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**Status of the Dream: A Study of Dr. King in Little Rock and Memphis Classrooms**

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## **Status of the Dream: A Study of Dr. King in Little Rock and Memphis Classrooms**

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### **Abstract**

As an elementary school student in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, the author attended what would become the last speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Now as a professor of leadership studies, the author continues to see the significance of this watershed moment in history as it relates to the new American civil right: education. The author surveyed 50 elementary school teachers in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee, investigating ways they honor the life and legacy of Dr. King in their classrooms. The study revealed that, even though teachers remain faithful to state standards, teachers find creative ways to bring historical context to their classrooms that extend Dr. King's dream indelibly to contemporary and future generations.

### **Introduction**

The author was present for what would become the last speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) when she was an elementary school student in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968. Being present for such a historical event was life-altering in shaping her views on equity with reference to what is known as *the American dream* (Webster-Smith, in press). Today, as a professor of leadership studies who helps to prepare and develop school leaders, she continues to see the significance of this watershed moment in history as it relates to what is believed to be the new American civil right: education. Dr. King's influence extends far beyond U.S. borders and offers a model for peace around the world.

Over 40 years after his death in 1968, the author investigated a total of 50 elementary school teachers in Little Rock, Arkansas, and in Memphis, Tennessee, regarding the life and legacy of Dr. King in contemporary classrooms. Selecting populations of teachers from these venues was important because both cities attracted national attention and fashioned defining moments during the Civil Rights era. The Little Rock crisis involved high school students known as the Little Rock Nine who were initially prevented from entering a racially segregated Little Rock Central High School, whereas the Memphis emergency concerned the Sanitation Strike of 1968 that culminated with Dr. King's death. Because the investigator was born, reared, and lived in the greater Memphis area for many years but currently lives in the greater Little Rock area, often she has wondered about the contemporary effects of Dr. King's legacy on instruction in schools in areas where civil rights battles were fought publically.

This paper acquaints the reader with how the MLK dream is operationalized in the personal and professional lives of a small sample of modern-day teachers. Specifically, this paper speaks to the ways in which elementary school teachers are honoring a piece of American history in their classrooms and will offer implications for teacher education.

### **Literature Review**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2010) defines social studies as an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence in K-12 and college/university settings. Its framework consists of 10 themes including culture, change, people, places, environment, institutions, power, authority, governance, society, global connections, civic ideals, and practices. In alignment with these precepts, elementary school teachers must routinely help their students understand the relevance and significance that everyday citizens have on the symbols, icons, and traditions of American history. The teachers

must chronicle the events, protocols, laws, and the basic structures of American life, how those procedures came to be and how such systems affect contemporary living.

Teachers must be able to give credence to Americans who take risks to secure the liberties that are enjoyed in this land of the free. When honoring the nation's heroes, teachers should include individuals from a diverse group of populations. Furthermore, teachers of social studies have the responsibility of engaging students in the processes of critical thinking, ethical decision making, and social participation because these tenets are necessary for democratic living (Ligon, 2005). Principles of the democratic ideal should be taught in ways that allow students to become more conscious of civic life and to see themselves as actors in history (Ayers, Kumashiro, Meiners, Quinn, & Stovall, 2010). Critical reflection and critical discourse are especially important in classrooms where minority students are taught as these instructional methods engage the learner in the process of intellectual border-crossing in that the students can move beyond the borders that have been constructed throughout the course of history through political (power, privilege, and policy) and social contexts (norms, culture, and ethos) (Ingram & Waters, 2007).

Additionally, ideals that educators have for themselves and for their students should include those that pertain to the character and courage that strengthen democracy, equity, and social justice in classrooms and throughout the school (Gallavan, 2011). Freire (1970) purported that education is a practice of freedom and necessary to experience the fullness of humanity; without education, people do not make their own way. They merely become what history makes for them. So, in order to ensure consistent and widespread implementation of teaching democracy, it is important that teachers become comfortable, confident, and competent in designing and presenting lessons to and about a multicultural America and a multicultural world.

