

Dissertation:

A Qualitative Analysis of *Can We Talk*

By

Jessica Larsen

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

---

Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Ng

---

Dr. Thomas DeLuca

---

Dr. Dorothy Hines-Datiri

---

Dr. Deborah Perbeck

---

Dr. Susan Twombly

Date Defended: December 3, 2015

The Dissertation Committee for Jessica Larsen  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

A Qualitative Analysis of *Can We Talk*

---

Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Ng

Date approved: December 17, 2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The University of Kansas holds a special place in my heart. My parents, Fred and Mary Rodriguez, moved here in 1978 and I am proud to have grown up in Lawrence and have been a Jayhawk for my undergraduate and graduate experiences. Rock Chalk forever.

I would like to thank my chair, Jennifer Ng, for her incredible insights and guidance to complete my dissertation. I hope that this work is a reflection of her support and skill throughout this process. In addition, the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies provided a solid education throughout my doctoral coursework. I also have to recognize my cohort colleagues, who provided a constant stream of support and encouragement from day one. While I won't necessarily miss the late evenings, I will certainly miss all of you.

I am currently in my tenth year of teaching at Lawrence Public Schools. During the 2014-15 school year, I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical and teach half time so that I could conduct this study and finish practicum hour requirements. I cannot appropriately express my gratitude to the district for its support in my professional learning, and its continued work with Equity initiatives. I would like to thank my building and district colleagues, who have been supportive and flexible throughout my graduate experience.

This study would not have happened without so many adults and students willing to share their time and thoughts with me. Thank you, and I hope that I become a better listener from now on.

Of course, I've saved the best for last in recognizing my family. I proudly come from a family of educators, as both of my parents spent their careers supporting public education in their own ways. Their unending support and encouragement took many forms, and I couldn't be more proud to be their daughter. My brother, Nathan Rodriguez, recently became the first doctoral graduate from the School of Journalism at the University of Kansas, and it was a very proud moment from a lifetime of memories growing up together. He, along with his girlfriend Makelle Alexander, have been constants in our lives and ready to help at a moment's notice. My sister-in-law, Jamie Larsen, and her husband, Mike Fredette, are both in special education and have spent countless hours watching our children if my husband and I both needed to be gone. My in-laws, Terry Larsen as well as and Jeff and LeAnne Larsen, provided nonstop encouragement along the way as well and deserve recognition. I appreciate everyone's time and involvement in our family more than I could ever reciprocate.

Finally, the best people in my life, and the ones who bring tears to my eyes while staring at a computer screen. My husband Jacob is the type of person who makes me proud to be his wife. When I first thought of going back to graduate school, we had a 3-year-old son and an infant daughter, and I was having hesitations. His only reaction was, "You should absolutely do it." More than anyone else, he has taught me that there will always be reasons not to do something, but you should just go ahead and do it anyway. Jake, you are

my best friend and I am in awe of your energy, patience, and humor. This year marks our tenth wedding anniversary and I have loved our journey getting to this point and look forward to what comes next.

I knew that by the time I finished this program, our preschooler would be a first grader and our infant would be a preschooler. It was so hard to fathom, but here we are. Jack, you light up everyone's world by simply being here. I love catching glimpses of you at school in your bright orange Star Wars jacket, eager to be wherever you are at the moment. Caroline, you have one of the best senses of humor I've seen in quite some time. You are a wonderful daughter and big sister. You've grown up so much, but I hope you love pink and purple and My Little Pony for just a little bit longer.

To the newest member of our family, Samantha, not quite four months old: you have brought all of us so much joy by reminding us what is most important in life. Your smile stops us all in our busy tracks and we are all excited to watch you grow. I hope to make you laugh as much as your brother and sister do.

## ***Chapter 1***

### **INTRODUCTION**

What happens when schools create programs that focus on structured conversations about race with students while providing academic supports? Staffs at both high schools in Lawrence, Kansas, run a program that encompasses these ideas. Can We Talk (CWT) is a voluntary, before-school program open to any interested student at each of the two high schools in the city. The program began in 2009 when four African-American community leaders organized the group as a mentoring program for African-American high school males, who they felt were the most vulnerable demographic experiencing a disconnection with school. Each member of the first cohort graduated high school, while other African-American males who did not participate in the program had lower graduation rates. In 2010, the founders received the Lawrence school board's Outstanding Citizens Award for their involvement. Over the next few years, the founders individually discontinued their involvement with the program, yet high school staff and administrators have continued the program to date. The program has also since expanded to include any Lawrence Public Schools high school student.

