom. Student achievement can also be improved by incorporating different cultures into the classroom. For example, Shandomo (2009) found, when examining student writing, that student writing improved when students exchanged pen pal letters with students from a different culture and wrote journal entries to reflect on the experience. Blue and Alexander (2009) found that struggling students from different cultures have greater reading achievement when reading books that reflect their own culture.

A third benefit is that students from different cultures are given a chance to use their unique background knowledge to improve their understanding and

their academic achievement. Blue and Alexander stress the importance of including students' different cultures into the curriculum so that students can use their existing background knowledge to improve their academic skills. Ciechanowski and colleagues (2015) embrace this importance when conducting a study that was based on using students' cultural hero to fuel their science education. Through observation they found that students were able to demonstrate scientific concepts that the students have not been taught. Ciechanowski and colleagues then used this same cultural hero to teach a science lesson. The students were actively engaged and the lesson was successful as demonstrated by Ciechanowski and colleagues. Schools should incorporate different cultures into the curriculum to help their multicultural students reach their fullest potentials.

Not only does incorporating different cultures into the curriculum improve the classroom environment and student achievement, it also prepares students for a culturally diverse world (Song, 2018). In Song's study, projects were incorporated into the curriculum that explored the different cultures the students came from. Through interviews and surveys, Song found that as each project was conducted, student comfort with different cultures and student acceptance of people from different cultures increased.

It can be difficult to understand opinions and points of view that contradict existing paradigms. Students should be exposed to different points of views to teach them how to respect peers with differing opinions. When events are taught from multiple cultural perspectives, students can be taught that there can be more than one way of understanding events (Merryfield, 2004). By incorporating different cultures into the curriculum, students can be exposed to many different cultures which will prepare them for the culturally diverse world that they live in (Song).

Understanding different cultural perspectives can also lead to students developing valuable relationships with peers from other cultures. When different cultures are incorporated into the curriculum, students will find it easier to collaborate with their multicultural peers (Ciechanowski et al., 2015). Once students are taught to respect and value different cultural points of view, students can develop friendships with people from different cultures. These multicultural relationships can encourage students to fight against stereotypes (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017).

Not only can multicultural relationships encourage students to fight against stereotypes, but incorporating multiple cultures into the classroom can also encourage students to fight against stereotypes. It can help eliminate student bias and decrease discrimination (Song, 2018). Schools should play a big role in

decreasing discrimination (Hajisoteriou et al.) by exposing their students to different cultures. When schools identify existing stereotypes, and address them by including different cultures into the curriculum, schools can reverse those stereotypes (Merryfield, 2004). Table 2.1 provides a summary of the problems caused by avoiding different cultures and the benefits of including them in the curriculum.

**Table 2.1: *Benefits of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum and problems caused by avoiding different cultures***

Problems of avoiding different cultures in the curriculum	Benefits of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum
Student bias is supported	Students develop valuable relationships that help them fight against stereotypes
Students from different cultures are put at a disadvantage	Classroom environment and student achievement improve
Students are not given equal opportunities to experience different cultures	Students are better prepared for the world outside of the classroom

### **Attempts Made to Include Different Cultures into the Curriculum**

The benefits of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum has led many teachers, administrators, and researchers to make attempts to include different cultures into the curriculum. Some of the successful ways of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum are using primary sources to introduce students to different cultures (Merryfield, 2004), using art to explore

different cultures, and video conferencing with students or adults from different cultures.

To use primary sources to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum teachers must find people, or places, that are part of the different cultures students are being exposed to. Parents or community members from different cultures can come into the classroom to introduce students to their culture. Instead of reading a text book about different cultures, students can use computers to hear about different cultures from the primary source or even take a field trip to learn about different aspects of other cultures.

Using and exploring art is another way to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum. Creating and exploring artwork motivated by various cultures not only teaches students about different cultures, it also encourages students to value and respect other cultures (Song, 2018). For example, Eristi (2012) conducted a study where students in Canada and students in Turkey explored cultural artwork through video conferencing. Students discussed the cultural artwork and created their own examples based on the cultural artwork. Students, when interviewed, said they enjoyed learning about the other culture. They said they felt a connection with the students from the different culture (Eristi, 2012). Art can give students a nonverbal way to explore different cultures, which can help students dive deeper into cultural topics.

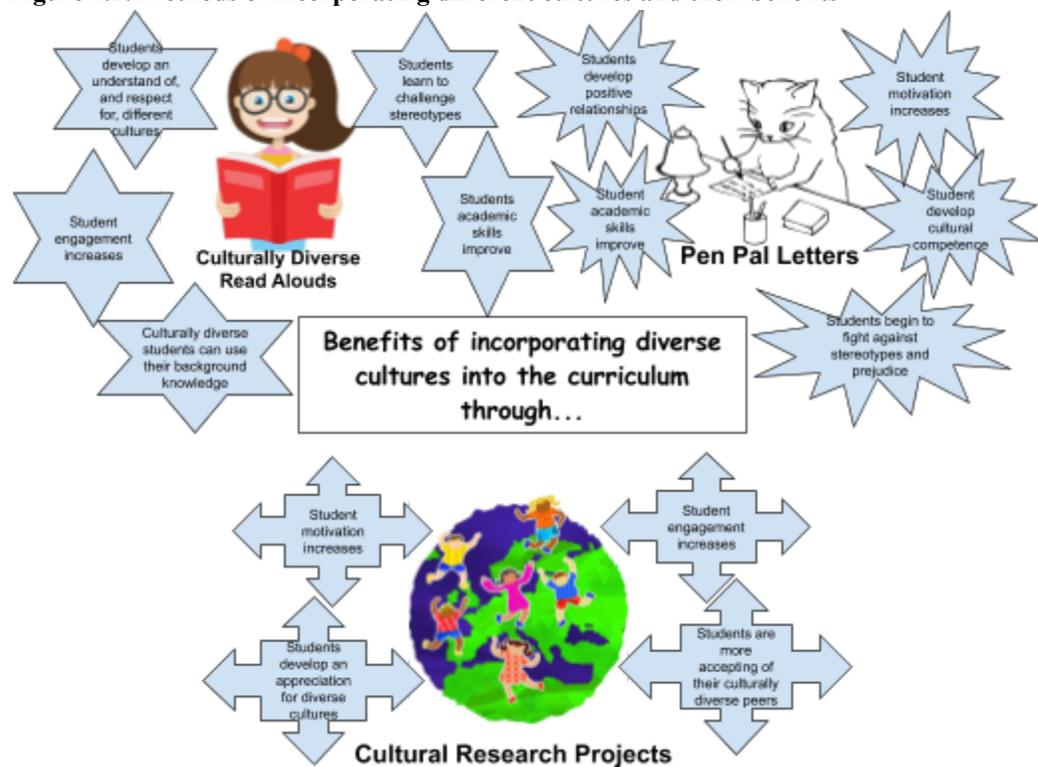
If the technology is available, video conferencing with people from other cultures is a third valuable way to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum (Eristi; Hopper, 2014). Communicating face-to-face with people from other cultures can help students see other cultures in a positive way and develop valuable relationships with people from various cultures (Eristi; Hopper). Video conferencing can also improve students communication skills and encourage collaboration (Eristi; Hopper).

### **Incorporating Diversity into the Classroom**

As previously discussed, there are many methods to incorporate different cultures into the classroom. Three specific methods are particularly beneficial. I will discuss how these methods can be included into the curriculum, as well as the benefits and cautions of each. Figure 2.1 shows the benefits of each method that will be discussed. Pen pal letters can be used to expose students to different cultures and give them a chance to develop relationships with students they would not encounter inside of their own school. Teachers can select authentic, culturally different books to read aloud to students to expose them to different cultures and new situations. Lastly, cultural projects can be incorporated into the curriculum to give students a chance to explore cultures other than their own and develop a deeper respect for differences among people.

**Pen pal letters.** Pen pal letters are a great way to introduce students to people from different cultures. There are many different ways to implement pen pal letters. Students can write to adults (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, & Igo, 2011; Shandomo, 2009) or other children (Wiener & Matsumoto, 2014) both in and out of their school.

**Figure 2.1: Methods of incorporating different cultures and their benefits**



**Method.** The pen pal process should begin with the teacher assigning a pen pal partner to students. The students should then introduce themselves to their pen pals in an introductory letter (Shandomo). They should write about who

they are, where they come from, their likes and dislikes, a bit about their cultural background, (Gambrell et al.), their friends and family, hobbies (Wiener & Matsumoto). Once an introductory letter has been sent and received students can then begin to dig into deeper topics with their pen pal. The pen pal letters can be used to compare and contrast the students ecosystems (Wiener & Matsumoto), discuss current readings (Gambrell et al.), or learn about new cultures (Shandomo).

At times, students may struggle to communicate difficult topics to their pen pal partner. Including student artwork in the pen pal letters can help students express their opinions and feelings. Artwork can help students communicate their true thoughts and feelings (Song, 2018) and can also help students expand on their discussions (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017).

Another way to provoke student discussions in pen pal letters is to incorporate a book into the pen pal letters. The students and their pen pals can read the same book, or set of books, throughout the process. Students can write responses to the books in their pen pal letters (Gambrell et al., 2011).

Students should also be given the opportunity to discuss their pen pal letters throughout the process with their teacher and classmates. Students can share parts of their pen pal letters that have excited them or new ideas that they

have learned. The discussions can be led by students, teachers, or both (Gambrell et al.).

**Benefits.** There are many benefits of writing pen pal letters and communicating with people from other cultures. Pen pal letters can improve students' academic skills and increase their motivation. Students can develop positive relationships with people from other cultures. Students can also develop cultural competence and begin to fight against stereotypes. For example, Shandomo (2009) found that many of the students in the study believed that all of Africa was the same culturally. After exchanging pen pal letters with students in Africa, the American students reported, in their journal entries, that there were many differences between the countries in Africa (Shandomo).

Gambrell and colleagues, Wiener and Matsumoto (2014), and Shandomo all agree that pen pal letters can improve students' academic skills in several ways. Students' writing skills can have the opportunity to improve when creating drafts and final copies of their pen pal letters (Gambrell et al., 2011; Shandomo, 2009; Wiener & Matsumoto, 2014). Students' reading skills can improve when they read their received pen pal letters (Gambrell et al.; Wiener & Matsumoto). When communicating with people from other cultures, students' communication skills can also improve (Hopper, 2014; Wiener & Matsumoto). Pen pal letters are

a fantastic tool to use when instructing students on letter writing (Wiener & Matsumoto).

Motivation is another benefit of incorporating pen pal letters into the curriculum (Gambrell et al.; Shandomo). Students become more motivated to write their letters and read the letters they receive. Communication with people from different cultures can also increase student motivation. Preservice teachers in Shandomo's study reported, in observational notes, that students were significantly more motivated during writing workshop when working on the pen pal letters they were sending to students from a different culture.