Standards for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2008) compels colleges and universities to ensure that teacher candidates as well as leadership candidates demonstrate their abilities to apply proficiencies related to diversity and to develop classrooms that value diversity. Therefore, institutions of higher education must offer experiences that help candidates confront issues of diversity and inclusiveness that affect teaching effectiveness and improves student learning. Such experiences would afford candidates opportunities to practice the integration of multiple perspectives in their disciplines and to connect curriculum and instruction to their students' experiences and cultures. These informed practices include knowing how to explain, in developmentally appropriate contexts, the effects of cultural and historical events on general and minority populations for the success of all students and the good will of the nation (Banks, 2007, Davis, 2009, Gay, 2000, Grant & Sleeter, 2007, Irvine, 2007).

Multicultural education is a broad concept that calls for school wide transformation for an empowering, inclusive, and equitable school culture and social structure. It also promotes a leadership team that works with teachers from all disciplines to understand and prepare for their highly interrelated roles (Banks, 2007). While developing students' consciousness and building democratic participation are building blocks in multicultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 2007), curriculum and instruction are crucial components. To that end, teachers must discern the confluence of culture and academic achievement on their roles as effective teachers (Banks, 2007, Davis, 2009, Gay, 2000, Grant & Sleeter, 2007, Irvine, 2007).

For all intents and purposes, teachers should be able to employ culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000) with consistency and confidence. Of the key elements of multicultural education is the consideration of various approaches and perspectives with an appreciation of

how such interpretations are based upon beliefs and social identity (Davis, 2009). Banks (2007) recommends the transformative approach to multicultural education. In this approach, the overall framework of the curriculum is structured such that concepts, issues, and themes are considered from a variety of perspectives. Accepting knowledge as a social construction, teachers present diverse understandings, explanations, and interpretations of the same event.

When used by teachers, the social construction practice helps students understand how the knowledge that is constructed is influenced by the ethnic, racial, and social-class backgrounds of the people constructing that knowledge. In view of the growing diversity in America's schools, this study captures a snapshot of how a small group of teachers integrates the NCSS social studies frameworks that offer a concept map, the NCATE diversity standards that guide best practice and prevailing multicultural education principles that offer practical applications for teaching.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was conducted specifically to explore the vitality of Dr. King's dream in contemporary classrooms. Of the many possible approaches for framing these phenomena, the author chose to use integrated lines of investigation to construct and to contextualize this study with respect to its place and connection to key, related standards for teaching. The conceptual framework also honors the influence of phenomenology and phenomenology of practice (van Manen, 2007) as it affords teachers a means of considering what they believe and how that translates into how they act in everyday situations.

Phenomenological research gives credence to individuals and how they make sense of their lived experiences. Through this approach, individuals are also given conceptual space to address the significance of events, time, self, and others as they are experienced (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008). In addition, the idea context for this study provides insights into how individuals build bridges between how they think and feel with how they act as much as it connects who they are with who they may become (van Manen, 2007).

On one hand, the study utilized direct examination by simply recording what occurred around a single organizing principle such as valuing diversity in the classroom. On the other hand, the investigator considered multiple ideologies such as developing civic competence and advancing multicultural education. Using a naturalistic, interpretive approach, the investigator prioritized explaining the phenomenon in terms of participants' meanings and perspectives. For example, the approach allows for teachers' personal presuppositions and interpretations of the concept, aka Dr. King's dream, and how their personal meanings of the concept intersect with its place in the contemporary elementary school classroom.

This approach gives conceptual space for examining whether it should be taught, when it should be taught, and how often it should be taught. Therefore, this qualitative study has the freedom to emerge with its own themes. Lastly, this conceptual framework was selected to develop the necessary structures to tell a story about the concept of Dr. King's dream and its relationship to 21<sup>st</sup> century schools and to teacher education with regards to the implications for how colleges of education prepare practicing teachers, provide professional development, and collaborate with schools.

Every learning environment takes into account knowledge of general and individual stages of child development and learning plus educational effectiveness. When teaching about the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., teachers are guided by at least three plausible systems: the NCSS social studies standards, NCATE accreditation standards for valuing diversity, and Bank's transformative approach to multicultural education. The conceptual map (see Figure 1)

offers a visual display expanding the social studies standards as the constructs grounding Dr. King's dream. The conceptual map also shows the integrated relationships among the concepts.

Dr. King's dream is at the core of the concept map. The tendrils represent preparation for democratic citizenry, a respect for diversity, as well as the incorporation of multiple perspectives for teaching and learning. This system of concepts frames the expectations for how teachers might honor this building block in the pillars of American history.

