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## **Building Stronger Student-Teacher Relationships Through a Mentorship Program to Increase Student Reading Achievement**

Emily Nicholas

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Building Stronger Student-Teacher Relationships  
Through a Mentorship Program  
to Increase Student Reading Achievement  
by  
Emily Nicholas  
April 2022

Master's Project  
Submitted to the College of Education  
At Grand Valley State University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Emily M. Nicholas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy Studies.

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Emily Nicholas

## Abstract

Research has shown that students learn best when their teachers know and understand them. When there are strong student-teacher relationships in place, reading achievement improves. In the following project, teachers will be part of a yearlong mentorship program at their school to improve student-teacher relationships in their classrooms. Teachers that are struggling to build positive student-teacher relationships will be the mentees and they will be paired with staff members who have already established strong, positive relationships with their students and will act as their mentors. The program will have three main components: cultural competence training, community connection and classroom library development. Through a series of meetings and events, teachers will meet with families, experience the community, learn to teach to a more diverse classroom and create a classroom library that reflects the students in their classroom. Through this program, student-teacher relationships will be improved and students will have more success in their literacy achievement.

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## Chapter 1

### Problem Statement

Students in Detroit are not performing on grade level on standardized reading tests. According to Lake, Jochim, and DeArmond's 2015 article "Fixing Detroit's Broken School System,"

Scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress have been impossibly low since 2009; just 4 percent of 4th-grade students were proficient in math and 7 percent in reading in 2013. The results put the district far behind other urban school districts, and behind even other midwestern industrial cities like Cleveland and Chicago. (p. 23)

There are many contributing factors to why students in Detroit are scoring so low on standardized reading tests, including limited economic resources and transportation gaps (Lake et al., 2015). Another important contributing factor has to do with the connections developed between students and teachers and the quality of those student-teacher relationships. "Research has shown student-teacher relationships (STRs) are associated with a variety of positive student outcomes, including increases in academic achievement and engagement and reductions in disruptive behaviors, suspension, and risk of dropping out (Cornelius-White, 2007; Quin, 2016; Roorda et al., 2011)" (Kincade et al., 2020, p. 710). While larger systemic issues such as funding for Detroit schools will need to be addressed, individual schools could work to immediately address the issue of student disconnect head on in order to improve the quality of instruction that their scholars are receiving by discovering which teachers have good rapport and strong relationships with their students and drawing on that existing resource to help other instructors improve their student-teacher relationships.

### **Importance and Rationale of the Project**

Student-teacher relationships play a large role in the academic success, and by extension future success, of the students. As Kincade, Cook, and Goerdts (2020) state:

The importance of the STR in affecting student outcomes has been demonstrated across dozens of studies synthesized within three meta-analyses (Cornelius-White, 2007; Quin, 2016; Roorda et al., 2011). High-quality positive STRs have been found to have medium to large positive relationships with student engagement, small to medium positive relationships with academic achievement (Roorda et al., 2011), a positive relationship with students' sense of belonging (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997), and a positive relationship with students' self-esteem and social skills (Cornelius-White, 2007). (p. 712)

Per this existing research on this topic, improving the quality of STRs will encourage students to be more engaged with their teachers which “has been linked to higher academic achievement and social outcomes” (Kincade et al., 2020, p. 711). Improving student engagement will have a direct impact on the improvement of standardized reading test scores, which in turn will have a direct impact on the improvement of the individual student's future endeavors.

Continued academic success has become intrinsically tied to students' performance on standardized tests such as the ACT and the SAT. When it comes to college admissions, standardized test scores greatly impact the applying student's chances of acceptance. “According to the 2010 NACAC *State of College Admission* report, 89.8 percent of colleges attributed either ‘considerable’ or ‘moderate’ importance to admission test scores in the admission process” (Patterson et al., 2012, p. 35). Success beyond academics is also tied to a person's literacy. As noted by Toews and Kurth (2019), literacy is one of the most important life skills for human beings to have in the modern world, enhancing and creating opportunities for

interaction at home and in the community while also opening doors for employment and other adult roles and responsibilities.

These opportunities will be far more difficult for the disengaged student to achieve. Less engagement due to weak STRs can lead to lower academic achievement, stunting the academic growth of the student to the point where collegiate success and future opportunities are less and less likely.

### **Background of the Project**

The commonality of weak STRs in Detroit can be tied back to a history of slavery and racism in the American school system. Schools were once a ‘White-only’ space and even when children of color were allowed to learn in the United States, they were largely kept out of White classrooms and schools under the Jim Crow laws of “separate but equal.” George Kimball, a founder of an integrated academy in Caanan, New Hampshire in 1835 observed that “despite an expansion in public schooling throughout the North, black and white children still possessed disparate access to education” (Moss, 2009, p. 2). In 1957, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford of the Little Rock Nine was met by a crowd of angry White people who shouted epithets and threatened to lynch her as she attempted to enter Little Rock’s Central High School after the Brown vs. Board of Education case of 1954 (Roberts & Staffers, 2017).

In this case, the Supreme Court declared that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional. While this ruling was in the spirit of progress, the execution of integration in the years that followed had severe negative consequences. Writing on these consequences, Sandles (2020) found that in 1950, four years before the Supreme Court’s ruling, almost half of all Black professionals were working as teachers and that Black communities across America had schools that were developing both academic leaders and providing opportunities for students

to go on to success in historically Black colleges and universities or HBCUs. However, when integration took place, Black teachers began to leave the field. “As Black students began matriculation into White schools, Black teachers and principals were outright forced or begrudgingly had to find employment in other areas (Rogers et al., 2013)” (Sandles, 2020, p. 68). If Black teachers remained in teaching, they were paid far less than their white coworkers. “According to Lutz (2017), more than 38,000 Black teachers across 17 states were dismissed from their positions between 1954 and 1965, with much of this exodus directly attributable to the fallout from the Brown decision” (Sandles, 2020, p. 68).

This lack of Black leadership in decision making positions continues to this day. According to the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey, 83.1 percent of teachers in public schools are White. While the student populations are growing more and more diverse, the demographics of teachers remains mostly White. This imbalance has fostered a system of policies and practices that has been called structural racism, institutionalized racism, or systemic racism. As studied by Crutchfield, Fillippo, and Frey (2020), this “large, interconnected system of discriminatory practices both within and between institutions, including schools, makes structural racism detrimental to individuals of color” (p. 187). Uneven disciplinary practices also feed into the institutionalized racism of the public school system, where “African American students are three times more likely to be expelled or suspended than their White counterparts (Losen, 2014; Office for Civil Rights, n.d.), and Black girls are suspended at higher rates than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys” (Crutchfield et al., 2020, p. 188). The history of anti-Black sentiment in American public schools has ingrained and normalized a racist system that creates an environment where the impact of even the best-intentioned teachers “is variable

and vulnerable to the sway of racist systems—especially when educators do not attend to the role of race and racism” (Goldin & Khasnabis, 2022, p. 1).

The effects of institutionalized racism are also detrimental to STRs because of “teacher implicit racial bias—racialized, subconscious assessments that shape teacher expectations, student performance, and school discipline” (Crutchfield et al., 2020, p. 188). Teachers entering the field of education are often not prepared in their undergraduate courses to teach the racially diverse student body. “As a result, many teachers harbor deficit-based views of—and lowered expectations for students who come from low income and/or minority communities, rather than valuing the knowledge and skills that marginalized students bring to the classroom” (Luet et al., 2018, p.162). Another report by Proctor as cited by Hampton, Peng, and Ann (2008) showed that teacher candidates held certain views about urban students specifically speaking to African American and Hispanic students. Some of the teacher candidates perceived views included that students would be “dirty,” “unruly,” have “little to lower knowledge,” “challenging because of diverse family backgrounds”, and “do not want to learn” (Hampton et al., p. 271).