Not only does communicating with people from different cultures and writing pen pal letters improve student motivation, it also helps students develop valuable relationships with people from different cultures. By writing pen pal letters, students are more comfortable speaking to new people (Wiener & Matsumoto). According to surveys in Wiener and Matsumoto's study, over half of the students developed a friendship that led students to want to continue communicating with their pen pals after the school year. Communicating and developing relationships with people from other cultures can provide students with a better understanding of different cultures (Eristi, 2012; Hopper, 2014; Wiener & Matsumoto, 2014).

Lastly, when students write to people from different cultures, they are exposed to different cultural points of view. Communicating with people from other cultures and being exposed to other cultural points of view can lead students to change their own point of view to a more worldly one (Eristi; Hopper; Wiener & Matsumoto). For example, after communicating with students from turkey in Eristi's study student interviews, and observations of students, showed that students demonstrated a greater understanding of the differences between the two cultures. As students develop a better understanding of different cultures through pen pal letters, they begin to appreciate other cultures (Wiener & Matsumoto). This appreciation of different cultures encourages students to overcome their own stereotypes (Shandomo, 2009) and stand up against prejudice (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017). For example, in Shandomo's study, students believed that people in Zambia rode around on elephants and monkeys and ate strange food. After exchanging pen pal letters with students in Zambia, students were observed focusing on the similarities of the other culture instead of the stereotypical, sometimes untrue, differences (Shandomo, 2009).

***Cautions.*** Pen pal letters can be very beneficial; however, there are a few cautions that should be taken when incorporating pen pal letters into the curriculum. Pen pal letters can take a lot of time. When interviewed, teachers in Wiener and Matsumoto's (2014) study reported that the pen pal letters took up a

lot of instruction time. Wiener and Matsumoto suggest sending fewer pen pal letters if time is limited. They also suggest focusing the pen pal letters on topics that are already in the required curriculum (Wiener & Matsumoto). The writing process can be broken apart to save time. Students can spend multiple days composing their letters and send pen pal letters to each other less frequently.

Teachers also need to be cautious about the content of pen pal letters when having students write letters to people outside of the school. Teachers should monitor letters students are sending and receiving (Gambrell et al., 2011).

Teachers must scan the pen pal letters being sent to make sure students are not sharing overly personal information like their address or last name. Also, the pen pal letters should be monitored to make sure they do not include anything that would be considered inappropriate.

**Culturally diverse read alouds.** Another method of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum is through read alouds. Reading books aloud to students from, and about, different cultures is another way to expose students to other cultures. There are many things to consider when picking out the culturally different books and holding group discussions.

**Method.** The first step to incorporating culturally diverse read alouds into the curriculum is to pick out the right books to read. The books should contain some topics and themes that all students can relate to like family, friends, love,

ect.. The topics should be addressed from the cultural point of view (McNair, 2010). The books should accurately portray the culture they are based on. Books written by authors from different cultures are the best types of books to use. The characters, setting, and nicknames should accurately reflect the culture the book is based on (McNair).

Once quality books from different cultures are selected, reading habits should be set up with the class. The read alouds should begin and end with discussions about the book being read aloud. Before reading each day the class should discuss what has previously happened in the text if it is a chapter book and they should be given the chance to make predictions about what will happen next in the story (Verden & Hickman, 2009). The teacher should then read one or more chapter from the story based on the time available. Older students can also read the culturally diverse books independently and have group discussions about the books. After reading, the class should have a deeper discussion about the story, giving students a chance to reflect on and connect to what has been read about different cultures (Verden & Hickman, 2009). Discussions are one way to have students respond to literature (Gambrell et al., 2011; Verden & Hickman).

Students should not only be responding to the books read verbally, they should also be responding to the text through their writing (Verden & Hickman). Students can be given questions or journal prompts to respond to, or they can

choose how they would like to relate to the story through writing. Students can be motivated to create written responses to their stories by using pen pals (Gambrell et al.). Students can write a letter convincing their pen pals to read the same book or they can just share what they have learned with their pen pals.

**Benefits.** Reading books from different cultures aloud to students can benefit the students in many ways. Students may become more engaged in the story when it is culturally different. During Verden and Hickman's study, students' were observed often being quiet and focused on the story when the teachers read aloud culturally diverse text that culturally different students could relate to (Verden & Hickman). According to a study conducted by Gambrell and colleagues (2011), student motivation to read led to an increase in student reading achievement.

Reading culturally diverse books aloud and having group discussions about the text can also lead to student academic growth. Blue and Alexander's study (2009) found that students from different cultures were able to comprehend more when reading books based on their culture that they could relate to.

Classrooms today are filled with students from different cultures that possess different background knowledge. These students are given a chance to use their background knowledge to relate to the stories being read when the stories reflect their culture (Verden & Hickman, 2009). By using their cultural

background knowledge from their different text, students can make sense of books that would be too difficult if they were based on the school's culture (Blue & Alexander).

McNair (2010) also stresses the importance of exposing students to literature from different cultures. Reading aloud literature from different cultures prepares students to encounter people with different points of view and respect those different points of view (Martens et al., 2015). Authentic, culturally different, literature can show students that people from other cultures can be intelligent (McNair) and capable role models.

***Cautions.*** Though reading culturally diverse books aloud to students has many benefits, teachers must be cautious when picking out culturally diverse books to read to their students. Teachers must make sure the books selected do not portray stereotypes and that they do not take culturally different characters and make them speak and act like Caucasian characters.

Many books may claim to be culturally different because they include characters from different cultures that play minor or stereotypical roles. Characters from different cultures that play stereotypical roles do not provide students with an updated example of real people that belong to different cultures (Doug, 2011). Teachers also need to be cautious in selecting books that do not portray different cultures as weird or different (Doug). According to Doug

identifying cultures other than the native culture as “different” is dangerous and unfair. Calling cultures other than the native culture “different” can lead to students believing that their minority, native peers are different and do not belong. Doug believes this can lead to people of different genders or gay people also being identified as “different”.

Teachers should steer away from melting pot books. Melting pot books are books that include different characters that speak and act like caucasian characters (McNair, 2010). The culturally diverse books should also be based on cultures that are different from the school’s culture (Doug). According to Doug (2011) many teachers who were uncomfortable with cultures that were drastically different than their own chose to incorporate different cultures into the classroom by picking the cultures that were the most similar to their own culture. Exposing students to books about British children does not expose students to a very different culture.

**Cultural projects.** The last method of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum I will be discussing is using cultural projects. Students can be exposed to different cultures when given projects that require them to research different cultures and share their research with the class.

**Method.** Cultural projects can be approached and conducted in many different ways. Teachers can assign students various cultures to research, or

students can pick the culture they want to research. Students can even research their own culture in a different class (Song, 2018).

Once students have picked the culture they want to research they can use books and technology to conduct their research. The research can be done in groups (Hopper, 2014) or independently. Students can view videos online about the culture they chose (Song) or look up facts in books and on the internet. Students can be instructed to compare and contrast two different cultures (Song) on their own or with a partner. During the research process, students should be given the chance to ask their own questions about the culture they are researching (Hopper, 2014).

Finally, once the students complete the research on a culture, they should present it to their class. Students can choose how they would like to present the information they have learned or the teacher can assign the presentation format. Students can write a report, create artwork, fill out a graphic organizer, create their own informational video, and more.

***Benefits.*** Students will benefit from their own cultural project as well as the cultural projects their peers present. When given the chance to guide their own learning in cultural projects, students often become more engaged in their project and more motivated to do research (Song, 2018). Hopper found that

students were more engaged and motivated when given the opportunity to conduct real world projects and interact with different cultures.

Another benefit of multicultural projects is that students develop an understanding of different cultures. In Song's study, student understanding of different cultures led students to react more positively towards their multicultural classmates. When students research other cultures and learn to enjoy and appreciate the diversity of different cultures, students begin to understand and accept the differences in each culture, which can create a more peaceful atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom.

***Cautions.*** Cultural projects are very beneficial when conducted properly. However, there are a few cautions to take when having students research various cultures and create projects. If too much focus is put on the culture being different, students may begin to see it as folktale (Hajisoteriou et al., 2017). Students must understand that the cultures they are researching are real (Hopper, 2014). Cultural projects can increase stereotypes if they encourage students to see different cultures as strange (Hajisoteriou et al.). Teachers also need to be aware of the availability and reliability of technology. When Hopper used a rubric to evaluate multicultural projects, one project's score decreased because their technology was not working. Teachers must also be aware of the time available

and conduct projects that will fit into the curriculum (Hopper). Table 2.2 provides a summary of the methods discussed above.

**Table 2.2: Methods of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum**

	Methods	Benefits	Cautions
<b>Pen Pal Letters</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assign pen pal partners</li> <li>2. Send an introductory letter</li> <li>3. Exchange letters; include artwork</li> <li>4. Discuss letters</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive relationships develop</li> <li>2. Academic skills improve</li> <li>3. Motivation increases</li> <li>4. Cultural competence is developed</li> <li>5. Stereotypes are challenged</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They take time</li> <li>2. Content of letters should be monitored</li> </ol>
<b>Culturally different Read Alouds</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pick books</li> <li>2. Introduce the book; make predictions</li> <li>3. Read the book aloud</li> <li>4. Discuss and relate to what was read</li> <li>5. Respond in writing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engagement increases</li> <li>2. Academic skills improve</li> <li>3. Culturally different students can put their background knowledge to good use</li> <li>4. Different cultures are understood and respected</li> <li>5. Stereotypes are challenged</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avoid books that promote stereotypes</li> <li>2. Avoid melting pot books</li> <li>3. Books must authentically portray cultures</li> </ol>
<b>Cultural Projects</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assign projects</li> <li>2. Research cultures</li> <li>3. Create project</li> <li>4. Share project</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engagement increases</li> <li>2. Motivation increases</li> <li>3. different cultures are appreciated</li> <li>4. Culturally different peers are accepted</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avoid focussing on cultures being different and strange</li> <li>2. Be aware of the available technology</li> </ol>

## **Summary of the Review**

There has been a clear history of avoiding different cultures in school curricula. Avoiding the incorporation of different cultures has caused students to develop prejudice and believe stereotypes; it has put students from other cultures at a disadvantage, and it has robbed students of the rich experiences different cultures provide. Schools today continue to avoid incorporating multiple cultures into the curriculum. There are multiple benefits of incorporating different cultures into the curriculum including an increase in motivation and academic achievement as well as a decrease in student negative bias.

There have been many attempts to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum. Some have been successful and some have not. Writing pen pal letters to a more culturally diverse school, reading culturally diverse books aloud to students, and incorporating cultural projects into the curriculum are all ways to expose students to different cultures.

This research leads me to ask, what are the effects on student engagement, academics, and student cultural competence when different cultures are incorporated into the curriculum? In the following sections I will detail the methods I used to investigate this question.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Research Goals**

After growing up surrounded by classmates from a similar culture and watching students struggle to understand their classmates from different cultures I knew there had to be a way to better prepare students for the culturally diverse world they live in. I planned on giving my students experiences with different cultures that I did not receive as a child. I hoped to improve student cultural competence through these experiences.