### **Methodology**

Subsequent to the 40-year commemoration of Dr. King's death was an appropriate juncture in time to examine the status of Dr. King's dream in America's classrooms. This study was conducted using a qualitative research paradigm as it is useful for studying a limited number of participants. Qualitative research is also valuable for describing complex phenomena and for understanding and describing participants' personal experiences of the phenomenon in question related to Dr. King's dream. The qualitative approach allows for describing this phenomenon as situated and embedded in local contexts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzi, 2004).

In 2008, Americans commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King's death and the 45<sup>th</sup> centenary since his *I Have a Dream* speech. During Dr. King's lifetime, the American Civil Rights Movement targeted ideals such as integration, justice, and equal access. The movement received notable mention for its victories in Little Rock, Arkansas, and in Memphis, Tennessee. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education is considered to be the new civil right; therefore, the author focused the spotlight on a school in each of these cities to catch a glimpse of how teachers commemorate that moment in American history with regards to its significance and relationship to the life and times of current students.

### **Participating Cities**

During the time of the study, the city of Little Rock proper was managed by a Caucasian mayor with an approximate population of 184,000, while the city of Memphis proper was governed by an African American mayor with an estimated population of 646,000 (Little Rock Community Profile, n.d.; Memphis Community Profile, n.d.). To revisit the Little Rock Nine situation, one can find the Little Rock Central High School Museum and Visitor's Center across the street from the continuously vibrant Little Rock Central High School as well as a memorial on the grounds of the state Capitol. Additionally, the street where the Capitol complex resides was renamed in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. To memorialize the Memphis emergency, one can find the National Civil Rights Museum located in the, now defunct, hotel where Dr. King was slain. Each city hosts special events to celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and across the United States the third Monday in January honors his life as the first national holiday that specifically honors the life of an African American.

### **Participating Schools**

The participating schools and school districts in this study are located approximately 200 miles apart. At the time of the study, both school districts employed African American superintendents and both schools were lead by African American principals. The majority of students at each school received free and/or reduced meals. Both schools were elementary schools serving students in grades PK-5. The Little Rock elementary school enrolled approximately 400 mostly Caucasian students while the Memphis elementary school enrolled approximately 1,000 mostly African American students. At the time of the study, the participating Little Rock elementary school was rated as "meets standards" according to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), and the participating Memphis elementary school was rated as having a "good" NCLB standing.

### **Participating Teachers**

The participating teachers included 18 teachers from the Little Rock elementary school and 32 teachers from the Memphis elementary school. The Little Rock teachers included 1 African American, 16 Caucasians, and 1 Native American. The only male teacher in the study was in Memphis with 22 African American teachers, 1 Asian teacher, and 9 Caucasian teachers. Credentials of the Little Rock teachers included mostly master's degrees averaging 20 years of experience whereas Memphis teachers held mostly graduate degrees (master's degrees and doctorates) with an average of 12 years of teaching experience. The majority of Little Rock teachers were over age 40 while the majority of Memphis teachers were under age 40. The majority of teachers at both venues reported living in either urban or suburban neighborhoods. Teachers of language arts/literacy/literature, science, mathematics, social studies, music, and art participated from both schools. Other participants in the study included the counselor, speech pathologist/therapist and English Language Learning (ELL) teacher. All grade levels, Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, were represented among the participants. Teacher demographics are displayed in Table 1.

### **Procedures**

The investigator employed the three basic stages of research. She declared the research objective, collected the data, and analyzed and interpreted the data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzi, 2004). Before data were collected, written, site permission was granted in each case by the lead school administrator. Thereafter, surveys were placed in the U.S. mail to the school principal with a self-addressed envelope and necessary postage. Upon receipt, the administrator at each school placed the surveys in the faculty lounge with instructions for interested, volunteer teachers to complete and return to the envelope.

Teachers were provided an informed consent form notifying them of the potential benefits, that their participation was voluntary, and that the estimated time investment for completing the survey instrument was approximately 30 minutes. Teachers also were informed that they could refuse to participate, stop participation at anytime without penalty, or they could indicate their withdrawal by simply discontinuing their responses to the questions and returning the participation packet to the envelope or to the investigator. Teachers were further notified of confidentiality in that the data were not associated with their names and that their data would not be withdrawn from the study after it had been collected.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey instrument was created by the investigator (see Appendix A). In order to determine a sufficiently valid and adequately reliable method of approaching the research questions, the investigator considered the types of information being pursued, uses of the information, individuals to be helped by receiving the information, the timeliness of the project, and the available resources (Krathwohl, 1993; Mathison, 1988; Patton, 1990). To those ends, this design was primarily selected for its potential to provide understanding and reasonable generalizability. As the chief interest of this study lay in exploring ways contemporary teachers honor the life of Dr. King, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