Dispelling these negative views and preconceived notions of students of color will require a reeducation of those teachers unfamiliar with or ignorant of the communities in which they teach, such as the predominantly minority schools in the city of Detroit. These views and notions are not formed in a vacuum, but rather are the product of living in a society that often paints urban cities and schools as dangerous and underfunded (Hampton, et al., 2008). Building stronger STRs starts with teachers having a stronger understanding of their student’s background, community, and family. “Researchers have theorized that the association between STRs and student outcomes is mediated by student engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Diperna, 2006) and that student engagement is inherently a relational process (Pianta et al., 2012)”

(Kincade et al., 2020, p. 711-712). Teachers must also have an understanding of the policies and systems that are hindering the academic success of students of color. This can be achieved through cultural competency trainings and professional developments. Another way to strengthen STRs is for teachers and students to work together to develop a classroom library with literature that functions as metaphorical windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors as theorized by Rudine Sims Bishop in her landmark 1990 essay (O'Donnell, 2019).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to create a teacher mentorship program for teachers with weak STRs that work in the city of Detroit that will generate stronger STRs by drawing on the experience and expertise of teachers in their schools who have already established good STRs, and in turn, will strengthen the students' literacy achievement across all grade levels. The mentorship program will have three main components: community connection, cultural competence training, and classroom library development. Community connection will focus on getting teachers more in touch with the community in which their school resides. This will include home visits to their students and activities to get teachers more comfortable and familiar with the community. Culture competence training will be reoccurring professional development where teachers learn strategies to combat any inherent bias they may carry into the classroom. The trainings will also foster conversation around antiracism and antiracist teaching. Classroom library development will assist teachers in creating a diverse classroom library that encourages student engagement and produces a collection of literature in the classroom that reflects the diversity of the student body. This program will strengthen teachers' understanding of their students which will improve their instruction which will positively impact student's literacy achievement.

## **Objective of the Project**

Each component of the mentorship program will have specific objectives. Community connection will put teachers and students' families in contact through home visits so that teachers can have a deeper understanding of their students' home life and family dynamics. This aspect of the program will also feature community events such as local scavenger hunts and staff luncheons at local eateries to further familiarize teachers with the neighborhoods they instruct in. Cultural competence training aims to address issues of race, privilege, and bias in a formal PD setting. Mentors and mentees will hold each other accountable and participate in difficult conversations to facilitate deeper knowledge and greater growth in gaining cultural competency. Additionally, these trainings will happen once a month to keep those conversations in the forefront of the school's focus on addressing issues of educational inequity for students of color. Classroom library development aims to get diverse books into classroom libraries that will act as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for students. Seeing characters and families in books that reflect themselves will help encourage literacy engagement for students while having a multicultural selection of books will allow them to see how other societies or peoples live. Furthermore, this activity helps deepen and positively develop STRs by being a collaborative, multiweek class project where student input is heard and valued. Altogether, this mentorship program will develop teachers to be better equipped to teach in Detroit by building stronger STRs with their students, facilitate a school environment of openness when it comes to issues of race and prejudice, while also getting the right books into the hands of the right students to strengthen classroom culture and to develop strong readers with high literacy achievement.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Book Pass-** the teacher provides compelling books for students to get into their hands for a few moments. Students read the blurb and the first few pages and then rate the book according to their level of interest. Students get exposure to a lot of high-interest titles.

**Classroom Library** – Resources within each classroom that supports students’ daily independent reading of self-selected books that meet their personal, recreational reading interests.

**Cultural Competence** – The ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences.

**Funds of Knowledge-** The skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture.

**Growth Mindset** –In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.

(Dweck, 2006)

**NWEA** – Northwest Evaluation Association.

**MSTEP** – Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress.

**SES** – Socioeconomic status.

**Simulation** – Simulations are instructional scenarios where the learner is placed in a "world" defined by the facilitator. They represent a reality within which students interact. Participants experience the reality of the scenario and gather meaning from it. A simulation is a form of experiential learning.



**STRs** – Student Teacher Relationships.

**Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors** – Books that allow children to see themselves (mirrors) as well as books that teach students about the lives of others that differ from their own (windows and sliding glass doors) (Bishop, 1990)

### **Scope of the Project**

It is important to note that the goal of this program is not to create perfect teachers or to solve racism. Rather, the goal of this mentorship program is to improve teachers' knowledge of students and understanding of how racism functions to place students of color at a disadvantage. This mentorship program is designed for K-12 teachers in both public and charter settings in the Detroit area. Teachers with a greater understanding of their students will foster stronger STRs, which will have a positive impact of students' academic abilities. Mentor candidates will be selected by school leadership after evaluating which teachers in their school have established or are already establishing strong STRs. Potential mentors could include deans, teachers who have instructed at the school for over 5 years, or teachers who live in the community. These potential mentors would be screened by the principal to determine if they possess the qualities of a mentor and are equipped to serve as a mentor in this program. The final selection of mentors will be up to the principal and the mentors themselves will hand select their mentees. While the design of the program is crafted in such a way as to encourage the developing of strong STRs as a peer experience that will also strengthen the bonds between staff members, one limitation is the possibility that there are not enough staff with strong STRs to serve as mentors. In this case, additional resources would need to be introduced, such as outside mentors or professional development for the mentor candidates. Another possible limitation of the project is that the success of the program depends on the investment of the mentees. If mentee participants do not

go into the program with a growth mindset and the ability to acknowledge their potential bias and privilege, then the benefits of the program will be very limited. Additionally, the successful longevity of the program depends upon teacher/staff retention to maintain the mentorship structure.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

As cited by Lake, Jochim, and DeArmond (2015), fourth grade students in Detroit have been scoring significantly lower than other urban school districts in both reading and math on the National Assessment for Education Progress since 2009. While there are many aspects of a student's life that are outside of the control of the school, how teachers instruct and how they relate to their students is within their control. To improve the literacy scores of students of color in Detroit, there needs to be change in the teachers who teach them. It is imperative that students have strong relationships with their teachers to foster a sense of autonomy and relatedness in the student to further their academic success (Kincade et al., 2020). To better prepare the students, schools must better prepare the teachers.

In the following literature review, the theories and rationale behind the mentorship program of improving student-teacher relationships (STRs) will be explored and explained as well as how issues of cultural disconnect can negatively impact those relationships. Afterwards, several bodies of scholarly research that have informed and influenced the proposed mentorship project will be reviewed to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the strategies that are to be implemented within the program. These strategies include home visits, community outreach, cultural competence trainings, and the development of diverse classroom libraries.

### **Theory/Rationale**

#### **Social Constructivism**

The proposed project is grounded in theories of social constructivism and sociocultural theory. While constructivism is a theory that “maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning,” social constructivism specifies that meaning must be constructed within a group

(Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 260). “Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 13). In other words, the theory of social constructivism believes that knowledge and understanding cannot be created alone, it must be developed in a group. Dewey (1938) says that constructivism is learning done in a social activity, something done together that is not an abstract concept. Meaning, learning is done when a group of people work together and learn from one another in a tangible setting. According to Au (2005), social constructivism includes the idea that there is no objective basis for knowledge claims, because knowledge is always a human construction. In other words, teachers will be creating their own sense of knowledge together through shared experiences and conversations in the mentorship program. Social constructivism is all about creating meaning through social experiences, and that is exactly what teachers will be taking part of in the proposed mentorship project.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

The proposed project can also be looked at through the lens of sociocultural theory. The work of Lev Vygotsky makes up much of the foundational research of sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky (1987), social interaction is important to cognitively develop, and community plays a central role in a person’s ability to “make meaning.” In other words, the social interaction, and the community they build, is key to a person making meaning or sense of what is happening. As explained by Daneshfar and Moharami (2018), this theory also contends that “the engagement in cultural connections proves the influential impact of social environment as a key source of development” (p. 600). The key phrases here are cultural connections and social environment, as the knowledge and meaning learners create in a specific social

environment are informed and shaped by the cultural connections they are making within that environment. In addition, “sociocultural theories describe human cognition as developed by engaging in social activities as an individual interacts with other people, objects, and events” (Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020, p. 537). In other words, an interaction needs to take place for meaning to be made. People, objects, and events are all aspects that shape and make up a culture. By interacting with these cultural aspects, a person will create meaning specific to the interaction that occurred within that social environment. Teachers will be learning to create new meanings through cultural connections and social interactions within the community for this mentorship program.