I also observed students from cultures that were different from their classmates. I saw students struggle with cultural rules that teachers assumed everyone understood. I watched students become detached from the curriculum and what they were learning. I felt that these problems could be reduced, or even eliminated, by exposing all students to multiple cultures. These goals have created the foundation for my action research project.

### **Setting and Participants**

I teach math, ELA, science, and social studies in third grade at a school that has recently become a school wide Title I school and is slowly becoming more culturally and economically diverse. There are three third grades in my school and my average class size is twenty to twenty five students. Ten of my students participated in my action research project. The students came from

various cultures. All of the participants spoke the same language however, some were multilingual. Four male students and six female students chose to participate in my action research study.

According to Public School review there were 407 students in my school (<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/>). Public School Review gave my school a diversity scale of 0.60 and states that 44% of the students were minorities and most were hispanic. 4% of the students were Asian, 29% were Hispanic, 10% were Black and 56% were White. 46% of the students were eligible for free lunch and 5% were eligible for reduced lunch. The student to teacher ratio on Public School Review was 16:1. 44% of the students were females and 56% of the students were male.

### **Data Gathering Methods**

**Participant observation.** I used student observation to collect data throughout my action research study. I observed changes in student interactions. I also focused on student reactions to read alouds and cultural projects. Observational notes were taken while students received and wrote pen pal letters. I also took observational notes while students completed and shared their cultural projects. I chose to use observations as one of my data collection tools because people are often unaware of hidden bias. By observing student interactions I was

able to observe student behaviors that students were unaware of or afraid to speak about.

**Student work.** I collected student writing, projects, and illustrations to analyze. Students wrote, and typed, multiple letters to their pen pals. I made copies of these letters for data. Students also responded to multiple read alouds through writing. I collected these written responses. I collected student projects. Students were also asked to respond to read alouds with illustrations that I collected. I wanted to examine the student work for any hidden feelings or opinions that students may not express verbally.

**Discussions.** I used class discussions to understand how student opinions and paradigms changed throughout my project. Discussions occurred before, during, and after each read aloud session. I asked students questions relating to the read alouds to help guide the discussions.

**Interviews.** After I completed my study, I interviewed students individually (Appendix D). I asked them questions about the projects, read alouds, and pen pals. I interviewed students about their feelings, opinions, and learning. I also used these interviews to eliminate any misinterpretations that could be shown during student observations.

**Surveys.** I gave students a survey three times throughout my action research project (Appendix E). I gave the first survey before beginning my study,

one in the middle of my study, and one after my study was completed. I gave the survey to help me understand student opinions and views of various cultures and the importance of diversity to each student. The survey consisted of multiple choice questions, a fill in the blank question, and a student illustration of their classmates.

### **Research Design**

Week 1: Pre survey, parent consent forms, student assent forms.

- Introduce project creating arrays to represent facts from different cultures. Students will research diverse cultures and find interesting facts throughout the units on multiplication. They will create an array to represent various facts and equations. They will then present their project teaching their class about different cultures while practicing their multiplication. Project continues through week 5.
- Begin reading Sadako and the thousand paper cranes aloud. Finish story during week 1. Discuss good guys and bad guys when dropping the atom bomb throughout read aloud. Students create a list of words that describe Sadako. Illustrate a picture of Sadako and her family.
- Assign pen pals. Create a list of questions to ask pen pals to get the conversation started. Students will write their first pen pal letter. Students

draw a picture of themselves with a friend on the pen pal letters. Discuss a purpose and plan for the next pen pal letter.

- Students research and Aesop's fable and create a story map, continue on day 5.

### Week 2:

- Begin reading The Hero Two Doors Down. Finish story during week 2 and week 3. Discuss heros, who student heroes are, sequence, setting, which characters students could relate to the most, and student reactions.
- Receive pen pal letters and read. Students create a rough draft of their next pen pal letter. Students use peer conferences to revise their pen pal letters.
- Introduce and discuss what traditions can teach students about cultures. Read Yoon and the Jade Bracelet and complete G.O. with characters, setting, and sequence.
- Students begin a research project about different cultures. Students document the characteristics and contributions of their chosen culture. Students create a web sharing the information they have learned. Finish project on day 5.

### Week 3: Mid survey

- Introduce and discuss how people from different cultures contribute to a community.
- Students illustrate and write a sentence about their favorite and least favorite part of The Hero Two Doors Down.
- Reread Room to Grow practicing fluency and how to use the speed of reading to show excitement. Read Sharing Polkas and Pitas and compare it to Gary the Dreamer. Students begin a research project in pairs. Students will research their community and create a brochure for the community. Finish project on day 5.

### Week 4:

- Begin reading The Truth and Myths about American Heroes. Finish reading during week 4 and week 5. Students make predictions about truths and myths. Students discuss misconceptions and the differences heroes made.
- Students receive pen pal letters and write a new letter back to their pen pals. Students draw a picture of their classmates on the pen pal letter.
- Introduce research project. Students work in pairs to create an action plan to solve a cultural problem. Finish and share on day 5.

### Week 5: Post survey, interview students

- Receive pen pal letters and write a new letter. Include a surprising fact students learned from The Truth and Myths about American Heroes.
- Discuss how students would like to make a difference.

### **Trustworthiness**

I have taken many steps to remain an ethical and trustworthy teacher action researcher. I began by obtaining my principal's consent to conduct the study in my classroom (Appendix C). I then submitted my study to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) to be approved. The HSIRB proposal included the dates the study took place. It outlined my objectives as well as my study design. The HSIRB proposal explained the procedures that occurred during my study and the steps I took to reduce the risk to my participants. I included the student assent form, parent consent form, signed principal consent form, interview questions, the survey I would use periodically to collect data, and the rubric I would use to analyze pen pal letters in the HSIRB proposal. The study was approved by the HSIRB committee.

To protect participants I began by explaining my study to my students and providing a student assent form that allowed students to opt in or out of the study (Appendix A). I explained that the students would not be negatively affected if they chose to not participate in my study.

I then sent home a parent consent form that explained my study for parents to allow or not allow their child's data to be collected (Appendix B). The parent consent form also explained that students would not be negatively affected if they chose to not allow their child's data to be collected. The parent consent form stated that they could opt out of the study without consequences at any time. The parent consent form also stated that the study would be published as a master's degree thesis.

I only collected research data from the students who agreed to participate in my study through a student assent form and returned a signed parent consent form agreeing to allow me to collect data. Students have been identified by number codes to increase anonymity. All collected data were kept in a locked drawer or a password protected computer. I also deleted all student number codes when the study concluded.

To collect data I used pre and post surveys to gather data on students' knowledge about their own culture as well as other cultures (Appendix E). I asked about student interaction with peers from different cultures and had students include an illustration that I could examine. I included multiple choice questions and open ended questions. The surveys helped monitor any change in student perceptions without bias.

I conducted student interviews about the cultural projects, the books read aloud from different cultures, and student pen pals. Interviewing increased my study's validity by providing students with open ended questions. Students did not avoid long, detailed answers because they did not have to write. There were not answers provided for students to choose from. Students were more honest about their opinions because they were able to have a one-on-one conversation without judgement. Interviews helped me consider my students' point of view during the study.

I kept a log of observations throughout my study. I collected information when observing students interacting with each other, having group discussions, completing projects, or having one-on-one conversations. The observations I logged were both participant and non-participant. Keeping a log of observations helped me collect unbiased data during my study which increased the validity of my data collection. I logged data that supported my study and data that did not support my study. I was able to discover unexpected research findings when logging my observations. I was then able to analyze, and code, my log after the data collection process. I separated what I saw and heard from my observations by using comments in a google document.

I collected or copied student work such as projects, illustrations, and pen pal letters and used a rubric to evaluate them (Appendix F). Using a rubric to

evaluate student work and letters allowed me to analyze my data without bias. I included sections about academic learning, student interaction, cultural sensitivity, and student engagement. By including multiple sections in the rubric I was able to analyze different effects of the student projects and pen pal letters. Collecting and copying student work and pen pal letters also provided information that supported the found effects of my study which improves the the trustworthiness I have as a teacher action researcher. I collected multiple sources of data to help me triangulate my data. Triangulating data occurs when a researcher collects multiple types of data to support his or her study (Hendricks, 2017).

According to Hendricks (2017) “it is important to choose several [strategies] to increase the trustworthiness and validity of your study” (p. 67). This is why I chose to use peer debriefing, member checks, triangulating data, continuous ongoing reflective planning, and leaving an audit trail.

Continuous ongoing reflective planning occurs when a researcher continues to use reflections about how the study is going to makes changes as needed (Hendricks, 2017). As I gathered and analyzed my data I kept track of what was working and what was not working. If I noticed students were not benefiting from a part of my study I modified it so that students benefited. I used peer debriefing and discussed my data with both colleagues and professors to

determine if my study was showing positive results or possessed any bias. Peer debriefing occurs when a researcher discusses the study with a peer that is not involved in the study (Hendricks, 2017). I remained open to suggested changes.

Throughout the study I documented data from my own point of view and various students' points of view. I used member checks and discussed my analysis of my data and what I felt it showed. Member checks occur when a researcher discusses his or her interpretations of data with the participants (Hendricks, 2017). Students were given a chance to explain if I misunderstood their actions or feelings during the data collection process.

Lastly, I made an audit trail. An audit trail is created when a researcher keeps a record of the data collected in a study (Hendricks, 2017). I had student work, surveys, observational data, and transcribed interviews available for review by my professor. This allowed my professor to examine the data and see the relationship between the data and my findings. By taking all of these steps I feel that I have conducted a credible study.

## **My Story**

### **Beginning the Journey**

Helping to create an atmosphere more accepting of cultural diversity has interested me ever since I entered a diverse high school for the first time. This interest grew to a passion after beginning to teach. I enjoy hearing about different cultures and listening to suggestions on how the world can become more accepting of cultural diversity. I knew, however, that this was my own passion. I could not guarantee that my students would feel the same way.

I had to be cautious with how I implemented my action research project. I started during the first week of school. My students had not had time to get to know me yet. They had no reason to trust me or believe in what I was trying to accomplish. The students already had a very rigorous curriculum to follow. If they saw my study as more work for them, more assignments to complete, more subjects to learn about, they would not be happy. If implemented incorrectly, my action research could cause students to view learning about, and accepting, different cultures as a burden and my project could worsen the problem I was trying to help solve.

I knew I had to present my project to my class in just the right way. I decided to present it by asking my students for their help with my homework. As

students sat at their desks set up in a U with two rows of desks in the middle, I told the class I was going to school just like they were and an excited chatter began. One student responded, “You’re in school? That’s so cool!” I immediately knew I made the right choice in how to introduce my action research project.

I continued to explain as I passed out the student consent form, “We will be learning about different cultures. You will get a penpal from a different school, we’ll be reading a few books about, or from, different cultures, and we will complete math and reading projects about different cultures. I am wondering if I can use your work as examples. If I can, circle yes. If I cannot, circle no. Everyone will be completing the same activities, this just tells me if I can use your work as an example. This will not affect your grade at all. Again, it just tells me if I can use your work as an example.” To my amazement, almost every student circled, “yes” as they continued to buzz excitedly.