The survey questions were arranged with the intention of taking each participant through the same sequence and asking each participant the same questions using the same words. This method minimized variation in the questions posed thus affording data that are more systematic and thorough. The different kinds of inquiries helped to capture patterns and differences, attempting to understand the reasons for those differences and where they existed (Krathwohl, 1993; Mathison, 1988; Patton, 1990). The qualitative inquiries were particularly important in

gaining insight into learning how teachers honored the life and legacy of Dr. King in the classroom, while the queries also aided in capturing the emotions of the participants on the subject.

The survey questions included what the MLK dream means to participants, the ways they celebrate the MLK holiday, the parts of the MLK dream they believe are important enough to integrate and model for students throughout the academic year, if the participants have taught lessons on the dream, the instructional approach(es) or practice(s) they used, and the ways that participants believe the MLK legacy should be preserved in school settings. The quantitative inquiries were represented in questions pertaining to culture, gender, age, years of teaching experience, subjects they teach, geographical residence, and degree of education.

### **Limitations**

The investigator does not know the reasons that the 50 participating elementary school teachers were motivated to complete the survey. Ultimately, 72 percent of the teachers from the Little Rock elementary school participated and 66 percent of the teachers from the Memphis elementary school participated. While the majority of teachers from each school participated, it is possible that only the teachers who were interested in the MLK legacy took the time to complete survey. Those teachers who chose not to complete the survey may or may not be sending a message. Neither interviews nor observations were conducted in the schools, methods that could have added to the depth, interplay, and interpretation of teacher practices. Because the data are contextualized and unique to the relatively few people included in the research study, the findings may not necessarily generalize to other people or other settings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzi, 2004).

Moreover, the principals at each location were not surveyed to denote their support or indifference about the study or its results. Contingent upon the liberties and/or reluctance of the participants, additional limitations may exist. The quantitative inquiries offered a number of predetermined response categories so that the experiences and perspectives of participants were measured in a standard fashion. Although the investigator used primarily a qualitative approach, the demographic data allowed comparison and descriptive measures as well as a generalizable set of succinctly presented findings.

### **Results**

The data are based on the participants' own categories of meaning. In reporting the results of the study, the investigator used direct quotes and fragments of quotes in order to represent participants' opinions, approaches, and methods in their own terms while capturing the heart of their experiences in their own words. Participant perspectives yielded the emerging themes of equality, justice, fairness, peace, character, respect for, and celebration of cultures. The perspectives are presented in terms of their personal phenomenology, school practices, their phenomenology of practice, and their curricula ideals.

#### **Teacher Phenomenology**

Critical reflection has long been a staple of teacher education (Dewey, 1933) as a means for teachers to grapple with the historical, political, and cultural contexts of their work. Hence, this study asked teachers to describe what MLK's dream meant to them personally. The primary theme that teachers expressed related to equality. Teachers in Little Rock reported such sentiments as *it is a reinforcement of Christian beliefs that all people are of equal value and precious in God's sight; that all people can live and work together as equals; equal opportunity; and that it represents a society in which "color" plays no part.* Teachers in Memphis reported similar sentiments with statements such as *all people were created equal in the eyes of God; the*

*end of segregation; equal access; and that now people can be judged by their character not their race.*

With respect to observing the MLK holiday in their personal or professional life, one group of teachers reported general activities whereas the other group of teachers reported highly specific events. In this study, 70 percent of the Little Rock participants reported having observed the MLK holiday with *church services* and non-specific *celebrations in his honor*. Other teachers reported observations *in college only*. Additionally, 80 percent of Memphis teachers reported observation of the MLK holiday with attendance at *parades, speeches, the Civil Rights Museum, prayer breakfast, MLK Annual Walk, Gandhi-King Conference, and rallies*. Other teachers reported taking time to reflect on his life or talking about how they can follow his example.