Anecdotally, the program has garnered positive attention. The *Lawrence Journal-World* and 6News Channel have each published stories about the program. In 2012, KU graduate students created a 7-minute documentary about the program after a referral from a KU professor. Based on the level of participation and outcomes in its initial implementation, the program has since expanded to two of the city's four middle schools, and Can We Talk sponsors have established a partnership with Boys & Girls Club to bring the program to an elementary school. The Independence, Kansas school district and

Highland Park High School in Topeka have also initiated similar programs (Koebler, 2011; "KU Students Document Courageous Conversations Journey," 2012; Roddy, 2010; Staff, 2014). It is unknown at this time why students choose to participate in the program, what factors drive their desire to maintain involvement, and what they feel are some of the benefits they experience from Can We Talk.

The purpose of this study is to address the following research questions:

*What were the original goals and mission when Can We Talk was established?*

*What are the current goals and mission of Can We Talk?*

*How do students at Lawrence High School and Free State High School describe their experience with the Can We Talk program?*

## *Chapter 2*

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to explore high school student experiences from participating in Can We Talk, and to identify the past and current goals of the program. There are potentially two broad benefits for student participants. One is to provide a mentoring structure to students, which is a core theme of the program. A second potential benefit is the ability to discuss complex and personal topics, such as race relations. The current body of literature on similar programs is extremely minimal due to the program's unique focus. However, several studies on similar programs find that they have a positive impact on its targeted population, which I review first. I also provide a local context that illustrates the school district's mission to narrow the racial achievement gap, which provides a supportive environment for these groups to exist. As this study is an initial exploration of Can We Talk, I draw from Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory to center my research focus. Finally, as I address the research questions in my study, I review the benefits of a multicultural experience in education, identity development, and group mentoring.

#### *Similar Programs*

While research indicates benefits for youth involved in after-school programs (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Post, 2005; Smith, Osgood, Caldwell, Hynes, & Perkins, 2013), there is minimal research focused on benefits for youth programs whose central focus is on race. In fact, the bulk of the

literature on after-school programs is on middle-class, white youth, or does not disaggregate the results by race (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001). Literature on programs for racial minority groups often focuses on attending to a “deficit” in their target population, such as problem behaviors, violence, and juvenile delinquency (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014).

However, the literature pertinent to this topic indicates programs such as these to be a “promising tool to help [minority students] navigate identity and development (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014). *Celebrating the Strengths of Black Youth* is a small group intervention program with the primary focus on promoting racial identity and increasing self-esteem among African-American children. Data indicates that participants have higher levels of self-esteem after completing the program compared to students on the waitlist (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014). Roffman conducted a study involving nearly 300 African-American and Hispanic students ages 10-18 in a Boys and Girls Club setting and disaggregated outcomes among age, gender, and race. The findings indicate significantly higher self-esteem levels from the black students in comparison to Hispanic students. It also reiterated other studies that found that girls were more likely to report higher levels of self-esteem than boys (Jones & Perkins, 2006; Roffman et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2013). Older students were more likely to have lower psychosocial concerns than younger students, which included academic, emotional, physical, and behavioral concerns. There were limitations to the study, including self-selection bias, which created an absence of white students to participate, participant self-reporting, and no data to indicate causation. However, these results support the rationale for a program such as Can We Talk for high school students, and warrants further research in this area.

### *Systemic District Transformation*

The school district and community at-large's attitude to openly discuss race, racial disparities, and academic opportunity helps shape the success and sustainability of these programs (Fennimore, 2005; Garrett, 2009; Huggins & Celio; Noguera, 2008; G. Singleton, and Curtis Linton, 2006; G. E. Singleton & Comer, 2012). In 2006, Lawrence Public Schools began a district-level book study on Glenn Singleton's *Courageous Conversations about Race* to discuss the racial achievement gap they witnessed across all buildings and grade levels district-wide as measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates. Singleton's company, Pacific Educational Group (PEG), supports districts in a "transformation process" to identify and address institutional forms of racial disparities within a district (G. Singleton, and Curtis Linton, 2006; G. E. Singleton & Comer, 2012) (Appendix A). PEG argues that addressing racial disparities within institutional structures such as school districts requires sustained, comprehensive action as outlined in the transformational process to incorporate schools, students, parents, and staff in a variety of conversations about race.

### *Literature Gaps and Contribution to the Literature*

Lawrence community leaders desired to address the disparity in support and opportunities for male students of color at the high schools' Can We Talk program through mentoring and discussion facilitation. Through the initial years of the Can We Talk program, the group leaders reflected on their own learning process to include any male or female high school student, regardless of their racial background. As one leader reported

in a local newspaper article, “It’s expanded to include everyone, because one of the realizations we came to is that everyone needs a little mentoring” (Staff, 2014).

In this study, I explore the degree to which Can We Talk participants report the benefits of discussing race with diverse peers and further develop their identity as they “begin to see themselves as meaningful contributors to society” within the context of their school and postsecondary life (Post, 2005). I asked students to reflect on their past and current sentiments towards school and their involvement with school besides participating in Can We Talk.