Once the student assent forms and parent consent forms were returned, I was able to discover which students would be in my study. Ten students had a parent consent form and circled “yes” on the student assent form. They became the participants in my study. I was excited to see that a fairly culturally and academically diverse group of students participated in my study.

## **Where we Started**

I was surprised that students did not ask me to explain the word “culture” when introducing my action research project. I was also a bit nervous. I wondered if this class had more experience with different cultures than my previous classes. Would I need to reorganize my entire action research project before even beginning? I received my answer as soon as I passed out a pre-survey (Appendix E).

I began by writing a “to do” list on the board for students. They were asked to finish a Social Studies assignment before beginning the survey. I was surprised when multiple students tried to skip the Social Studies assignment so that they could complete the survey. Many students immediately raised their hands or approached me asking, “What does the word culture mean? What is my culture? What are other cultures?” The survey helped me realize that most of my students did not know what their culture was or knew very little about their culture after all. All but one student reported this on the pre-survey. In fact, many students did not even understand the concept of culture! I smiled, knowing my action research project would answer many of their questions.

The survey consisted of six multiple choice questions about students’ prior knowledge of their own and other cultures. The surveys also asked about student

relationships with classmates. There was an open-ended question, asking students about their favorite assignment. Lastly, the students finished the survey by drawing a colorful picture of themselves and classmates.

I pictured my students taking the survey the way I have always taken surveys, quickly reading through the questions and responding. I assumed they would do a quick pencil sketch on the back, add a bit of color, and be finished within five minutes. I could not have been more wrong. The class took the survey more like a test. Students asked for clarity on the questions. I felt as if they were trying to find the “right” answers, even though there were no right answers. “In number four, what do you mean by ‘What is your favorite assignment in school?’ Do you mean homework? Do you mean math?” I reassured the class that there were no right or wrong answers. The survey just helped me get to know how they felt about things and how they viewed their education.

Finally, students began their illustrations of classmates. I was impressed by the amount of time and effort students put into their pictures. I’ve often observed others, children and adults, drawing illustrations that reflected their own culture, unaware of who they were actually drawing. I wondered if students would notice the differences in appearance when taking so much time on their illustrations.

The survey took at least thirty minutes to complete. I knew I would need to rearrange my plans in the future to better fit the survey. I did not want to limit the time students had to complete their surveys. Some students had to finish during the next school day.

Once they were done, they placed the surveys in their individual pockets so that I could collect them. I looked at the pictures first. Some students included different skin colors and hair styles in their illustrations. Others used the typical “peach” colored crayon for all of the drawn classmates as well as the same hair color and style.

Once I was able to observe my students and gather their thoughts, it was time to start my action research project. I incorporated different cultures into the curriculum using three different methods. I gave the students pen pals from a more diverse school. They were able to communicate with students who have had different experiences and develop a friendship with others that may have had different perspectives. Also, I read three books aloud to the students and the class held discussions based on those books. One book told about a historical event from a different cultural point of view. One book told the story of a Black man breaking barriers for others. The last story addressed common misconceptions in American history and shared new facts about various American heroes. Lastly, I

assigned students small cultural research projects. Students used Chromebooks to learn about different cultures and reported what they learned to the class.

### **Pen Pal Letters**

I knew the pen pal process would take a long time. I wanted students to be able to send and receive as many letters as possible. I decided to begin working on the pen pal letters during the first week of school.

**Learning about pen pals.** I told my students about their pen pals the first week of school. As expected, the students were curious. They asked, “Do we know our pen pals?” and “Will we get to meet them?” I explained that the students’ pen pals came from a different school. They would be writing to second graders. The students responded with more questions, “How will they get our letters? Will we mail them?” I told the students, “I will be giving the letters to a friend of mine so she can give them to her students.” I explained that the class could choose what they would like to say in their first pen pal letter. I told the class that I may ask them to discuss a specific topic in some of their future letters. I also explained that they may be asked to include illustrations of their own in the pen pal letters.

In the past, I have had students struggle when given total freedom on what to write about. Because of this and because it was only the first week of school, I decided to begin the pen pal process with some brainstorming. I asked the

students to begin by creating a list of questions and ideas that they would like to include in their pen pal letter. When examining their lists, I discovered that most students decided to stick with questions to ask their pen pals. I realized I had a very curious group of students. I was also surprised that no students told me they were “stuck” and could not think of any ideas. This was fairly uncommon when students were given so much freedom in choosing topics.

Once students began to finish their list of questions and ideas, I invited them to write a few of their questions and ideas on the chalkboard in the back of the classroom. “Once you are finished, or close to being finished, you may come up to the chalkboard and write an idea or two to share with others. You do not need to ask me to come to the board. Only four students are allowed to be at the board at one time.” The board was quickly covered in questions and ideas.

**Writing the first letter.** The next day, I asked the class to use their notes to write a rough draft of their first pen pal letter. We reviewed the parts of a letter on the whiteboard in the front of the classroom. All students were asked to address their first letter to “Pen Pal” because their specific pen pals were not assigned yet.

I was sure the writing jitters would hit once the students began to write their first draft. I expected to see hands raised and asking for help. Again, I was surprised by how quickly students began writing. They wrote their rough draft in

their new writer's notebooks. To my surprise, many students filled at least two of the small composition book pages.

Most students chose to write a list of questions on their rough draft. They wrote their own questions recorded the previous day and used some of their classmates suggestions posted on the chalkboard. Some of the students set up their letters by writing a question and then answering the same question.

The students were eager to send their letters. One student asked, "Are we sending these letters today? Do we need a separate paper so we can mail them?" I responded, "No, we are not mailing the letters today. You do not need a seperate piece of paper. We will type the letters and send those. This is just the rough draft."

After a three day weekend it was time to edit the rough drafts. I began by projecting a "rough draft" letter on the whiteboard. I introduced how to mark various edits and invited students up to the board to edit the rough draft. Students found missing punctuation marks, corrected spelling mistakes, and capitalized letters that needed to be capitalized. The students appeared to enjoy editing the letter as a class. As I got to know them better, I discovered that working on the whiteboard as a class was a popular activity. Almost all students participated. Unfortunately, there was not enough time for every student to have a chance to edit on the whiteboard.

Once the projected rough draft was edited, I asked the class to take out their writer's notebooks with the pen pal letters. I also asked them to take out their new red pens. I explained that the students were asked to skip lines when writing to leave space for editing. I told the class to begin editing their pen pal letters with the red pens.

In the past, students have often told me they were finished editing within a few minutes. Some have even responded to my edit requests by telling me they did not have any edits to make. To my surprise, I did not hit this barrier while students edited their pen pal letters. The students appeared to take their time when editing the pen pal letters. Some students added to their letters with the red pens. I suspected that this was related to the extended edit time.

At the end of the week, the class finally had time to type their pen pal letters. Many students were fairly inexperienced with typing a final copy. The "hunt and peck" method was a popular choice for many students. I explained that students could change the font and add pictures to their letters when they finished typing. Most of the class did not finish typing the letters on the first day. Many students took more time typing the letters than they spent on writing and editing.

After a few days, most students finished typing their letters. I asked each student to draw and color an illustration of himself or herself with a friend or two. I explained that the drawing would be included with their first pen pal letter.

I printed out the letters and began to pair up the students with pen pals. A colleague helped me match my students with pen pals from her class based on writing ability. Once each student had a pen pal, I attached their illustrations to their letters and gave them to my colleague. She then brought the letters to her school and gave the letters to her students. I chose to have my class write to her class because they were part of a more culturally diverse school. I wanted my students to get to know other students that would have different experiences.

**They wrote back!** After days of hearing students ask, “Did we get our pen pal letters back yet?” they finally arrived. The class grew loud with a buzz of excitement when I made the announcement. I told the class, “Once you receive your letter you may read it quietly to yourself. I will give you time to share with your classmates once all of the letters are passed out. I called out the names on the letters. I had to pause for a moment to remind one student of the rules, “Please wait to share until all the letters have been passed out. Don’t worry, I will make sure you have time to share.”

There was a bit of confusion when some of the letters were not addressed to specific students. Luckily, I kept a list of the paired students. Once I finished passing out the letters the students found partners to share with and began reading their letters immediately. They found spots in the room to sit quicker than normal. There was no bickering over chairs. Many students had big smiles on

their faces while sharing their letters. I was pleased to discover that most students were able to read their letters without my assistance.

**Developing new friendships.** The students began working on their second letter before they received their first response. Luckily, the first writing assignment of the school year was “Friendly Letter” writing. I reviewed the features of a letter again with my students. This time we examined the features more closely. We discussed the heading and greeting. I explained that friendly letters should be written with an informal tone of voice. I asked my students to write as if they were speaking to a friend. We discussed the body of letters, the closing, and the signature.

Figure 4.1 shows a graphic organizer I gave my to help them gather their thoughts about the next letter. The students recorded the heading and greeting they would use on their letter. They then recorded three or more details the planned on including in the body of their letters. Lastly, students recorded the closing and their signature.

Before the class began writing their rough drafts, I taught another mini lesson on the tone students should be using in their letters. They finally received their first letter and were ready to begin their rough drafts. I reminded the class to answer any questions their pen pals have asked in their new letter.

Figure 4.1: Friendly Letter Graphic Organizer

Parts of the letter	Your letter
Heading:	
Greeting:	
Body of the Letter:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>●</li> <li>●</li> <li>●</li></ul>
Closing:	
Signature:	

Once the rough drafts were finished, students were asked to edit their letter with a red pen. This time, I asked students to share their letters with a friend and allow the friend to edit their letter as well. After students had some time to edit with a partner I asked, “Who feels they need more time?” Many students raised their hands. The class decided they wanted five to seven more minutes to

edit. In the past, I've had students rush through the editing process. I decided to permanently add the opportunity to edit with a partner to the writing routines.

Because we were reading The Hero Two Doors Down, I asked the students to tell their pen pals about their hero somewhere in their letter. I also asked the class to include an illustration of their hero in their letters. I was excited to examine the pictures of student heroes later on. Once the editing process was finished, students typed their letters. I printed the letters out, attached their illustrations, and delivered the letters. For the third pen pal letter, students were asked to immediately type their letters once they received a letter from their pen pal. The class was silent as they typed their letters. As I walked around the classroom, I noticed the letters appeared much longer than the previously sent letters. There was a fire drill during the typing process. To my surprise, after the class got back in from the drill they went back to work immediately without the need of a reminder.

I wanted to get a better understanding of how students felt about the pen pal letters and their pen pals. I said to my class, "Tell me something you liked about the letter you got." In individual interviews I also asked students to tell me about their pen pals.

One student responded, "I like when your pen pal keeps writing and writing to you until the end of the year." When looking at his pen pal letter I

noticed that he wrote about feeling alone in his first letter. I was happy to read his second letter where he spoke in a more upbeat tone. He even added the phrase, “Thanks for being my friend.”

Multiple students commented about getting to know their pen pals. One student stated, “I like when they ask questions of us so they can learn more about us.” Another students responded, “My favorite part is when she said ‘I like fortnite too’ me and her have the same thing we like!” The class seemed to agree that they enjoyed getting to know their pen pals and discovering similarities.