### **School Practices**

As the principles of multicultural education call for an overarching school structure that goes beyond curriculum and instruction (Banks, 2007), teachers were asked about ways that the MLK holiday is acknowledged at their schools. The teachers at one elementary school reported many more signs of recognition than the teachers at the other elementary school. Little Rock teachers reported that their school only acknowledges the MLK holiday in the *morning* via the *school news/announcements*. At this school, there are no school wide activities that address the life of MLK. Memphis teachers reported that their school acknowledges the MLK holiday by *reading the MLK dream over the intercom*, hosting an *assembly*, and by pointing it out in their *news/announcements*. The teachers also noted having *related music, displays of artwork, projects*, and examining his life through *Black history studies that extend throughout the year, not just in February*.

### **Phenomenology of Practice**

In a sense, all phenomenology is pragmatic and lends itself to the practice of living (van Manen, 2007). Besides, praxis is the culmination and application of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that define the substance of teaching (Ingram & Waters, 2007); therefore, teachers were asked if they had ever taught lessons on the MLK dream.

In this study, 80 percent of the teachers in the Little Rock elementary school reported affirmatively while 75 percent of the teachers in the Memphis elementary school reported affirmatively. Lessons from both groups of teachers can be primarily categorized as social studies, language arts, and art lessons. Miscellaneous activities also were reported. Little Rock teachers reported the following types of activities. In social studies, teachers led discussions on *MLK's contributions to society* and his *influence, equality, civil rights*, and the *historical context* of what Dr. King did. These teachers also reported *watching a history channel documentary*, *watching a video on united streaming*, and *visiting the MLK website using the data projector*. In language arts, teachers reviewed related *vocabulary words*; students wrote their own *I Have a Dream* papers, devised an *I Have a Dream* pledge, participated in various *writing and journaling* activities, and *read books about MLK*. In art classes, students *designed a medallion to wear all day; they made booklets, made a Dream Mobile* and other unnamed *art activities*. These miscellaneous activities included *visiting the Central High Museum*, listening to the *I Have a Dream speech on tape*, and completing *diversity activity worksheets*.

The Memphis elementary school teachers reported other types of MLK activities. In social studies, teachers led *discussions on MLK's life as a child and his education* so that students could identify with him more readily as a child and student and not always as the adult hero. Students *wrote reports* and *watched films*. They also *studied a unit on MLK's life and*



*legacy* that included the use of PowerPoint presentations, videos, and work sheets. *Students memorized parts of the dream that were important to them. Further, one class held a party to celebrate his birthday. In language arts, students made a booklet to celebrate the day, read related books, and read his autobiography. In addition, students recorded their own dreams then stood at the classroom podium and read their dreams to their classmates. In art classes, students participated in role play, drew their own dream; made a web of how to achieve their personal dreams, listened to his speech, and sang songs about Dr. King's life. Miscellaneous activities included visiting the Civil Rights Museum, integrating MLK's dream at the beginning of the academic year when students were generating their dreams and goals for the year, and routinely holding lessons on fairness throughout the school year.*

When teachers had taught lessons on the MLK dream, elementary school teachers in both Little Rock and Memphis reported that they designed their own lessons. Their schools did not provide related lessons in their designated curricula.

When asked about the educational settings where they learned multicultural approaches to instruction, teachers at both elementary schools reported learning about multicultural approaches to instruction from all five of the sources in the survey. They gained knowledge while enrolled in either their undergraduate or graduate programs or from professional development workshops offered by their schools.

### **Curricula Ideals**

Curricula in multicultural education should interweave inclusiveness in ways that acknowledge and celebrate a multifocal, relational view of the human experience (Tetreault, 2007). To that end, teachers' opinions were sought concerning the parts of the MLK dream that are important enough to integrate and model for students throughout the academic year. Similar sentiments were expressed by each teacher in the categories of fairness, justice, equality, life success, peace, and character. The Little Rock elementary school teachers mentioned that *color should not influence discipline or learning; that students are free to be anything they want to be if they make good choices; that injustices happen and are wrong; being able to speak and write are important; people should find peaceful ways of solving problems and injustices; that character is about the person, not the color of skin; that trustworthiness and honesty count.* The Memphis elementary school teachers mentioned that *people must treat other people with dignity and worth; that students must be encouraged to follow their dreams and work hard so students can achieve.* The principles that were consistently mentioned were *fairness, justice, and equality.* Other regular comments supported the presence of *diversity in the curriculum, the promotion of non-violent/peaceful disagreement* and that *character is what matters.*