## **Research/Evaluation**

### **Importance of STRs**

To gain a better understanding of why students of color in Detroit have fallen so far behind, the contexts in which they are instructed and the quality of the STRs these students have must first be understood. Per Chrisolm (1994) and Monroe (2005), as cited in Delano-Oriaran and Meidl (2012), the teaching force as a whole is “culturally and linguistically different from the student population, with the majority of these educators being White and female” (p. 1). The authors go on to state that there is a great need for White in-service teachers to confront and examine their racial identity so they can examine how it may impede their ability to meet the needs of their diverse student body successfully (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl). Teachers may be unconsciously bringing in bias and a deficit view of their students of color, which in turn hinders the development of their STRs (Luet et al., 2018). This is detrimental to the student’s literacy growth, as healthy STRs promote higher academic achievement and behavioral adjustment and are also linked with pleasant student peer relationships, engagement in the classroom, and higher

overall achievement (Francis et al., 2019). Furthermore, Murray and Greenburg (2000), as cited in Francis et al. (2019), found that when STRs are positive, “students are more likely to work hard and persevere, to risk making mistakes, and seek help when needed” (p. 536). These qualities are crucial to a student’s academic success. The responsibility for the development of strong, positive STRs lies not only with the individual teachers who struggle with STRs but with the school as well. As Kincade et al. (2020) confirmed in their research into the possibility of elevating the quality of STRs through school programs, “schools can support STRs universally and systematically by implementing school- and class-wide programs and practices that facilitate positive, high-quality STRs” (p. 710-711).

### **Value of Mentorship Programs**

The proposed project is conceived of as a mentorship program where teachers are mentored by leaders and other teachers in their school with experience in the development of strong STRs. Law et al. (2014) enumerate the benefits of a formal mentorship program, noting that “mentoring has been associated with improved faculty job satisfaction, increased commitment, reductions in faculty turnover, greater productivity, and a favorable ‘departmental ethos’” (p. 1). Wells and De Nobile (2021) agree, noting that structured mentoring programs within schools can assist teachers in acclimating to the profession and have positive, long-term effects on how these mentees will practice teaching. As a method of instruction, Lacy and Copeland (2013) found that mentorship programs are capable of imparting a great deal of knowledge to the mentees while also boosting their confidence in their capabilities. Lacy and Copeland go on to note how they discovered that the mentors of their studied program also valued the experience as it encouraged their own self-awareness of and reflection on their practices. The decision to structure this project so that deans and teachers in the school with

established, positive STRs take on the role of mentors to their peers who are struggling to develop positive STRs was encouraged by studies on peer instruction, which found that students instructed with peer instruction achieved higher cognitive and affective skills than students instructed with traditional teaching methods (Gok & Gok, 2017).

In the selection of mentors, it is important to take into consideration how to evaluate a mentor candidate's ability to mentor and their expertise in the subject at hand. Trubowitz (2004) writes that having rigid criteria for the selection of mentors could result in a limited or narrow approach to mentee development and that mentor selection must go beyond simply taking inventory of typically desirable characteristics of mentors (professionalism, positivity, empathy, etc.). Some of the qualities Trubowitz notes as valuable in the consideration of mentor candidates are maturity and the power of insight, coupled with the necessary experience and a genuine desire to mentor. Furthermore, teachers that demonstrate any of the following direct practices at school would be teachers who are proactively curating strong, positive STRs, according to Kincade et al. (2020), and would potentially be strong mentor candidates: praising students, spending one on one time with students to build relationships, getting to know students personally, and positive greetings at the classroom door.

## **Community Connection**

### ***Parent-Teacher Relationships***

Parent involvement is a key component of the mentorship program. In their study on the improvement of STRs, Kincade et al. (2020) found that one of the most common proactive practices utilized by teachers to structure the environment of their classroom to facilitate STRs is parental involvement. As noted by Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017) and Wright et al. (2018), as quoted by Soule and Curits (2021), students are more successful in school when

parents and teachers build relationships and work together. According to Neiver et al. (2018), “there is substantial evidence to suggest that parents’ involvement in the education of their children can make a significant difference in the educational attainment of those children” (p. 1116). Home visiting in particular is the strategy studied at length by Neiver et al. in their 2018 article, “Home Visiting Among Inner-City Families: Links to Early Academic Achievement.” As defined by Scher and Lauver (2021), home visits are the practice of teachers connecting with their students’ parents or caregivers in the students’ homes at set intervals throughout the school year. At these meetings, topics of discussion can include grade level expectations, the parent’s views on their child’s educational needs, and the student’s academic progress. The dual purpose of these meetings is also for the teacher to build rapport with their students’ parents. Neiver et al. (2018) found in their research that home visits may enhance parent–child relationships and encourage parents to have a hand in the education of their children, which enhances a child’s potential. Furthermore, Will (2018) found that the benefits of this strategy extend to the teachers as well, as they can change their assumptions and biases by interreacting with their students and their families, strengthening school-home relationships.

Hearing parent input can also shed light on students’ particular needs. Moll et al. (1992) define the useful term “funds of knowledge” as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well being” (p. 133). Moll et al. describe how parents and families have significant funds of knowledge on the student beyond the classroom, which informs the child as a whole person and not merely a student. Moll et al. go on to assert that in these home-based contexts, teachers can take into account and have knowledge of the multiple spheres of activity in which the student is enmeshed, which makes the typical student teacher relationship seem incomplete and shallow by



comparison. When using a funds of knowledge lens on student families, Szech (2021) found that “teachers see them as having a wealth of knowledge to share and build from, especially if family practices are not currently represented by the traditional curriculum” (p. 152). Beyond the knowledge that parents can offer teachers and schools, Navarro-Cruz and Luschei (2020) also find that when parent’s desires are given attention, families become valued and in valuing parents, the quality of care for the students will increase.

### ***Community Immersion & Engagement***

Involvement in the community is another important part of the mentorship program. Community Immersion programs studied by Waddell in 2013 led her to the conclusion that “Community-based experiences and a focus on the development of the identity of the community-minded and culturally responsive teacher are essential components of a multifaceted approach to preparing the teachers all children deserve” (p. 12). One of the key findings in Waddell’s study was that the teachers who participated in the program concluded that they can only be effective if they develop authentic and trusting relationships with their students, affirming the important role of STRs in the classroom. Some of the methods that Waddell explored included community-based experiences such as volunteering at local homeless shelters or food banks, exploring diverse neighborhoods, and learning about cultural and historical landmarks within the community. Each of these experiences inform the teacher’s understanding of the community and of the “systemic, institutional, and bureaucratic barriers that can prevent teachers and students in urban education from realizing and reaching their potential” (Milner, 2008, p. 1575).

Engaging with members of the community has additional benefits as well. Building trust with community members is an essential part of any kind of meaningful engagement (Scott,

et al., 2020). According to Hindman, Brown and Rogers (2005), “successful schools must involve all members of the community from the single newcomer to the family with children in the public school system to the senior citizen who does not have school-age children” (p. 36). A case study of a mentorship program by Luet et al. (2018) found that the program would have been stronger if the participants had spent more time with local stakeholders in more community-oriented settings, such as the public library or the adult literacy center. Luet et al. go on to suggest that the theoretical grounding of funds of knowledge, or community cultural wealth, could have made participants more receptive to learning what community members have to teach them. Waddell (2011) notes how cultivating a better understanding of the community will improve STRs by helping teachers “develop a deep understanding of the experiences of the students and families with whom they will work” (p. 26)

### ***Student Voice***

To help shape meaningful and beneficial change, the proposed program needs to consider the importance of the reciprocity between students and teachers by ensuring there is a platform for students to have their voices heard. The term student voice is defined as empowering students to make decisions about teaching and learning practices (Tuhkala et al., 2021). As Hillman points out in her 2018 interview with *Principal Leadership* on the subject of student voice, “through developing strong relationships with our students, but still honoring their voice by listening and then providing information, we should be able to create vehicles where students can activate needed change” (p. 28). Granting a platform for student voice creates a positive impact on school culture by helping students feel more connected, feel greater ownership of their school, and build strong relationships with staff; all of which leads to students’ academic and personal success (Erickson & Virgin, 2019).