### **Discovering New Stories**

I wanted to expose my students to different cultures using more than one method or tool. Besides the pen pal letters I also read various books aloud to my class. I introduced each book to the class by asking a question that related to the story. This also helped me discover how each book changed students. I then took one to two weeks to read the book aloud to the class. We often began and ended the read aloud sessions with a discussion.

**The Hero Two Doors Down.** The first book I read to my class was The Hero Two Doors Down. I called the students to the reading center. There were two bean bags set up as well as a rocking gamer chair. There were a few arguments over the chairs at first, but students settled in fairly quickly. I asked

the students to share who their heroes were before beginning the story. We then discussed what a prologue was. As I began to read, the class fell silent.

I read about segregation and how it affected Jackie Robinson the second day. Students were able to tell me that the story took place in the past because the story talked about segregation. I suspect the students felt a bit uncomfortable with the topic at first because they did not share much more. Even I felt a bit nervous discussing segregation and reading the book.

To my surprise, the students asked many more questions about segregation the next day during the read aloud. At first, they appeared nervous to say “Black” when referring to characters but they began to speak up more after hearing me refer to characters as “Black”. The students discussed how they felt segregation was wrong. They also discussed how Jackie Robinson changed the future of sports.

After a few days of reading I asked the students, “Have you learned anything new from The Hero Two Doors Down?”

One student responded, “Don’t judge people by their skin tone.” Another student agreed with her.

A boy spoke up, “Nobody can join the team with just White people. Black people can play too.” Another student added, “Back in the days, Black people and White people didn't like each other. They would always fight. In these days

they get along.” Once the discussion was finished, students created a list of words that described Jackie Robinson.

During the next few read alouds students discussed the setting of the story and its significance I asked them to tell me about the sequence of events.

Students also illustrated a picture of the main character and Jackie Robinson.

As I finished reading the story to the class, the students were frozen. They continued to stare at me as I read, not even flinching when another adult entered the room. To my surprise, they asked to see the photos in the story after I finished reading. I passed the book around the room, allowing students to page through the photographs. I wrapped up the story by asking students to illustrate their favorite and least favorite part of the story.

**Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.** The next story I read to my class was Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. Before I began to read I told the students, “This story is based on a historical event when an atom bomb was dropped. It involved the United States and Japan. Who were the good guys and who were the bad guys when the bomb was dropped?”

Most of the students agreed that The United States must be the good guys and Japan must be the bad guy. To my surprise, one boy spoke up and said he felt Japan was the bad guy and The United States were the good guys. Another girl

stated, “I don’t think they will be good guys. I think they are both bad guys and not bad guys at the same time.”

After reading just the introduction of Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes almost all of the opinions changed. Every student agreed that the Japanese were the good guys and The United States were bad guys. The students’ opinions on who the good guys and bad guys were continued to change throughout the entire story.

The next day I had training so a substitute continued to read the story aloud to the class. When I returned I asked students to give me a summary of what they have read. I then asked the class, “Has the story taught you anything new or changed your opinion in any way?”

Student hands shot up. One student wanted to share what he learned from the story. He stated, “It taught us that you could accomplish anything.”

The rest of the students wanted to share how their opinions changed. One girl changed her opinion for the third time, “I changed my opinion that America was the good guys and Japan was bad because America was just trying to end the war.”

Another boy added, “Now I think they are both good guys.”

Two others felt that the Japanese were good guys and America was the bad guy. One boy spoke up, “I think both are good because usually there aren’t

any bad guys in the world.” He then added that sometimes there were bad guys so he felt they were both half good and half bad.

One student clearly did some research on her own time. She added, “I think they’re both the bad guys because I think Japan came over to America and killed some people and then America came over and dropped a bomb and killed a lot of people. And so I think they are both bad guys.”

Once I finished reading the story aloud to the class I asked the students to complete two tasks. First, I asked the class to illustrate a picture of Sadako and her family. I wanted to see how students pictured Sadako in their heads as they listened to the story. Many students appeared concerned about getting the picture “right”. Two students asked to look through the book in hopes that it would help with her illustration.

I also asked students to write a descriptive paragraph about Sadako. I expected the paragraph to be a quick write. The students took more time than expected completing the paragraph. One student even asked if she could write more. I was not use to students asking me to write more.

**The Truth and Myths About American Heroes.** The last story I read to my class was The Truth and Myths About American Heroes. When I read this story I focussed on the American Heroes that were from different cultures. As I read new sections I would take class polls before reading new facts or myths. The

students loved to make predictions and would cheer when they predicted correctly.

I first read about Pocahontas. The class was surprised to learn how young she was when she met the settlers. They were also surprised to learn that she was really a princess.

Next, I read about Harriet Tubman. Before I began to read many of the students thought Harriet Tubman was a man. One student even thought that Harriet Tubman was a president. After reading, I asked the students what they learned about Harriet Tubman. Many students spoke about how she helped end slavery and rescued a lot of people.

When reading about Frederick Douglass I asked students how he contributed to the world we live in today. At first, some of the students mixed up Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. One student spoke up, relating Frederick Douglass to a character from The Hero Two Doors Down, “He fought for a lot of the things Jackie Robinson did!”. Once the class heard this their hands shot up and began to wave back and forth as the students shouted, “Ooo-oo!” Students spoke about how he helped people gain freedom. The class spoke about how he spoke up for people rights. One student spoke about how Frederick Douglass was one of the first slaves to read because he wasn’t allowed to read.

Another students added that because of him, people from different races are allowed to read and write.

Next, I read about Sitting Bull. I wanted to ask the class how Sitting Bull could be both a hero and a villain at the same time. The class, however, began to discuss this topic before I could even ask the question. The class discussed how Sitting Bull could be seen as both a hero and a villain at the same time. They felt that he was a bit of a villain because he did something that caused him to go to jail. However, they felt he was a hero because he stood up for Native Americans.

The last American hero I read about was Rosa Parks. Before beginning to read I assumed the class would not be familiar with Rosa Parks because they were not familiar with Harriet Tubman. The students, however, were familiar with Rosa Parks. They were able to predict with statements in the book were truths and myths. Students spoke about how Rosa Parks made a difference by changing the rules so that any person could sit any place on the bus, regardless of race.

### **Cultural Research Projects**

The third tool I used to expose students to different cultures was cultural research projects. The students were asked to complete a math cultural array project. The students were also asked to complete multiple mini cultural research projects in English and Language Arts.

**Discovering new cultures through arrays.** The first cultural project students completed was a math cultural arrays project. I explained to my class, “This will be a long project that is completed during two math units. You will look up facts from different cultures and then create an array to represent that fact.” An array is an image of objects organized into rows and columns that is used to represent a multiplication equation. The students immediately discussed plans for their projects.

The students completed the project in two rounds. They completed cultural arrays to represent equations with a factor of 0, 1, 2, 5, 9, and 10 during the first round. During the second round, students completed cultural arrays to represent equations with a factor of 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

I passed the project rubric out to the class (Appendix G). “You will need 11 arrays on your project. You will write the equation for each array under the array. You need an array with a factor of 0, 1, 2, 3 all the way up to 10. Each array will be based on a cultural fact. You will be given time to research different cultures. For example, if you find a fact about a cultural food you might create an array by drawing that food.”

During each round, students were given time to research different cultures using a Chromebook. They took notes about facts that interested them. After they gathered enough facts they picked out the facts they felt were the most

interesting. Students they created an array using a symbol to represent each fact and they wrote the cultural fact on the back of their project.

When I finally passed out the posterboard for the project the students cheered with excitement. I suspected they have not had the chance to complete a project on posterboard yet during their schooling. One students asked, “How do you know which arrays match which fact?”

I responded, “You will label each cultural fact on the back of your board with the factor you used to represent that fact.”

The class immediately began to look for facts on the Chromebooks. I noticed one student was choosing very lengthy, wordy sites to complete her research. Usually students appeared to avoid sites like that.

One student shouted, “I’m going to look up China. Oh! What do Chinese people eat?”

I noticed another students writing down facts from different cultures. Each fact appeared to be at least a paragraph long!

I observed students using many different resources while researching different cultures. Some students used videos. Others used pictures. Many chose to use sites that included a lot of reading.

The students were allowed to sit around the room so many chose to sit near their friends. Some were staring at their screens silently as they recorded

various facts. Other students were sharing each fact they found with a friend.

One student informed me, "I'm going to write more than eight facts." after I told the class they needed to find at least six cultural facts.

A few students chose to sit near me. One shared a story about her friend from India. Another student chose to research China and told me about each fact she found with amazement. She gasped, "They do have pets and they do not eat them!" I smiled, knowing at least one cultural misconception was corrected.

The next day, I reviewed the project. I explained, "Today, you will be using the facts you found yesterday. You will create your arrays using a symbol to represent each fact." The students rushed to get their posters before the paper passer could get them all passed out.

Students chose three different methods to approach the project. Some chose the cultural facts they wanted to use first and recorded them on the back of the posterboard. Then they illustrated each array on the front labeling them with an equation. Some students chose to draw the arrays first as they labeled them with the equations and then moved on to writing the cultural facts on the back of their posterboard. The third method some students used was to complete each fact one at a time. They wrote one cultural fact on the back of the board, then they completed the array with an equation on the front. They continued to do this until all the arrays were completed.

Again, the students were allowed to sit around the room to complete their project. A few asked questions about how to draw various objects in an array. Others were able to get started immediately. Most students took their time and carefully illustrated each array. When I announced time was up I heard students groaning.

I gave the students more time to finish their project a few days later after they finished their math test. Some students worked on their project for at least an hour. One student asked to look up more facts. In the past, students rarely wanted to work on one task for an entire hour.

Once the class completed their projects they were given the choice to share. Most students chose to share. They were asked to share one or two of the most interesting cultural facts they found and show the class their arrays. The students shared facts from many different cultures. To my surprise, each student appeared to have different facts than their classmates.