Teachers reported that the most ideal ways of preserving MLK's legacy/dream in a school setting included the significance and impact of MLK's life, justice, fairness, coming together, respect and celebration of cultures, peace, and character. The Little Rock teachers recommended the promotion of the *historical import* of the MLK legacy through the *discussion of diversity and what that looks like in schools today versus diversity before the Civil Rights Movement.* These teachers expressed their beliefs that there should be more *student based projects, presentations, posters, etc.,* that capture the essence of MLK's impact. These teachers also shared that they want to remain cognizant of the fact that *all students have the same right to learn and be offered various teaching strategies in order to reach them all.* They promoted *working together, diversity, fairness, acceptance, patience, and celebrating cultures plus teaching conflict resolution and character to promote respect for all.*

The Memphis teachers recommended a more consistent means of effectively *presenting MLK's legacy and the study of the Civil Rights Movement with developmental appropriateness*. They also desired to routinely *teach children to have respect for all cultures and races* and to provide students with *opportunities to come together with different groups of people so that differences can be noticed but celebrated*. These teachers reported that they would appreciate *more school-wide observances and celebrations* so that their students could see *MLK's legacy as an everyday philosophy modeled by all teachers throughout the year* so that *some will not just focus on it in January and February only*. They also noted that they believe that *teaching the significance of character and encouraging students to dream* would be ideal as well.

### **Discussion**

In examining the participating cities, schools, and teachers, similarities as well as differences were reported. Clearly, one city offers more MLK activities than the other city. The death of Dr. King in Memphis might explain the reasons that city has more related MLK activities and stimulates more involvement of its students and citizenry than the Little Rock school and community. Memphis may possibly have more activities than any other community besides Atlanta, where Dr. King lived during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Likewise, the Memphis school, noticeably, may give more school wide attention to the MLK holiday and attempt to extend the MLK legacy more broadly.

The results of this study were uplifting and revealed a sense of agreement and forward thinking among the teachers who completed the survey from both locations. The findings are even more interesting considering that the participating teachers in the Little Rock elementary school are older and have many more years of teaching, on the average, than the more youthful teachers at the Memphis elementary school. What is consistent with conventional wisdom is that teachers are on the front lines in classrooms every day, and their attitudes and aspirations can make a difference in what lessons are prepared and the ways in which they are led.

The ideals of equality, justice, fairness, peace, character, respect for, and celebration of cultures that emerged as themes from the participating teachers in both locations are noteworthy. The teachers' philosophies seem to be aligned with that of the current U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who asserts that education is a daily fight for social justice while it promotes opportunity and reduces inequality and that every child is entitled to a quality public education regardless of race, creed, or zip code (Duncan, 2009).

The participating teachers also demonstrated consistency with their ideals and serve as good role models for students when they attend community events that symbolize honor and respect for Dr. King's leadership. These teachers not only locate or design lessons that highlight the MLK dream, they also expressed strong beliefs that such principles are integrated and highlighted in instruction throughout the academic year employing pedagogy that is developmentally appropriate. When considering the ideal instruction of Dr. King's dream, teachers indicated use of many of the standards noted on the concept map. Some standards were used more often and in more depth than other standards, and a few standards such as environment, power, authority, governance, and global connections were not given much attention. This finding might speak to a need that colleges of education can fill.

### **Implications**

The commentaries collected in this study represent a strident call to teacher educators that affirm NCATE obligations. Hence, colleges of education should customarily give teacher candidates opportunities and guidance in developing lessons about diverse populations as well as lessons that recount history from multiple perspectives. In order for teacher candidates and

classroom teachers to gain the comfort, confidence, and competence they need to consistently demonstrate value for diversity, their education programs must routinely provide guidance in and practice with this topic that is compelling, meaningful, reflective, and related. It is valuable to know that, although the elementary schools in this study did not provide a curriculum for MLK activities, teachers were able to use what they learned about multicultural approaches from their respective colleges of education and their school districts' professional development opportunities. Perchance if candidates received more practice during their teacher preparation programs, more of them would attempt such lessons and they might be able to carry them out with even greater creativity, diplomacy, and teaching and learning effectiveness.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Colleges of Education**

As America's public schools are increasingly more culturally diverse and aware of their diversity, colleges of education must rethink and reexamine their teacher education programs to ensure that they are able to prepare candidates for the populations that await them. For instance, colleges of education must ensure that their faculty are recalibrated to ensure that every instructor is up-to-date and prepared to integrate multicultural principles into their courses. Instructors must also hold students accountable for adopting multicultural practices and look for evidence of competency in assignments, field experiences, and internship appointments.