Defur and Korinek (2010) highlighted the benefits of dialoguing with all types of students and the positive impacts that can be had on STRs including increasing student engagement, focusing faculty on needed student supports, and connecting youth and adult worlds. Another important benefit of dialoguing with students that Defur and Korinek make note of is the student's increased sense of belonging, which Kincade et al. (2020) make clear is "a core human need (Lambert et al., 2013) that facilitates engagement and responsiveness in a given setting" (p. 712). In a school setting, this lack of belonging can often manifest as disengagement. Some of the ways Kincade et al. encourage creating a space for students to share their voice is by giving students choices whenever possible and empowering students to ask questions or creating student-driven content/instruction.

### **Cultural Competence Training**

#### ***Self-Reflection***

Kondor et al. (2019) define cultural competency as understanding oneself as a cultural being, appreciating and understanding diverse populations, and interacting with cultural groups other than your own in ways that acknowledge and value their differences. As the work of Loadman, Freeman, and Brookhart (1999) as quoted by Lee et al. (2010) makes clear, cultural competency in teachers is incredibly important, as a teacher's knowledge of how a certain culture is formed and sustained is a vital part of effective student learning, particularly in classrooms where the teacher's background and culture are very different from those of the students. To relate to their students and encourage stronger STRs, teachers need to develop their cultural competency. As Banks wrote in 2005, "all teachers need to develop cultural competence in order to effectively teach students with backgrounds different from their own" (p. 237).

One of the tools used to create more culturally competent teachers is the process of self-reflection. A definition of self-reflection referenced by Brownhill (2022) in his article “Asking Key Questions of Self-Reflection” is provided by Neale (2019), which defines the activity as “taking time to think, contemplate, examine and review yourself as part of increasing your self-awareness” (p. 58). In a 2003 study by Milner on situated learning and self-reflection, he found that when prospective teachers worked with diverse urban schools without reflection activities, racial stereotypes were actually perpetuated; but when this situated learning was compounded with reflection, the teachers were able to gain a deeper cultural and racial awareness and insight. The useful application of self-reflection is detailed further by Chen, Nimmo, and Fraser (2009) as a tool that provides teachers with the opportunity to think more deeply about their teaching, specifically in relation to the students that they are instructing. Chen et al. argue that the process of self-reflection facilitates both reflections on action and planning for action, letting the examination of past practices inform new and improved practices.

### ***Simulation***

Simulation activities are another helpful tool for developing culturally competent teachers. These activities are powerful visual and physical experiences that create space for interesting conversations around race and racism and about how society favors whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity (Ngoasheng & Gachago, 2017). Ngoasheng and Gachago (2017) go on to detail how The Privilege Walk, a popular simulation activity, engages the participants in a way lectures or discussions alone could not by providing them with an embodied experience which “visualizes systemic privilege and breaks the silence on how systems continue to favor some in lieu of others” (p.199). Teachers who participate in these simulations are able to use that experience to create new ideas regarding race, class, and

diversity, which will foster a more productive learning environment for their students (Hogan-Chapman et al., 2017).

### ***Teaching Through the Lens of Anti-racism***

Knowles and Hawkman (2019) assert that teachers too often enact “pedagogical approaches rife with deficit perceptions of students and their abilities, as well as a general sense of ignorance in terms of the nature of systemic oppression within educational contexts” (p. 239). A study by Proctor referenced by Hampton, Peng, and Ann (2008) showed that some teacher candidates harbored a number of deficit perceptions of African American and Hispanic students, including that students would be “dirty,” “unruly,” have “little to lower knowledge,” “challenging because of diverse family backgrounds”, and “do not want to learn” (Hampton et al., p. 271). Within the context of the educational system, systemic oppression of students of color includes over-punishment and mislabeling students as requiring special education (Crutchfield et al., 2020). These deficit views and ignorance of systemic oppression do not allow teachers to reach a real understanding of their students and will inform their classroom instruction in a negative fashion. Teachers that bring these biases into the classroom can demolish the quality of their STRs as their racism or racial insensitivity is internalized by the students through the schooling experience, resulting in beliefs of racial inferiority (House-Niamke & Sato, 2019).

One method of developing cultural competence and dispelling the deficit views or ignorance teachers may hold is through learning how to apply anti-racism in the classroom. As described by Sefa Dei (1995) and referenced by Knowles and Hawkman (2019), anti-racist teaching is an “active, intentional approach in the classroom that addresses the historic, contemporary, institutional, and systemic ways in which racism contributes to oppression” (p.

245). As noted by Rojas and Liou (2021), one of Dominique's (2016) eight essential social justice pedagogies is providing curriculum that situates contemporary social justice issues in historical contexts. Dispelling any deficit perceptions of student racial groups and ousting ignorance of the educational system's institutionalized oppression will heighten teachers' cultural awareness and help them form more meaningful connections with their students and enhance the strength and quality of their STRs.

### **Classroom Library Development**

#### *Classroom Library*

Studies by Morrow (2003) and Neuman (1999), as cited by Coppens (2018), show that "students that have classroom libraries available to them read 50-60% more than those who do not have access to classroom libraries" (p. 22). Young and Moss (2006) agree, stating that students who have easy access to books have more positive attitudes about reading, reading achievement and comprehension than students who do not have the same level of access. Coppens (2018) notes that her development of a classroom library not only had the benefit of increasing students' reading comprehension and background knowledge, but also of creating a culture of reading that brought her and her students together.

Student involvement in the creation of the classroom library is another important component of developing strong readers. According to Sens (2009), student involvement is critical to planning a successful classroom library. Sens goes on to say you can capture student voices through town-hall style meetings or focus groups. Other methods of collaboration suggested and practiced by Pytash (2012) include "having students participate in a book pass to voice their opinions, suggestions, and recommendations for book purchases; creating a

classroom set of library rules; and being involved in physically organizing the books and placing them on the shelves” (p. 32).

### ***Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors***

Over 30 years ago, Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) coined the term “windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors.” This metaphor refers to the ways children sees themselves mirrored in literature and also how they can enter the lives of others through windows and sliding glass doors. Although this impactful metaphor is over three decades old, it is still vital today.

O’Donnell (2019) describes the metaphor as “more potent than ever, continuing to shape pedagogy, inspire more culturally relevant practices and propel the field of children’s literature toward greater diversity” (p. 18). Johnson, Koss, and Martinez (2018) agree, calling Bishop’s article seminal and acknowledging its great impact on current conversations around reading.

Johnson et al. (2018) go on to praise how the metaphor places focus on the role of the reader as they make meaning of themselves and the world through literature. Cahill et al. (2021) noted the numerous benefits of diverse literature being approached in this manner, including how diverse books help marginalized or underrepresented children foster a love of reading and how this interest in reading can lead to enhanced reading comprehension and feelings of empowerment and agency in the student.

### **Summary**

To summarize, the purpose of the proposed mentorship program is to educate teachers on how to strengthen STRs in their classroom to improve the literacy of the students. The two theories that informed the make-up of this program are social constructivism and sociocultural theory. Social constructivism is a branch of constructivist thinking that believes that knowledge and meaning are constructed by groups of individuals in a social setting (Merriem & Cafferella, 1999; Amineh

& Asl, 2015; Dewey, 1938). Sociocultural theory posits that building community is key to a person making meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory also holds that making cultural connections by interacting with people, objects, and events within a specific social environment will shape and inform how an individual creates meaning and understanding (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020). The purpose of focusing on improving STRs is based in the research that confirms that stronger and healthier STRs lead to higher reading scores, better overall academic performance, and improved behavior (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2012; Luet et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019; Kincade et al., 2020). The proposed project has been conceived as a mentorship program due to the numerous benefits of this style of program, including increasing commitment amongst the staff, developing positive workplace culture, and the long term, positive effects mentoring has on teaching practices (Law et al., 2014; Wells & DeNobile, 2021). Studies of mentorship programs have found that they impart great deals of knowledge to the mentees, provide opportunities for reflection for mentors, and that peer instruction is a more effective way of developing cognitive skills than traditional instruction (Lacy & Copeland, 2013; Gok & Gok, 2017). In the process of selecting mentor candidates from staff members who have already cultivated positive STRs, it is important to consider their maturity, insightfulness, experience, and if they have a genuine desire to mentor others (Trubowitz, 2004). It would be equally important to select teachers who demonstrate direct, observable practices that positively effect the quality of the STRs in their classrooms (Kincade et al., 2020).