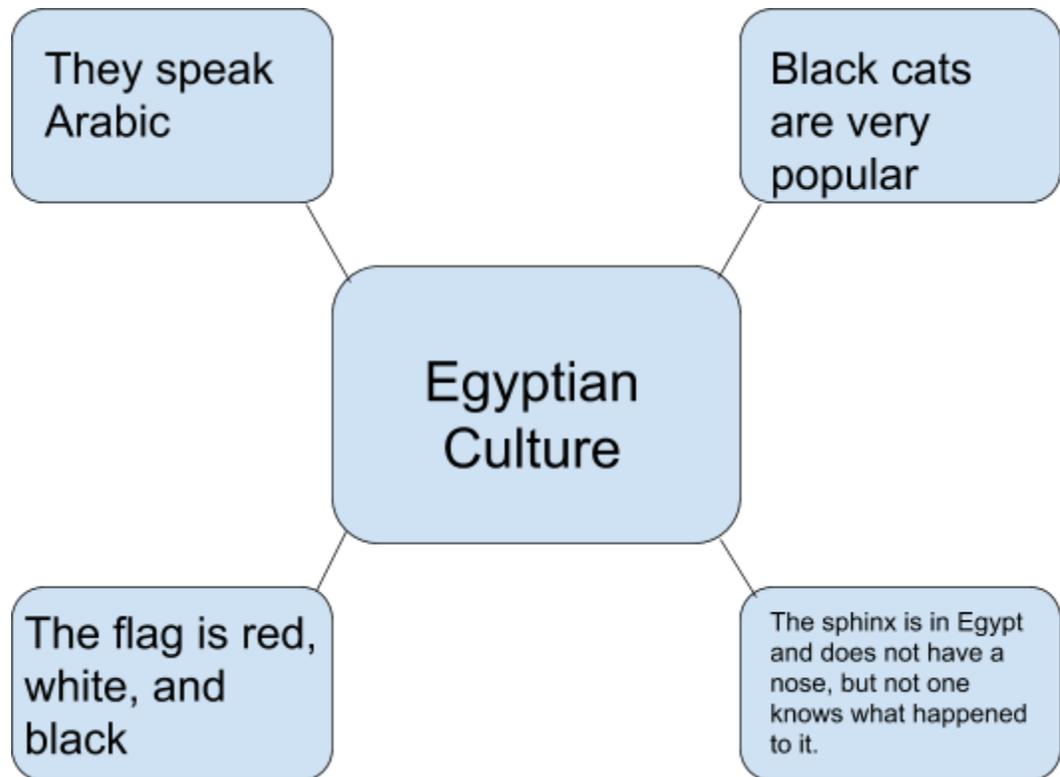
**Researching different cultures in ELA.** The students completed multiple cultural research projects in English and Language Arts. Because of time restraints, these projects were not as in depth as the math project and were usually completed in one or two days. Students completed most of the ELA projects with a partner or a group.

Students were asked to research a fable and complete a story map. Next, they completed a cultural web. An example of a cultural web can be seen in figure 4.2. Students researched their own culture to create a community brochure. Lastly, students were asked to think about a cultural problem and create a plan to fix the problem.

During the fable project, students were learning about creating story maps and using them to tell a summary. I asked students to find any fable with a partner using the Chromebook and create a story-map. Some students chose fables I recognized and others chose fables that I have never heard of. I was worried after hearing students present their story maps. Most students just shared a summary of the story. I thought I must have explained the project incorrectly. After collecting the students projects I realized the opposite had happened. The students created the story maps perfectly. They even took it a step further and turned their story maps into summaries before I even asked!

Next, students were asked to pick a group to research one culture. They were then asked to create a web using different facts they have learned about that one culture. Students quickly picked groups and grabbed chromebooks. Some students were watching videos about different cultures and others chose to use websites. One student asked, “Will we be sharing this with the hole class?” When I responded, “Yes” she smiled excitedly.

**Figure 4.2: Cultural Web**



Two groups decided to research the Egyptian culture because one of their classmates was from that culture. Most of the groups stuck together while working on the project. A few students chose to wander around to check on other groups occasionally. One student asked, “Can we do another culture on the back of our paper when we finish our first one?”

Once the groups finished their projects they were given time to share with the class. Multiple groups wanted to present first. Many groups went above and

beyond. I was amazed by the number of facts students found about different cultures. The class remained quiet as each group shared their cultural webs.

After learning about how different cultures contribute to a community the class was asked to research their community and create a brochure. I assigned the students groups to work with. One student chose to work on her own. The students chose to write about many different parts of their community. They wrote about food, places to visit, different sports in their community, and more. Once each group finished their brochure I collected it.

Towards the end of my action research project I had a discussion with students about different cultural problems. I then asked students to choose a problem related to different cultures and create a plan on how to fix it. I was purposefully vague when explaining what a “cultural problem” was. I wanted to see what the students would choose to fix.

Before beginning their plans students told me what problem they were doing. The first student chose to focus on Day of the Dead. He felt that it would be a problem if the Mexican culture was not allowed to celebrate this holiday. Another student chose to focus on the fact that people from different cultures spoke different languages and were not able to communicate with each other. A few other students chose to focus on the fact that people from different cultures fight when they do not understand each other.

Many students chose to use Chromebooks to do some research before creating a plan. Some students did not need to do any research. After students finished their cultural problem plan I asked them to share it with the class. The students shared the problem they chose to focus on and their plan to fix the problem. They then answered any questions their classmates had.

I was amazed by the projects. When I heard the students share their plans it brought tears to my eyes. Many of the students spoke confidently and passionately when sharing. One student wrote about how he could help stop people from different cultures from fighting. Another girl chose to write about the importance of having equal rights. One student wrote about the importance of speaking up for others when different cultures are arguing and how she can also set a good example through her actions. The student that originally planned on writing about Day of the Dead decided to write about how he could help stop different cultures from fighting by exposing them to each other's traditions. The cultural problem project was the perfect project to end my action research project.

### **Wrapping it all Up**

The students wrote to their pen pals, listened to the various cultural read alouds, and completed cultural research projects at the same time. It was important to use different methods to incorporate different cultures into the curriculum. Students gained different experiences from each event. They were

able to gain new friendships with students outside of their school community through pen pal letters. Students were given the chance to discuss different cultural perspectives when listening to the various stories. Lastly, students were able to learn about many different cultures through both their own projects and the projects their classmates completed.

## **Data Analysis**

I used multiple data gathering instruments to collect data. By doing this I was able to collect data from different perspectives. I kept a log of participant observations and class discussions throughout the study. I collected student work. The participants were interviewed individually after the study (Appendix D). Lastly, the participants completed an identical pre-survey, mid-survey, and post-survey (Appendix E).

## **Participant Observation**

I observed students throughout my action research project. I documented everything I saw and heard. I focussed on student reactions to read alouds and cultural projects. I also focussed on student behaviors, conversations, and interactions. While observing students, I typed my observations in a google document each day. After I finished each observation I added my personal reflections to the observation in a comment so that it was separated from my observational notes.

When conducting my observations I often noted that students were more independent, engaged in the activities, and often went above and beyond expectations. I rarely observed students asking for help. Instead, I often observed students having discussions about their activities. I often noted students chatting about the project cheerfully while smiling. I also documented multiple quotes

where students asked for more time, asked to do more, or asked to do a second project when they were finished with the first.

### **Class Discussions**

I held class discussions before, during, and after each read aloud session. I often asked the class questions that were related to the read aloud. I typed notes as the class discussed various topics.

Through the discussions of Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes I learned that student opinions could be changed more quickly than I suspected. The class often discussed who the good guys and bad guys were when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. I asked the students, “Who were the good guys and who were the bad guys?” before reading the book. All of the participants who spoke during this discussion felt that America was good and Japan was bad. After I read the introduction paragraph of the story, I asked the same question. To my amazement, each student that participated in the discussion stated that they no longer felt America was good and Japan was bad. The participants either reversed their feelings or stated that they felt both countries were both good and bad. The participants’ opinions continued to change throughout the story. Once the story was finished, most participants reported feeling that both countries were good or that both countries were both good and bad.

When the class discussed The Hero Two Doors Down I discovered that students were not initially comfortable discussing different cultures using the appropriate terms. Students were very hesitant to use the term “Black” when discussing The Hero Two Doors Down. The students did not begin using the term when discussing the story until they heard me use it a few days in a row. Once they became comfortable using the term they began to ask many more questions and became much more vocal during the class discussions. Students often chose to speak about the color barrier Jackie Robinson broke during class discussions.

When analyzing the discussions of The Truth and Myths about American Heroes I discovered that students had misconceptions about almost every American Heroes they read about from a different culture. Students thought Pocahontas was much older when meeting the settlers. The students also thought Harriet Tubman was a man. Before reading about Frederick Douglass students confused his achievements with Harriet Tubman’s achievements. Students did not think that Rosa Parks was arrested for standing up for her beliefs. The students often became more vocal during discussions when they discovered misconceptions. The class appeared to enjoy learning the truth about their misconceptions.

## **Student Work**

I collected student work from all ten participants. I collected writing samples, some illustrations, and some projects. I copied pen pal letters and some illustrations. I also took pictures of some student projects.

When analyzing the pen pal letters and accompanying illustrations I discovered that students wrote much more than they did on more specific writing assignments. Many students completed two or more written pages in their writer's notebooks on their first pen pal letters. When responding to other prompts most students wrote half a page or less. The pen pal letters also needed fewer teacher edits than other written assignments.

I also discovered that students developed relationships with their pen pals. Students often wrote about their similarities and were very respectful when writing about their differences. Many students referred to their pen pals as friends by the end of my action research project. One student even ended his letter with the words, "Thanks for being by friend."

When analyzing the written responses and illustrations related to the read alouds I discovered that many students liked the characters from different cultures. When creating a list of words to describe Jackie Robinson students only used positive words. The students also used very positive words when writing a

descriptive paragraph about Sadako. Students called both characters kind, brave, smart, and more.

I also discovered that students were aware of the cultural differences of the characters even though the stories did not include many illustrations. Students accurately illustrated the characters from different colors. In fact, when illustrating Sadako and her family, multiple students asked to see the book because they did not want to illustrate her incorrectly.

When analyzing the cultural projects I discovered that students made fewer errors and often went beyond teacher expectations. All participants created accurate arrays when using cultural arrays to represent different multiplication facts. When creating a story map after reading various fables, students accurately created the story maps and were able to turn the story map into a summary without being prompted to. Students also included many more facts on the cultural facts map than required.

I also discovered that students learned about many different cultures, began to value cultural differences, and had previous cultural misconceptions corrected. Students chose many different cultures when completing each project. They included a variety of cultural facts. Many students also wrote about the importance of learning about different cultures when they created a plan to solve cultural problems. One student chose to use a popular Chinese food to create an

array on her math project because she was surprised to learn that Chinese people did not eat their pets.

### **Interviews**

Once my action research study was completed, I interviewed the ten participants individually (Appendix D). I asked open-ended questions about all of the activities included in my action research project. I also asked follow up questions if students struggled to expand their answers.

When I asked the students about their projects I discovered that multiple participants found the cultural array project difficult at first but enjoyed it in the end. The students were able to tell me a lot when describing the different cultures they learned about. Students spoke about different traditions, different clothing, different foods, and more.

Students also responded to questions about the three read alouds. All participants reported liking all three books. All of the students felt that Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes was a sad story but also a good story. Some students spoke about learning more about the Japanese culture. Other students spoke about learning that people could be good and bad at the same time. Students reported learning that anyone could do anything regardless of skin color when asked about The Hero Two Doors Down. One student also reported learning that it was important to invite other people over to share different

traditions. When asked about The Truths and Myths About American Heroes students reported learning that American heroes could be anyone. Students also reported some of the truths and myths they learned about.

### **Surveys**

Before I began my action research project I gave students a survey (Appendix E). I gave them the same survey in the middle of my project and at the end of my project. I gave the survey to help me understand student opinions and views of various cultures and the importance of diversity to each student. The survey consisted of six multiple choice questions, one fill in the blank question, and a student illustration of their classmates. All ten participants filled out all three surveys.