Basic multicultural principles and cultural understandings are important because instructional and curricular practices that employ a singular perspective are destined to disengage students (Irvine, 2003). More specifically, all teachers must teach with appreciation that communication of knowledge is conveyed through language and language is highly influenced by culture. Learning must be contextualized as opposed to decontextualized much like it is presented for the purposes of taking standardized achievement tests. When information is separated from students' realities rather than intertwined with their cultures, when instruction is misaligned with students' learning preferences, and when concepts and practices are void of everyday cultural experiences and students' ways of knowing and perceiving, then meaning is not constructed by the learner (Irvine, 2003). Without meaning, the relationships that connect new information with already stored information are splintered as is comprehension (Ormrod, 2009). Where there is no construction of knowledge, learners are merely consumers of knowledge absent ownership and equity.

Another critical consideration in multicultural education is that learning, for some cultures, is a social event, not necessarily an individual one (Irvine, 2003). Therefore, teachers must build in time for students to cooperate and collaborate; teachers must be prepared to indulge in repetition; teachers must initiate highly emotional engagement, lively discussions, stimulating instruction, controversy, creative analogies, symbolisms, and aphorisms (Irvine, 2003). Various assessments must be conducted over time that demonstrate verify competencies through traditional and unconventional means. Teachers must also generously extend encouraging gestures.

In essence, colleges of education should prepare candidates to take their place in the community as nation builders by empowering them to personalize and own the craft of teaching. Teacher education programs must combine critical theory with reflection and experiences that parlay theory into practice through practical and habitual application (Freire, 1970). This combination empowers teachers to become involved in the work of social transformation. According to Freire (1970), this is when teaching truly becomes praxis.