The program is broken down into three distinct components: community connection, cultural competence, and class library development. Developing stronger Parent-Teacher Relationships and generating more parental involvement both with the school and with learning



at home is an important part of developing a stronger connection with the community and with students (Kincade et al., 2020; Soule & Curtis, 2021). Activities such as home visits allow teachers to dive into the family's funds of knowledge and develop a more informed and complete portrait of their students, bettering their STRs and increasing the quality of care they receive at school (Neiver et al, 2018; Will, 2018; Moll et al., 2001; Szech, 2021; Navarro-Cruz & Luschei, 2020). To further connect teachers with the cultures and communities in which they teach, Community Immersion programs should be deployed, as they are proven to help teachers develop authentic and trusting relationships with their students, especially in urban areas where such programs can help teachers reach an understanding of their students community and of the barriers that may make it more difficult for their students to reach their full potential (Waddell, 2013; Milner, 2008). STRs can be further improved by engaging with community leaders and local stakeholders, as this kind of engagement can provide teachers with further funds of knowledge of the community in which their students and their students' families live (Scott at al., 2020; Luet at al., 2018; Waddell, 2011). Another often overlooked resource is the students themselves; granting them a platform and listening to their voice helps students better connect with each other, their school, and their teachers, all of which leads to stronger STRs and higher academic achievement. (Tuhkala et al., 2021; Hilman, 2018; Erickson & Virgin, 2019). When students are made a part of the conversation, they feel a greater sense of belonging, which boosts their engagement and responsiveness in the classroom and connects the youth and adult worlds (Defur & Korinek, 2010; Kincade et al., 2020).

Developing culturally competent teachers who understand themselves as cultural beings, appreciate diverse populations, and value different cultural groups is a key factor in creating strong STRs, especially when teachers and students have differing backgrounds and cultures

(Kondor et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2010; Banks, 2005). One tool to help teachers achieve a sense of cultural competency is self-reflection activities that ask them to contemplate and examine themselves to increase self-awareness of their existence as cultural beings and to confront any implicit biases they may carry when working to gain a deeper cultural and racial awareness (Brownhill, 2022; Milner, 2003). When teachers apply this technique, they are provided an opportunity to think more deeply about their teaching and the students that they teach and how they may create plans for action to improve their teaching practices (Chen, Nimmo, & Fraser, 2009). Another useful tool to sharpen teachers' cultural competency is simulation activities, which are powerful visual and physical experiences that can create space for conversations around race, culture, and class to deepen participants' understanding of their students' environment and help them craft more productive classrooms for their students (Ngoasheng & Gachago, 2017; Hogan-Chapman et al., 2017). Learning how to teach through the lens of anti-racism will allow teachers to intentionally address historic, institutional, and other ways racism contributes to the oppression of their students on a day-to-day basis, while keeping racism or racial insensitivity out of their teaching (Knowles & Hawkman, 2019; Crutchfield et al., 2020; House-Niamke & Sato, 2019). This practice will generate stronger STRs by dispelling any deficit perceptions of student racial groups and filling in any ignorant gaps of knowledge on the education systems institutionalized oppression (Knowles & Hawkman, 2019; Rojas & Liou, 2021).

The final part of the program is working to build classroom libraries, based on evidence and studies that in-classroom libraries afford students more opportunities to read, create more positive attitudes about reading, and lead to higher achievement and reading comprehension (Coppens, 2018; Young & Moss, 2006). Involving the students in the development of the

classroom library has positive effects on STRs, as students and teachers are brought together by collaborating and creating a culture of reading (Sens, 2009; Pytash, 2012; Coppens, 2018).

Another way in which classroom libraries strengthen STRs is by focusing on Bishop's "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" metaphor to create a diverse library where students will see themselves, gain insight into others, and allow marginalized and underrepresented students to foster a love of reading, all of which enhances reading comprehension and creates feelings of empowerment in the student. (O'Donnell, 2019; Johnson & Martinez, 2018; Cahill et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of social constructivism and sociocultural theory has informed the development of this proposed mentorship program to be a collaborative and social experience where mentee teachers are creating knowledge and making meaning with each other and with their mentor teachers while engaging in cultural interactions with people, objects, and events in the school's community to develop deeper understanding of their students and develop strong STRs. These improved STRs will result in students having higher academic achievement in reading and beyond while also increasing the likelihood of less problematic behaviors and pleasant peer relationships.

The proposed project offers a myriad of approaches informed, supported, and endorsed by research and qualitative studies from the field of education. By building relationships with parents and guardians, and by developing connections to and with the community writ large, teachers can leverage the funds of knowledge provided by these sources, as well as by the students themselves, to develop a much more well-rounded and well-informed portrait of their students as entities beyond the classroom, which will boost the quality of STRs. By growing

more culturally competent themselves through self-reflection, simulation activities, and engaging with anti-racist practices, teachers will gain invaluable understandings of themselves and their students as cultural beings with varying degrees of relatability and differences while also uncovering any unconscious biases and the history of systemic oppression in the educational system. By collaborating with students on the development of a diverse classroom library, teachers will bond with students and shape a useful tool in their classroom to generate interest in reading and boost students' literacy.

## **Project Description**

### **Introduction**

Students in Detroit, Michigan are not performing at grade level on standardized reading tests (Lake, Jochim, & DeArmond, 2015). A mentorship program for teachers with weak student-teacher relationships (STRs), which is made up of three key components: community connection, cultural competence training, and classroom library development, will strengthen STRs. When STRs are made stronger, teachers will be able to connect more and teach their students better (Francis et al., 2019). When students receive better instruction, their test scores will improve (Kincade et al., 2020). Following this introduction, there will be a section on the components of the mentorship program. This section will explain the pieces that go into making this program successful. For example, in the following section there will be explanations of the professional development and community outings teachers will participate in. After the components piece there will be a section explaining how the program will be implemented in the school. Afterwards, there will be a section where possible ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the program will be discussed. Finally, there will be a section where possible project conclusions are explored and examined.

### **Project Components**

This mentorship program is made up of three major components: community connection, cultural competence training, and diverse classroom libraries. The three distinct components of the program will take place simultaneously over the school year. The first year the project is implemented, school leadership will screen and select staff members at their school who demonstrate both the disposition to mentor and who have already curated strong, positive STRs in their classroom (Appendix A) (Trubowitz, 2004; Kincade et al., 2020). The final selection of

mentors will be decided by the principal and the mentors themselves will hand select their mentees. The following year, the mentees become the mentors and take other teachers in the school through the program. This program is a recurring, year-after-year program to keep important conversations about race and community at the forefront and to develop incoming teachers to be the best instructors they can be for the students they teach. This program is to be implemented across grade levels with the greatest variance in the development of classroom libraries, as these must be suited to the students' reading levels.