Table 5.1 shows the number of students that chose each response. After analyzing the results of the pre-survey I discovered that most of the participants in my study did not know what their culture was or knew very little about their own culture. All but one participant reported this on the pre-survey. This survey caused me to go into even more detail than previously planned when introducing the students' first cultural project.

I also discovered that most of the participants were not familiar with many cultures other than their own. Four participants reported not being familiar with any other culture and four participants reported only being familiar with one or

two other cultures. One participant reported being familiar with three to four other cultures and one participant reported being familiar with five or more different cultures.

Table 5.1 Pre-survey Results				
Question	Response (out of ten students)			
What do you know about your own culture?	I know everything 0	I know a lot 1	I know a little 3	I don't know what my culture is 6
How many cultures other than your own are you familiar with?	Zero 4	One/ two 4	Three/ four 1	5 or more 1
Do you get along with people from different cultures?	Yes 9		No 1	
Do you like learning about different	Yes 10		No 0	
What is your favorite assignment in school?-	Math-2, Reading-2, Gym-1, Centers-1, Art-1, Ariel view map-1, Array assignment-1, Math & reading-1			
Do you learn about your classmates in school?	Yes 6		No 4	
Do your classmates learn about you in school?	Yes 5		No 5	
Draw a colorful picture of you and your classmates in school	Accurately illustrated culturally diverse classmates based on skin tone and hair: 6			

The survey also asked participants if they got along with people from different cultures and if they liked learning about different cultures. Most participants responded “yes” to both questions. This showed me that the students would likely be open to my action research project.

The participants were asked if they learned about their classmates in school and if their classmates learned about them in school. Six out of ten students reported learning about their classmates in school. Five out of ten participants reported feeling that their classmates learned about themselves in school.

When asked about a favorite assignment in school the participants chose many different subjects and activities. To my surprise, one participant responded “Array project”. When given this survey, the participants were told about the array project but did not start it yet.

Lastly, I examined the illustrations on the pre-survey. Six out of ten students accurately illustrated their classmates from different cultures. They recognized that not all classmates had the same skin and hair color and recognized that not all classmates had the same hair style.

The results of the mid-survey and post-survey are shown on table 5.2 and 5.3. After comparing the pre-survey, mid-survey, and post-survey I discovered that more participants learned about their own culture and other cultures. The biggest changes occurred during the pre-survey and the mid-survey. The students that reported not knowing what their culture was dropped from six participants to one participant after the mid survey. No students reported not knowing what their own culture was after the post-survey.

Table 5.2 Mid-survey Results				
Question	Response (out of ten students)			
What do you know about your own culture?	I know everything 1	I know a lot 4	I know a little 4	I don't know what my culture is 1
How many cultures other than your own are you familiar with?	Zero 2	One/ two 2	Three/ four 3	5 or more 3
Do you get along with people from different cultures?	Yes 9		No 1	
Do you like learning about different	Yes 10		No 0	
What is your favorite assignment in school?-	Math-2, Array project-2, Science-1, Grammar-1, Quick check-1, Project-1, Reading-1, Math & writing-1			
Do you learn about your classmates in school?	Yes 8		No 2	
Do your classmates learn about you in school?	Yes 6		No 4	
Draw a colorful picture of you and your classmates in school	Accurately illustrated culturally diverse classmates based on skin tone and hair: 7			

The number of participants that were familiar with three or more cultures other than their own rose from two students to six students on the mid-survey. On the post-survey all participants reported being familiar with at least one to two different cultures and half of the participants reported being familiar with five or more cultures.

After my action research project was started most students reported feeling that they learned about their classmates on the mid-survey. On the post-survey,

nine out of ten participants reported they felt that their classmates learned about themselves in school. When examining the illustrations on the survey, the number of students that illustrated their classmates accurately increased on both the mid-survey and the post-survey. They began to recognize that not all classmates had the same skin color or hair style. Nine out of ten participants accurately illustrated their classmates on the post-survey.

Table 5.3 Post-survey Results				
Question	Response (out of ten students)			
What do you know about your own culture?	I know everything 1	I know a lot 3	I know a little 6	I don't know what my culture is 0
How many cultures other than your own are you familiar with?	Zero 0	One/ two 2	Three/ four 3	5 or more 5
Do you get along with people from different cultures?	Yes 9		No 1	
Do you like learning about different	Yes 10		No 0	
What is your favorite assignment in school?-	Post-survey: How to-2, Array Project- 1, science-3, Reading-1, Quick check-1, Array & Pen pal-1, Essay & How to-1			
Do you learn about your classmates in school?	Yes 8		No 2	
Do your classmates learn about you in school?	Yes 9		No 1	
Draw a colorful picture of you and your classmates in school	Accurately illustrated culturally diverse classmates based on skin tone and hair: 9			

## **Data Analysis Process**

To analyze the data I created codes and bins based on the collected data. I began by coding my observational and student discussion data. New codes were created as I found new patterns in the data. I color coded my data based on various codes. I also documented the pages that fell into various code categories on a coding index. Once I finished coding my observational data I coded the surveys, collected student work, and interviews.

As I was coding the data and creating various codes, I found many codes that were related. I labeled these codes with a category on my coding index. These categories were used to create my bins. The bins were then used to create themes from my action research project.

I created the collaboration bin to connect the collaboration, speaking respectfully, and understanding cultural differences codes. I often observed students working together peacefully. They developed relationships with their pen pals. Students also began to speak about different cultures with more respect.

I created a bin titled When and How to Teach Cultural Competence. This bin was created from the codes that were related to how cultural competence was taught. Some of the codes used to create this bin were pen pals, whole group, and ELA.

Another bin I created was student engagement. The codes behavior, collaboration, on track, positive student feelings, and taking the lead were combined to create this bin. All of these codes supported an increase in student engagement.

I combined the positive student feelings and positive personal feelings to create the positive feelings bin. I often observed students smiling and chatting cheerfully when completing cultural activities. Also, many of my added comments were positive.

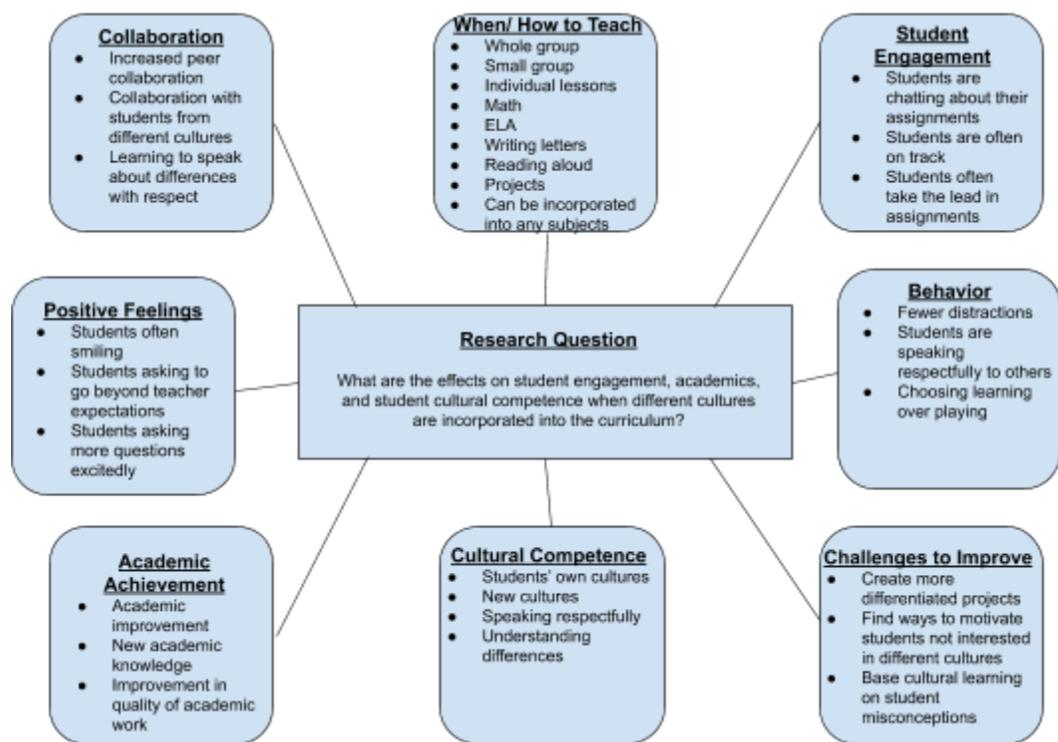
Next, I created the behavior bin. This bin was created using the codes behavior, on track, speaking respectfully, and taking the lead. I rarely documented students needing to be redirected for their behavior.

The codes for academic achievement, academic improvement, and taking the lead were combined to create the academic achievement bin. I often observed an improvement in academic achievement when students were completing cultural activities. I also often observed students going above and beyond academic expectations.

I created the cultural competence bin using the codes collaboration, learning about new cultures, learning about own culture, speaking respectfully, and understanding cultural differences. Students developed a deeper understanding of their own culture and other cultures. Students spoke about

different cultures with respect and created plans to solve the problems that may occur when cultures clash. Students developed an understanding that cultural differences do not make certain cultures “good” and other cultures “bad”. They learned to respect, and value, cultural differences.

Figure 5.1 Codes and Bins



Lastly, I created the challenges to improve bin. I used the codes academic struggles, cultural incompetence, and lack of motivation to create this bin. I used this bin to help me modify my action research project and guide possible future research. Figure 5.1 shows a summary of the bins I created.

## **Theme Statements**

I conducted this action research project so that I could examine the effects on student engagement, academics, and student cultural competence when different cultures were incorporated into the curriculum. As I conducted the action research project and analyzed my data, themes began to appear. The themes I discovered during my project were collaboration, when and how to teach cultural competence, student engagement, positive feelings, behavior, academic achievement, and cultural competence. I will describe each theme bellow.

### **Collaboration**

One theme that appeared during my action research project was collaboration. According to Freire (1970), “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 96). Communication and collaboration are important skills to develop. During this action research project, students were able to collaborate with both their classmates and their pen pals. Students were able to respectfully collaborate with peers from different cultures.

Students demonstrated this when successfully collaborating with peers during cultural inquiry projects. Students developed relationships with students

from a more culturally diverse school through pen pal letters. I also observed students speaking respectfully when discussing cultural differences.

### **When and How to Teach Cultural Competence**

“For those who come to us knowing how to count to one hundred and to read, we need to teach them problem solving and how to tie their shoes. And for those who already know how to clean up spilled paint, tie their shoes, prepare meals, and comfort a crying sibling, we need to make sure that we teach them the school knowledge that they haven’t learned at home” (Delpit, 2012, p. 54-55). If all students are to learn, multiple methods of learning must be available for students. This quote demonstrates the importance of another theme that appeared during my action research project. This theme was when and how to teach cultural competence. Cultural competence could be taught at any time, during any subject, with students from any grade level.