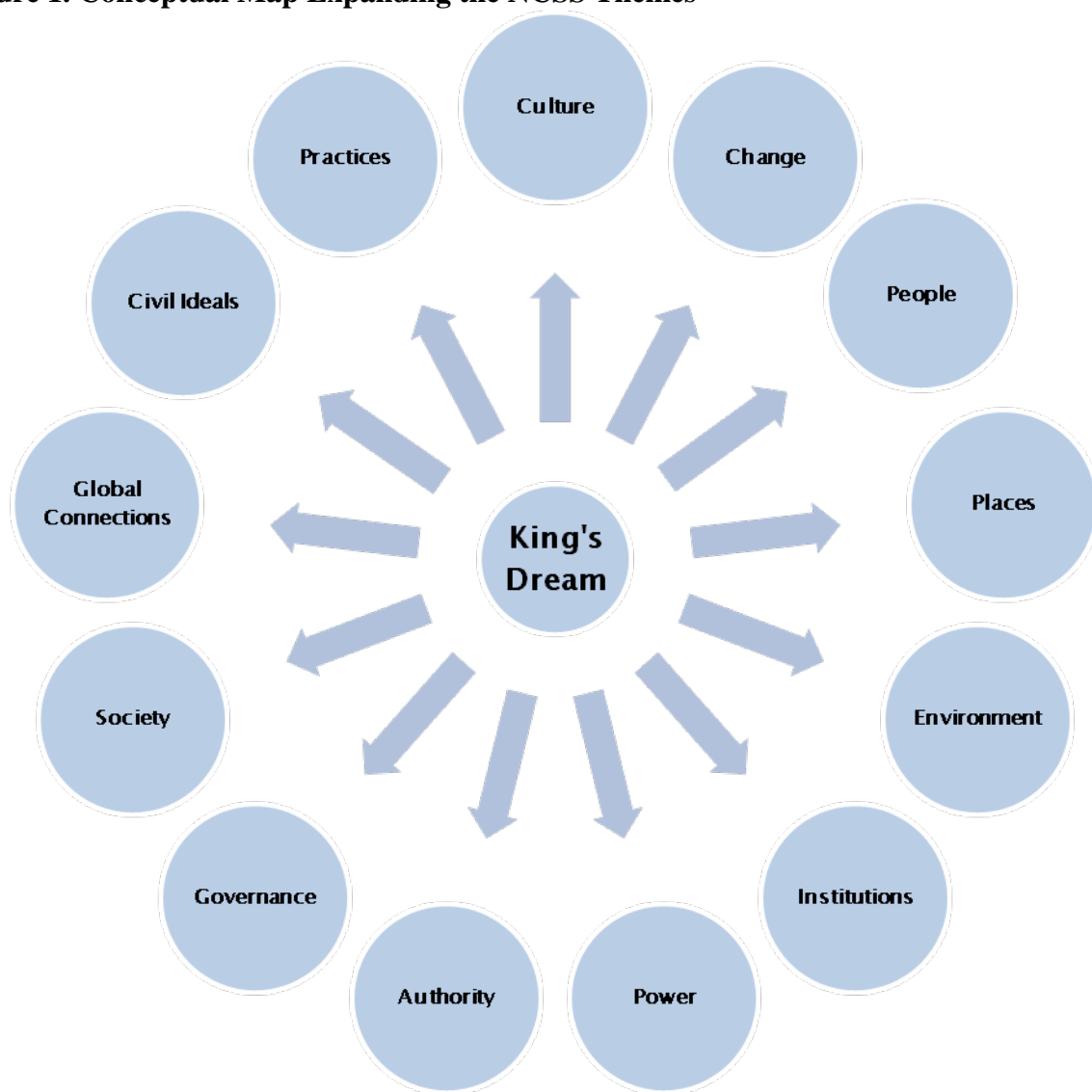
### **Conclusions**

Although the sample of teachers surveyed in this study is small, the investigator believes that this study provides insight and implications for colleges of education that correspond to NCATE directives and relate to the optimal preparation of candidates for comfort, confidence and competence in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. It is heartening, nonetheless, that such a beautiful American dream remains alive in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms through social studies, language arts, the arts, and through interdisciplinary means. Even though teachers must remain faithful to mandatory frameworks and state academic standards, teachers are finding creative ways to bring historical context to elementary school students so that American ideals can be planted in their hearts and, thereby, extended into following generations. In terms of the status of the dream, it is promising.

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**Figure 1. Conceptual Map Expanding the NCSS Themes****Table 1. Teacher Demographics**

	Teachers (N = 50)		Totals
	Little Rock	Memphis	
Gender			
Female	17	32	49
Male	1	0	1
Credentials			
Bachelors	6	12	18
Master's	4	10	14

Master's +	8	8	16
Doctorate	0	2	2
Age Range			
Under 30	3	3	6
31-40	3	14	17
41-50	4	5	9
51+	8	10	18
Ethnicity			
African American	1	22	23
Asian	0	1	1
Caucasian	16	9	25
Native American	1	0	1
Home Residence			
Suburban	12	18	30
Rural	2	1	3
Unincorporated	1	1	2
Urban/City	3	12	15

## Appendix A

### *Status of the Dream Survey*

**Check one response or fill-in-the-blank for items 1-11. Write a response for items 12a-12j.**

1. Gender             Female    Male
2. Age                 Under 30     31-40     41-50     51+
3. Your culture      African American    Latino    Caucasian    Asian    Native American
4. School district
5. The community in which you live is most defined as  urban  suburban  rural
6. Years of teaching experience
7. Your education: Bachelor's     Master's     Master's +     Doctorate
8. Grade levels you teach this academic year
9. Subjects/academic disciplines you teach this academic year
10. Estimate the percentage of culturally diverse students you teach who identify as:  
 African American    Latin Descent    Caucasian    Asian Descent    Native American
11. Principal's Culture  African American    Latino    Caucasian    Asian    Native American
12. Please answer the following questions in the space given, on the back or on additional paper.
  - a. Have you ever observed the Dr. Martin Luther King (MLK) holiday in your personal or professional life? If so, describe how.
  - b. Do your students report ways in which they have observed the MLK holiday in their personal lives? If so, describe how.
  - c. What does MLK's *dream* mean to you personally?
  - d. What parts of the *MLK dream* are important enough to integrate and model for students throughout the academic year?

- e. Have you ever taught lessons on the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King? If so, give a brief example of the lesson.
- f. If you taught a lesson on the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, was it part of your school's curriculum? \_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No  
OR did you design the lesson? \_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No
- g. In what educational settings have you learned multicultural approaches to instruction? Check all that apply.  
\_\_\_\_\_Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_Master's \_\_\_\_\_Master's +  
\_\_\_\_\_Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_Professional Development
- h. In addition to having a day away from school, are there acknowledgements of the MLK holiday at your school? If so, describe the acknowledgements.
- i. What do you think is an ideal way of preserving MLK's legacy/dream in a school setting?
- j. Are there MLK holiday activities in the community where you live? If so, give brief examples.