The program consists of eighteen in-person meetings between mentors and mentees, twice a month for the duration of the school year (Appendix B). The exceptions are December and June, which will have one meeting each. The first meeting will be an explanation and outline of the program, followed by an assignment of a reflection activity for the mentee teachers (Appendix C). The purpose of the first meeting is to introduce the program to the participating staff, pair up mentors with their mentees, and to get the self-reflection assignment into the hands of the mentees. This self-reflection assignment serves to gauge how teachers currently feel about their students, their school and its community, and notions of anti-racism and the importance of diverse literature. The second meeting will be about the reflection mentees filled out during the first meeting. Mentors will lead a discussion and dialogue about the responses and questions that arose from filling out the reflection. The purpose of diving into these reflections is to stimulate thought and conversation around the topics addressed in this program and for mentees to understand where opportunities for growth in their teaching practices may be, particularly in relation to the development of strong STRs (Milner, 2003; Chen et al., 2009). The third meeting will invite a speaker to come and present and talk with the mentees (Appendix D). This speaker will be a community leader or activist with great knowledge of the community. The purpose of

inviting a community leader to speak to the mentees is to tap into the funds of knowledge that an authentic voice from the community may offer. Mentors and mentees will have an opportunity to dialogue with this guest and to start building the foundations of a trusting relationship with them (Scott, et al., 2020). The fourth meeting will be a scavenger hunt in the community, finding various landmarks and Detroit-specific iconography (Appendix E). This activity serves to familiarize the mentees with the neighborhood that their school resides in and to facilitate engagement in social interactions around that community to develop a deeper understanding of the community's specific cultural identity (Waddell, 2011; Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020). The fifth meeting will introduce reading materials for the mentees, starting with articles that examine the role of STRs (Appendix F). Discussion will follow. The purpose of providing these reading materials to the mentees is to demonstrate the importance of building strong STRs and the incredibly positive effects good STRs can have on a student's academic performance. The sixth meeting will be a dinner at a local eatery to familiarize teachers with each other and with their communities (Appendix G). The dual purpose of this activity is to support local businesses and also to immerse the mentees in their students' culture and experiences (Luet et al., 2018). Home visits are also introduced. The seventh and eighth meetings are the home visits between teachers and their students' families (Appendix H). The home visits serve a variety of purposes, including mentee teachers learning more about their students' home lives, inviting feedback and input from the students' parents or guardians, and creating a relationship between school and home (Neiver et al., 2018; Will, 2018). At the ninth meeting, mentees will discuss how the home visits went and what they learned about their students' home lives (Appendix I). This meeting allows the mentees to examine their interactions with students' families, hear from their fellow mentees about their experiences, and reach a deeper cultural awareness and insight from those

experiences with help from their mentors. (Milner, 2003; Chen et al., 2009). The tenth meeting will introduce Simulation Activities, starting with the Privilege Walk (Appendix J). Mentors and mentees discuss what they learn. The purpose of this activity is to give mentees an experience that demonstrates in a visual and physical manner what privileges they may or may not have and to discuss privileges their students may or may not have and how that can affect their ability to relate to their students (Ngoasheng & Gachago, 2017; Hogan-Chapman et al., 2017). The eleventh meeting will be a multimedia day, where mentees listen to podcasts or watch videos, diving into materials on the subject of anti-racism (Appendix K). The purpose of introducing these materials to the mentees is to spark the conversation around anti-racism and start them on the path of applying anti-racism into their teaching practices in order to leave any implicit biases towards or deficit views of their students far behind them (Knowles & Hawkman, 2019; Crutchfield et al., 2020). The twelfth meeting will follow up with a second Simulation Activity, BaFá BaFá (Appendix L). Mentors and mentees discuss what they learn. This activity demonstrates the difficulty of two distinct and different cultures interacting with one another so mentees can understand that there are challenges in cross-cultural communication that they will need to work on to overcome (Ngoasheng & Gachago, 2017; Hogan-Chapman et al., 2017). The thirteenth meeting will introduce the classroom library project, where mentee teachers will be asked to reshape their classroom libraries to contain more diverse literature both in terms of representation and authors (Appendix M). The purpose of this project is multi-faceted. The main goal is to get more diverse books into the hands of students who might not otherwise see themselves or others reflected in literature. It also encourages student-teacher collaboration in the selection of books for the library and offers students a chance to suggest where the library should go in the classroom or how it should be set up or how renting books from the library should



work. Finally, students who have access to classroom libraries have been proven to read upwards of 50% more than students who don't. (Coppens, 2018; Young & Moss, 2006; Bishop, 1990).

The fourteenth meeting will host a student panel where older students (middle school and up) are invited to share their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concerns with the mentors and mentees. The purpose of this panel is to invite students of the school to a place to have their voices heard and their opinions to be given a platform. This creates a sense of belonging and trust in the student and further solidifies the bond of STRs (Hilman, 2018; Erickson & Virgin, 2019; Defur & Korinek, 2010). The fifteenth meeting will be a check-in on the progress of the library project where mentors and mentees can help each other with what they have found so far and what areas they still need assistance in. The purpose of this meeting is for the mentees to get assistance from their mentors and to collaborate with each other and share resources or ideas, such as developing a book pass for students to choose books (Appendix N). The sixteenth meeting will take staff offsite to volunteer at a local food bank or homeless shelter to give back to the community. The purpose of this activity is to encourage mentees to give back to the communities in which they teach and to further improve STRs by helping teachers cultivate a better understanding of the needs of the community in which their students live. (Waddell, 2011). The seventeenth meeting will host a parent panel where parents of students are invited to share their views on the school with mentors and mentees (Appendix O). The purpose of the parent panel is to tap into their funds of knowledge once again and to continue to build upon the school-home relationships established during the home visits. (Kincade et al., 2020; Soule & Curits 2021; Moll et al., 2001; Szech. 2021; Navarro-Cruz & Luschei, 2020). The eighteenth and final meeting will serve as a wrap up of the program, with reflection and feedback given to the mentors. Mentees will present their completed diversified classroom libraries and reflect on what they have learned throughout

the program. By reflecting on their experiences in this program, mentees will be equipped to speak to the growth in the quality of their STRs and be able to point to how a deeper understanding of the students' community and home life helped them perceive the person they are teaching as a whole and not merely as a student (Milner, 2003; Chen et al., 2009; Kincade et al., Moll et al., 2001). They will also at this time start to plan the next year's program which they will serve as mentors in.

The goal of this program is to boost students' reading scores by boosting their confidence and their skill simultaneously. This is done through positive STRs where teachers support and understand their students at a deeper level and in a more contextualized way (Kincade et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2019).

### **Project Implementation**

To properly implement this program, the members of school leadership will screen and select the staff members who will act as mentors in the first year of the program. These mentors will need to meet over the summer before the program's implementation. They will discuss the program, gather reading materials and assignments, and select their mentees from their peers. It would also be important to invite community leaders and parents to the summer meetings to gain their input and insight on certain aspects of the program, like suggesting a great local activist for the guest speaker or what restaurants to take the mentees to or what should be included in the scavenger hunt. Following each of the eighteen meetings over the school year, mentors should meet and debrief to go over what they think is going well and is helping their teachers grow in their cultural competency and their knowledge of their students and community.

Another important aspect of this program is that it is designed to be recurring year to year, with the mentees from the first year becoming the mentors the second year, and the

mentees from the second year becoming the mentors the third year, and so on. While the numbers are flexible, the recommended number of mentors to mentees is five to ten. This program can be altered to be suited to a high school as well, but the program was designed around a K-8 building. Mentees should be selected to have representation from every grade level and at least one paraprofessional or instructional coach. After the first year, five of the mentees are selected either by mentors, by vote, or by volunteering to become mentors the following year.

### **Project Evaluation**

The two methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the program would be through analyzing state mandated standardized reading test scores and through surveys. Test score data should be collected from the previous year before the implementation of the program to establish scores prior to the program. Then MSTEP/NWEA scores will be collected at the end of the academic school year. Reading scores will be compared from the previous year's scores. This comparison process will continue year to year as long as the program is in effect at the school. The success indicators of this method of evaluating the program's effectiveness will be higher scores on these tests after the program is implemented.

In addition, there will be two surveys for the mentees to participate in throughout the school year (Appendix P). The first survey will be given in December to gain insight into how the mentees feel the program is going. The survey will also ask for suggestions and areas of improvement which the mentors will take into consideration. A final survey will be given at the end of the school year. This survey will ask mentees to reflect of the program and rate its effectiveness. The success indicators for this method of evaluation will be consistent positive feedback by the majority of the teachers and by the utilization of text mining methods to examine

commonly used words and phrases from the surveys. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, a more comprehensive look at the effectiveness of the program will be revealed.