When books from different cultures were read aloud to students, students were observed discussing the culturally diverse books with their peers. Students also wrote letters to people from different cultures. Projects were collected from students that reflected student research on different cultures. The projects were completed both independently and in small groups. Student then shared their findings with classmates. The cultural research was embedded into math and ELA projects. Students developed a greater level of cultural competence when

they were given more freedom when discussing different cultures and completing cultural research projects.

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement was a theme that was discovered through my action research project. Student engagement is essential for student learning. According to Delpit (2012), “We can and must build curricula that connect to our students’ interests, thereby allowing them to connect the knowns to the unknowns” (p. 25). When different cultures were incorporated into the curriculum, students were more engaged.

Students were often observed discussing their cultural projects. When given a choice, students chose to complete cultural projects over other tasks and often asked for more time to complete cultural projects and pen pal letters. When writing pen pal letters and completing cultural inquiry projects, students often went above teacher expectations.

### **Positive Feelings**

The theme positive feelings emerged during my action research project. Incorporating different cultures into the curriculum evoked positive feelings in the students about different cultures and the tasks they were completing. It is crucial for students to have positive feelings during new learning experiences. “As we have seen, there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience

affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end” (Dewey, 1938, p. 37). The action research project also evoked positive feeling in the teacher.

When completing cultural research projects, students were often observed smiling and laughing. Multiple students asked to expand their projects and pen pal letters. Students also asked to borrow the culturally diverse books that have been read aloud so that they could read them independently again. When discussing the culturally diverse read alouds, students were observed asking deeper questions. Students were choosing to research how to solve problems that have been discussed during the read alouds.

### **Behavior**

Another theme that appeared during my action research project was behavior. Student behavior improved when incorporating different cultures into the curriculum. Students were not distracted as easily. This could be because students were enjoying what they were doing. According to Vygotsky (1978), “A child’s greatest self control occurs in play. He achieves the maximum display of willpower when he renounces an immediate attraction in the game (such as candy, which by the rules of the game he is forbidden to eat because it represents something inedible)” (p. 99).

When students were socializing during the assignments, they were observed socializing about the assignments. Students were using the new information they were learning about different cultures to speak more respectfully about different cultures.

### **Academic Achievement**

Through my action research project, I discovered the theme of academic achievement. When students were given the opportunity to research cultures they were interested in and write letters to pen pals, their academic achievement improved.

When collected student writing and projects were examined, it appeared that students wrote more. Fewer spelling and grammatical errors appeared on the cultural projects and pen pal letters. Students also often went beyond teacher expectations when completing cultural projects and writings. This could be related to the independence students were given when completing their writing and projects. Vygotsky (1978) states, “They never entertained the notion that what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone” (p. 85).

### **Cultural Competence**

Delpit (2012) states, “What teachers should be doing is developing the knowledge of the outside world that children from less privileged families might

lack” (p. 34). Cultural competence was another theme that appeared in my action research project. Students developed a deeper understanding of their own culture and other cultures.

Students were observed speaking about different cultures with respect and created plans to solve the problems that may occur when cultures clash. Students demonstrated an understanding that cultural differences do not make certain cultures “good” and other cultures “bad” through their discussions and cultural projects. Students were often observed respecting, and valuing, cultural differences.

In conclusion, after incorporating different cultures into the classroom both students and teacher benefited. Students showed an increase in engagement when researching different cultures. Students also showed an increase in academic achievement. Students learned how to respectfully speak about different cultures and how to respectfully interact with peers from different cultures.

## **The Next Action Research Cycle**

There were a few challenges I ran into when conducting my action research project. These challenges caused more questions to be raised. These questions could lead to new action research projects.

One challenge I faced during my action research project was hidden student misconceptions about different cultures. During the middle of my action research project I began to discover some new misconceptions students had about different cultures. I felt that students would have benefited more if these misconceptions were addressed earlier on in my action research project. This led me to ask, how can I effectively identify student misconceptions about different cultures. I would like to do an action research project where student misconceptions are identified immediately and used to guide the integration of different cultures into the curriculum.

A second challenge I faced during my action research project was that some students were apprehensive at first when researching different cultures. This caused me to ask, how can I adapt this action research project to better fit all student interests? I felt that the students would benefit from an inquiry project that allowed them to examine an interest of theirs through different cultural lenses. I would like to do an action research project that focused specifically on cultural inquiry projects. I would create inquiry projects that allowed students to

make more choices when researching various cultures. I would examine the effect these projects had on student engagement.

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**APPENDIX A**

Participant Consent Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to let Mrs. Linkert use your school work as an example? Circle one.

Yes

No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Parent Consent Form

September 2018

Dear parents or guardians,

I am a Moravian College graduate student working towards my Masters degree in curriculum and instruction. I will be conducting a study that incorporates diverse cultures into the classroom. Students will write pen pal letters to students from a different school. I will be reading diverse books aloud to the class. Lastly, students will be researching different cultures. The study will be published on the Moravian Archive of Master Thesis, but individual information collected from students will not be identifiable.

I will be collecting student work, taking student surveys, observing student interactions, and conducting student interviews throughout the project. This study will be taking place during the months of September and October.

Only my professor and I will have access to the collected data. All students will be engaged in the curriculum; however, only data from research participants will be used for the study. It is not mandatory for students to participate in this research and there will be no penalties for students that choose not to participate. Students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you wish to withdraw your child from the study you can email me or give me a note.

Any research materials used or collected will be kept in a safe, locked location outside of the classroom and destroyed after the study. Number codes will be used when referring to student data. I would like your permission to include your child's data in this study.

I would like your permission to collect data from your child. If you have any questions or concerns you can contact me at [jlinkert@basdschools.org](mailto:jlinkert@basdschools.org). You may also contact my Moravian College professor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at 610-861-1482 or by email at [shoshj@moravian.edu](mailto:shoshj@moravian.edu). If you agree to allow your child's data to be collected, please sign the bottom of this letter. Thank you for your consideration.

~Jennifer Linkert

- I agree to allow Mrs. Linkert to use my child's data
- I do not agree to allow Mrs. Linkert to use my child's data

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Signature

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Date

## APPENDIX C

### Principal Consent Form

Dear Mr. Quinones,

I am a Moravian College graduate student working towards my Master's degree in curriculum and instruction. I will be conducting a teacher action research project on the effects on student engagement, academic achievement, and student cultural competence when diverse cultures are incorporated into the curriculum. The study will be published on the Moravian Archive of Master Thesis, but individual information collected from students will not be identifiable.

I will be collecting student work, taking student surveys, observing student interactions, and conducting student interviews throughout the project. This study will take place during the months of September and October.

Only my professor and I will have access to the collected data. All students will be engaged in the curriculum; however, only data from research participants will be used for the study. It is not mandatory for students to participate in this research and there will be no penalties for students who choose not to participate. Students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Any research materials used or collected will be kept in a safe, locked location outside of the classroom and destroyed after the study. A consent form will be sent home for parent permission. Number codes will be used when referring to student data.

I would like your permission to conduct this study in my classroom. If you have any questions or concerns you can contact me at [jlinkert@basdschools.org](mailto:jlinkert@basdschools.org). You may also contact my Moravian College professor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at 610-861-1482 or by email at [shoshj@moravian.edu](mailto:shoshj@moravian.edu). If you agree to this study, please sign the bottom of this letter. Thank you for your consideration.

~Jennifer Linkert

- I agree to allow Jennifer Linkert to conduct this study
- I do not agree to allow Jennifer Linkert to conduct this study

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Signature

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Date

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questions

- What did you learn when completing the math cultural project?
- How did you feel about the math cultural project?
- Tell me about your culture.
- What have you learned about other cultures?
- What did you think about Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes?
  - Did you learn any lessons from the story?
    - What lessons did you learn from the story?
- What did you think about The Hero Two Doors Down?
  - Did you learn any lessons from the story?
    - What lessons did you learn from the story?
- What did you think about The Truths and Myths about American Heros?
  - Did you learn any lessons from the story?
    - What lessons did you learn from the story?
- What culture did you choose to research for your ELA project?
  - Why did you pick that culture?
    - What did you learn?
- Tell me about your pen pal.

## APPENDIX E

### Survey: Cultural Knowledge

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle your answer for each question

- 1) What do you know about your own culture(s)?
  - a) I know everything
  - b) I know a lot
  - c) I know a little
  - d) I don't know what my culture is
  
- 2) How many cultures other than your own are you familiar with?
  - a) 0
  - b) 1-2
  - c) 3-4
  - d) 5 or more
  
- 3) Do you get along with people from different cultures?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
- 4) Do you like learning about different cultures?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
- 5) What is your favorite assignment in school?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 6) Do you learn about your classmates cultures in school?
  - a) Yes

b) No

7) Do your classmates learn about your culture(s) in school?

a) Yes

b) No

Draw a colorful picture of you and your classmates in school.

## APPENDIX F

### Student Work Rubric

	3	2	1	0
<b>Academic Learning</b>	Pen pals taught each other new academic knowledge and asked each other for academic assistance	Pen pals taught each other new academic knowledge	Pen pals referred to academic subjects but did not demonstrate new learning	Pen pals did not write about academic subjects
<b>Student Interaction</b>	Students experienced new friendships with their pen pals	Student interaction included personal conversations but a friendship was not established	Student interaction included introductions and superficial conversation	No student interaction took place
<b>Cultural Diversity</b>	Cultural diversity was exchanged in the pen pal letters and students asked questions to learn more about new cultures	Cultural diversity was exchanged in pen pal letters numerous times	Cultural diversity was exchanged in pen pal letters occasionally	No cultural diversity was shared
<b>Cultural Sensitivity</b>	Cultural sensitivity was displayed through pen pal letters and students promoted cultural sensitivity when others were culturally insensitive.	Cultural sensitivity was displayed through all pen pal letters	Cultural sensitivity was displayed through most pen pal letters	No cultural sensitivity was displayed in pen pal letters and students were unaware of cultural differences

<p><b>Student Engagement</b></p>	<p>High student engagement occurred when writing pen pal letters (Students may ask to write more letters or include extra information they would not in their regular assignments)</p>	<p>Average student engagement occurred when writing pen pal letters (Students complete the pen pal letters in the same manner they complete regular assignments)</p>	<p>Minimal student engagement occurred when writing pen pal letters (Students may write less than normal or complain about writing the letters)</p>	<p>No student engagement occurred through pen pal letters (Students may refuse to write pen pal letters)</p>
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## APPENDIX G

### Array Project Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Array project**

Create arrays with facts about different cultures. Follow the directions below. You will create and illustrate eleven arrays. Make sure your illustrations are neat. Use a ruler to make straight lines.

- **Array 0:** Make an array with 0 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents. Don't forget the product! (9 pts)
- **Array 1:** Make an array with 1 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents. (9 pts)
- **Array 2:** Make an array with 2 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 3:** Make an array with 3 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 4:** Make an array with 4 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 5:** Make an array with 5 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 6:** Make an array with 6 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 7:** Make an array with 7 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 8:** Make an array with 8 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- **Array 9:** Make an array with 9 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)

- **Array 10:** Make an array with 10 as a factor. Write the equation that your array represents.(9 pts)
- Don't forget to make your work **neat and colorful** (1 pt)