### **Project Conclusions**

This mentorship program has three main components: community connection, cultural competence training, and classroom library development. When teachers go through this program, they will learn how to understand their students better, which will allow them to strengthen their STRs. When strong STRs are in place, the students will learn more, which will have a positive impact on their literacy scores. Other positive outcomes of the program could be creating a partnership with the community and the school, honing teachers' cultural competency, and ensuring the diversity of all classroom libraries. While the ultimate goal of the program is increasing students' reading test scores, there are a myriad of positive outcomes that would create higher achieving students and stronger, more effective teachers schoolwide.

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**Appendix A**  
**Screeners for Mentor Candidates**

**Observation**

- Staff member positively greets students every morning**
- Staff member consistently praises students**
- Staff member celebrates student birthdays and/or holidays with their class**
- Staff member attends or is involved in extra-curricular activities at the school**

**Questionnaire**

**1. How would you define student-teacher relationships?**

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**2. How do you build relationships with your students?**

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**3. What impact do you think STRs have on academics?**

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**4. Are you interested in acting as a mentor for your co-workers?**

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**Appendix B**  
**Calendar for the Meetings/Events of the Year 2022-2023**

Meetings will take place on Tuesdays after school starting at 4:00pm. Below find the exact dates and the corresponding meetings.

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>DATES</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
<b>September</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> 27 <sup>th</sup>	1. Introduction/Self-Reflection 2. Reflect on Self-Reflection
<b>October</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> 18 <sup>th</sup>	3. Guest Speaker 4. Scavenger Hunt
<b>November</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> 15 <sup>th</sup>	5. Reading Materials on Student-Teacher Relationships 6. Dinner
<b>December</b>	13 <sup>th</sup>	7. Home Visit
<b>January</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> 24 <sup>th</sup>	8. Home Visit 9. Reflection on Home Visits
<b>February</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> 21 <sup>st</sup>	10. Privilege Walk 11. Multimedia Day
<b>March</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> 21 <sup>st</sup>	12. BaFa Bafa 13. Classroom Library Project
<b>April</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> 18 <sup>th</sup>	14. Student Panel 15. Library Project Check In
<b>May</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> 16 <sup>th</sup>	16. Volunteer 17. Parent Panel
<b>June</b>	6 <sup>th</sup>	18. Wrap Up/Final Reflection/Steps for Next Year

Created by Emily Nicholas, 2022.

## Appendix C

Mentee Reflection (to be completed after the first meeting)

**1. What challenges do you think our students face due to the color of their skin and socioeconomic status?**

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**2. What do you know about the history of Detroit?**

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**3. What does being anti-racist mean to you?**

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**4. Does your current classroom library include diverse characters written by diverse authors?**

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**5. Do you think it is important to spend time in the community you work in? Why or why not?**

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**6. Do you feel like you have strong relationships with your students' adults (parents/grandparents/guardians/etc.)?**

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**7. Why do you think our students are reading below grade level?**

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**8. What are you hoping to gain from participating in this program?**

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**9. Any questions or anything else you would like to add?**

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**Appendix D**  
**Potential Questions to Ask Community Leader**

**1. How long have you lived or worked in the community?**

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**2. What makes this community special or unique?**

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**3. Why is it important that teachers know and understand the community they work in?**

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**4. How can teachers get involved in the community?**

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**5. What does this community mean to you?**

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**6. What challenges have you faced living/working in this community?**

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**7. What advice do you have for teachers working in this community?**

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**8. Anything else you think we should know about this community?**

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## Appendix E

### Form to be Completed During Local Scavenger Hunt

Take a selfie next to the following landmarks in the city.

1. A library.

2. The police station.

3. The fire station.

4. A local park.

5. A corner store/convenience store.

6. A mural/outside artwork.

7. A local restaurant.

8. Another elementary school in the community.

9. A high school in the community.

10. City hall.



## Appendix F

### List of Reading Materials on the Importance of Strong Teacher-Student Relationships

1. The Importance of Strong Relationships

<https://edtrust.org/resource/the-importance-of-strong-relationships/#:~:text=Strong%20relationships%20with%20teachers%20and,and%20experience%20more%20positive%20behavior.>

2. Why Strong Teacher Relationships Lead to Student Engagement and a Better School Environment

<https://www.waterford.org/education/teacher-student-relationships/>

3. Why Teacher-Student Relationships Matter

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-teacher-student-relationships-matter/2019/03>

4. 5 Reasons Why Student-Teacher Relationships are Important

<https://www.sst13.org/blog/5-reasons-why-student-teacher-relationships-are-important/>

5. Teacher and Student Relationships: The Power of Trust

<https://www.massadvocates.org/news/teacher-and-student-relationships-the-power-of-trust>

**Appendix G**  
**List of Potential Restaurants for Local Dinner**

1. Buddy's Pizza: 17125 Conant St, Detroit, MI 48212
2. Lou's Coney Island: 19100 Mound Rd, Detroit, MI 48234
3. Taylor Made Burgers: 4844 Seven Mile E, Detroit, MI 48234
4. Conant Street Grill: 19132 Conant St, Detroit, MI 48234
5. BB's Diner: 5223 Seven Mile E, Detroit, MI 48234
6. Fay Fay's: 19160 Conant St, Detroit, MI 48234
7. Generations Bistro Soul Food: 2440 Seven Mile E, Detroit, MI 48234
8. Motown Café & Grill: 19638 Van Dyke Ave, Detroit, MI 48234
9. Joe Ann's Bar B-Q: 3139 Jerome St, Detroit, MI 48212
10. Detroit Soul: 2900 E 8 Mile Rd, Detroit, MI 48234



**Appendix H**  
**Home Visit Questions**

**1. How long have lived here? Who lives here with you?**

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**2. What are your hopes and dreams for your child this year?**

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**3. Does your child have any siblings?**

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**4. As your child's first teacher, what can you tell me that will help me to teach them best?**

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**5. What does your family do in their free time together?**

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**6. What does a typical weekend look like for you and your family?**

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**7. Do you have any special interests or skills you'd like to share with the class?**

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**8. Are you and your family involved in anything within the community? If so, what?**

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**9. Are you close with your neighbors?**

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**10. Anything else you would like me to know about your family?**

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**Appendix I**  
**Reflection on Home Visits**

1. What did you learn from doing the home visits?

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2. Did participating in the home visits help you understand your students more? Why or why not?

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3. Do you think you strengthened your relationships with students and parents by doing home visits? Why or why not?

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4. Do you think doing home visits is important? Why or why not?

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5. What was one thing that surprised you during home visits? Explain.

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## Appendix J

### Questions to Ask During *The Privilege Walk*

1. If one or both of your parents graduated from college, take one step forward.
2. If you studied the history and culture of your ethnic ancestors in elementary and secondary school, take one step forward.
3. If you have ever been the only person of your race/ethnicity in a classroom or place of work, take one step back.
4. If you knew since you were a child that it was expected of you to go to college, take one step forward.
5. If you almost always feel comfortable with people knowing your sexual orientation, take one step forward.
6. If you started school speaking a language other than English, take one step back.
7. If you grew up in an economically disadvantaged or single-parent home, take one step back.
8. If you have ever been called names regarding your race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, or physical/learning disability and felt uncomfortable, take one step back.
9. If you feel certain that you will not be followed, harassed, or watched under close surveillance while shopping, take one step forward.
10. If you feel that people do not interpret your personal opinions as a representation of your entire race, take one step forward.
11. If you were ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, or car and wished to change it to avoid being judged or teased, take one step back.
12. If school and work is not in session during the major (religious) holidays or other cultural events that you celebrate, take one step forward.
13. If you have ever been hesitant to speak to avoid being ridiculed because of your accent or speech impediment, take one step back.
14. If you have ever skipped a meal or went away from a meal hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one back.
15. If you almost always see members of your race, sexual orientation, religion, and class widely represented on television, in the newspaper, and the media in a POSITIVE manner, take one step forward.

## Appendix K Multimedia Resource List

1. The Difference Between Being "Not Racist" and Antiracist | Ibram X. Kendi  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCxbl5QgFZw&t=2241s>
2. Detroit, 1967: 100 Years of Racism in Policing  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlqfEYSSi8M>
3. Can One Person Change the Criminal Justice System?  
<https://www.iheart.com/podcast/302-katie-couric-28008908/episode/can-one-person-change-the-criminal-54238120/>
4. Code Switch  
<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510312/codeswitch>
5. About Race with Reni Eddo-Lodge  
<https://open.spotify.com/show/6RNwASBcNjuK4tuqdaXzBn?si=7wG82LpBROOOww9-xL1ndQ&nd=1>
6. 16 Ways to Help Children Become Thoughtful, Informed, and BRAVE About Race  
[https://www.embracerace.org/resources/16-ways-to-help-children-become-thoughtful-informed-and-brave-about-race?gclid=CjwKCAiAvaGRBhBIEiwAiY-yMKxqHHQ9pF3L1FrvOAEsKMu2LWzwwsjWMhIwId\\_0YICpP14p3VCuOhoCzPcQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.embracerace.org/resources/16-ways-to-help-children-become-thoughtful-informed-and-brave-about-race?gclid=CjwKCAiAvaGRBhBIEiwAiY-yMKxqHHQ9pF3L1FrvOAEsKMu2LWzwwsjWMhIwId_0YICpP14p3VCuOhoCzPcQAvD_BwE)
7. How to be Anti-Racist  
[https://www.aspenideas.org/sessions/how-to-be-an-antiracist?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=adgrant&utm\\_campaign=Society&utm\\_term=how%20to%20be%20an%20antiracist&gclid=CjwKCAiAvaGRBhBIEiwAiY-yMDRVK00u9kKVMaycFdsUf9Z598L8appCMukQtSfexBHBdrqD2GhyExoCx8AQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.aspenideas.org/sessions/how-to-be-an-antiracist?utm_source=google&utm_medium=adgrant&utm_campaign=Society&utm_term=how%20to%20be%20an%20antiracist&gclid=CjwKCAiAvaGRBhBIEiwAiY-yMDRVK00u9kKVMaycFdsUf9Z598L8appCMukQtSfexBHBdrqD2GhyExoCx8AQAvD_BwE)
8. How to Be an Anti-Racist Teacher in a Mostly White School | Taryn Coe  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_ITNyEHLOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_ITNyEHLOk)
9. Episode 1: Tools for Anti-Racist Teaching  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8O1JRHnb-o>
10. 6 Ways to be an Antiracist Educator  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM3Lfk751cg>

List compiled by Emily Nicholas, 2022.



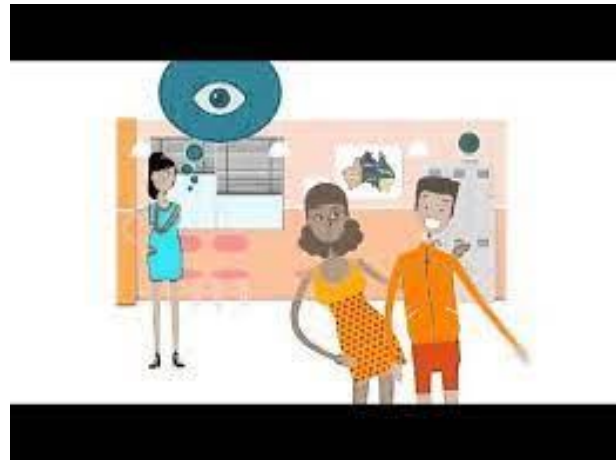
## Appendix L

### BaFa BaFa Directions

You can watch the full directions on how to play this simulation game here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi4nVs077Rc>

1. Separate the mentees into two groups randomly: The Alphas and The Betas.
  - Alphas are family-oriented and value, interpersonal relationships are valued, and non-competitive.
  - Betas are highly competitive and believe time is money, values negotiation.
2. Brief mentees on the rituals, customs and beliefs of their cultures and give them time to live and practice in their new culture.
3. Elect an observer from each group and send them to the other group.
4. Observer finds out as much as possible about the other culture and returns to their original group to tell and interpret what they saw.
5. Send visitors to the other group and do not explain any of the customs or rituals to the visitors.
  - Example: In Alpha culture, you must touch someone before you speak to them. Betas will be ignored unless they do this.
6. After everyone has had a turn to visit the other group, meet back to debrief.
7. Discuss the experience.



Created by Emily Nicholas, 2022. Images searched on Google Images.  
Based off the idea of Dr. Gary Shirts.

## Appendix M

### Tips to Build a Diverse and Inclusive Classroom Library

1. Look at the current books you have in your library. Remove all books that perpetuate stereotypes such as: ability, race, mental health, and so on.
2. Include as many unique voices as possible!
  - a. Here is a check list to see if a book meets your criteria:  
[https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/resource-documents/classroomlibraryequityaudit.pdf?\\_ga=2.217367125.2142966146.1620844832-1518216399.1620844832&\\_ga=2.217367125.2142966146.1620844832-1518216399.1620844832](https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/resource-documents/classroomlibraryequityaudit.pdf?_ga=2.217367125.2142966146.1620844832-1518216399.1620844832&_ga=2.217367125.2142966146.1620844832-1518216399.1620844832)
  - b. Diverse book recommendations: [https://littlefreelibrary.org/read-in-color-recommended-reading/?gclid=CjwKCAiAg6yRBhBNEiwAeVyL0B4dcwHb96cry9aZLoubf\\_klYcJUumEvC0HZ6Us9M0C4Ft-cp25UThoCphsQAvD\\_BwE](https://littlefreelibrary.org/read-in-color-recommended-reading/?gclid=CjwKCAiAg6yRBhBNEiwAeVyL0B4dcwHb96cry9aZLoubf_klYcJUumEvC0HZ6Us9M0C4Ft-cp25UThoCphsQAvD_BwE)
  - c. More recommendations: <https://diversebooks.org/resources-old/where-to-find-diverse-books/>
3. Ask your students for books they would like to read or listen to you read. (See book pass in the next appendix)
4. Ask your coworkers for recommendations! Use your resources!



### Appendix N Book Pass

**Directions:** Gather a group of compelling books for your students to pass around. Give students about 30 seconds to flip through the pages, read the back of the book and the first few pages. Then have students fill out the form below. You can purchase the books they are the most excited about!

Name \_\_\_\_\_



# Book Pass



#	Title and Author	Interesting? Yes No Maybe

Directions created by Emily Nicholas, 2022.  
Book pass created by Joy Sexton, 2016.

**Appendix O**  
**Potential Parent Panel Questions**

**\*Start with each parent introducing themselves and saying how old their child/children are and what grade they're in\***

**1. What do you like about Legacy Charter Academy?**

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**2. What would you like to see changed at Legacy Charter Academy?**

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---

**3. How can we improve teacher-parent relationships?**

---

---

**4. What events would you like to see take place at the school?**

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---

**5. How would you like to communicate with teachers and staff at the school?**

---

---

**6. Do you feel like your child's educational needs are being met? Why or why not?**

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**7. How can we support you in helping your child learn at home?**

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---

**8. Anything else you would like to add?**

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**Appendix P**  
**Survey for Mentees**  
**(To be given halfway through the program and again at the end.)**

**1. Do you think you have been given tools to strengthen your relationships with your students? Why or why not?**

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**2. How has learning about your students' home lives impacted the way you teach?**

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**3. How has interacting within the community helped you understand your students better?**

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**4. What have you learned about anti-racism and privilege that has impacted your views on your students and how you teach?**

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**5. Do you think having stronger relationships with your students will improve their reading scores? Why or why not?**

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**6. What suggestions do you have for making this mentorship program even stronger?**

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**7. Anything else you would like to add?**

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