While not unprecedented, the available literature examining programs such as Can We Talk is extremely minimal. While other districts consult PEG and conduct programs such as Can We Talk, evidence demonstrating the success of these programs has not been studied at a scholarly level. Moreover, while there is ample literature that demonstrates the positive impact of multicultural education and identity development, the bulk of the literature does not focus on these concepts and structures on after-school programs whose main focus is based on race. My study serves to explore links among these areas in the academic field, as well as to provide scholarly evidence for school districts regarding the effectiveness of a program such as Can We Talk. I review the Intergroup Contact Theory to guide my thinking before reviewing the literature on the benefits of multicultural education, adolescent identity development, and group mentoring.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Gordon Allport’s Intergroup Contact Theory (1954) says that groups who are dissimilar in some significant way, yet have the opportunity to interact with each other,

likely will yield positive attitudes towards each other. Group members are able to challenge preconceived notions and stereotyped prejudice towards the other group based on this interaction. Allport writes, "Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom, or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups" (Allport, 1954) (281). While Allport focused on racial forms of prejudice, this theory has since been applied to address other forms of social prejudice, as well.

In the context of Can We Talk, the dissimilar groups are the racially diverse student participants and the dynamics between the student participants and adult sponsors, as well as among students from grades 9-12. Furthermore, Can We Talk aligns with research that supports multicultural education and diverse classroom settings, as students of all backgrounds benefit from interacting with peers from varied demographics (Chang, 2001; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milem, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Students develop their identity as they reflect on their own perspectives and beliefs and enact steps to improve their lives, but also those of others. (Bandura, 2006; Chang, 2001; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; González & Brown, 2006; Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace, & Langhout, 2011; Larson, 2011; Luyckx et al., 2013; Post, 2005; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Smith et al., 2013; White & Abu-Rayya, 2012).

### *Diverse Society, Diverse Students*

The United States is currently experiencing a significant demographic shift. In what he called the “Browning of America,” Johnson (2013) used Census data to report that the majority of U.S. immigrants from the past 20 years is predominantly from Mexico, Central, and South America, and that rate is expected to increase (Johnson, 2013). Advocates for multicultural education argue that the predominantly white female teaching population is not adequately prepared to adjust to teaching students who come from differing linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Landsman, 2011; Nieto, 2000; Noguera, 2008; Phinney, 1989). Currently, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that over 80 percent of the teaching population consists of white females (“Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Teachers in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey,” 2013). In contrast, the Washington Post reported that the 2014-15 school year was the first year in which students of color were the majority student population (Strauss, 2014). In addition, as most states adopt Common Core standards, advocating for students to be fully prepared for 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education and careers, proponents for multicultural education point out that students not only need to meet academic standards, but also have a meaningful understanding of their peers from differing backgrounds in order to be prepared to interact within a global society (Chang, 2001; Hurtado, 2001; Milem, 2003).

However, some researchers note that it is not enough to simply have a diverse student body, or to have a multicultural curriculum. Teachers need to create structures that allow students to socialize across racial lines and discuss racial issues (Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2008; Chang, 2001; Galda & Beach, 2001; Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007). Researchers

also cite that conditions similar to what is described in Allport's Theory yield similar results of combating stereotypes and prejudice (Beaton et al., 2012; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; González & Brown, 2006; White & Abu-Rayya, 2012). In fact, if classroom structures do not enable students from differing backgrounds to interact with each other, the shift in peer status becomes even more disproportionate (Hurtado, 2001).

Milem (2003) writes that students experience the benefits of exploring diversity for themselves, their institution, and society. Individually, students develop a "cross-cultural competence" as well as report a more positive school experience (Chang, 2001; Hurtado, 2001; Landsman, 2011; Milem, 2003; Phinney, 1989). In addition, Hurtado reported a significant relationship between student growth on educational outcomes and activities when they experienced a diverse body of students and faculty while in college (Hurtado, 2001). The institution benefits when students are better prepared to participate in a global society, and do so both within and outside the institution. Finally, society benefits as civic and professional involvement increases, and race-based topics of controversy, such as affirmative action, are more deeply understood and valued (Milem, 2003).

My study explored the nuances in which students found that Can We Talk has enabled them to explore and understand multiple perspectives. I also explored the degree to which participation in the program strengthens student development.

### *Identity Development*

My study examined the ways in which students participating in Can We Talk developed their identity, both as individuals and as members of the program. Stronger senses of self-identity is linked with higher levels of self-esteem (Beaton et al., 2012;

Luyckx et al., 2013; Rowley et al., 1998). Luyckx (2013) even found that changes in one of these constructs must be reinforced by corresponding changes in the other.

Racial identity is also a complex structure and concept, as race centrality varies from person to person (Rowley et al., 1998). It is important for everyone to develop a strong sense of identity, including ethnic identity, regardless of whether a person is from a dominant or minority race. However, Phinney (47) stresses the importance of developing a strong ethnic identity for the minority population, as they tend to struggle with conforming to the dominant culture while “giving up” or denying their ties to another ethnicity (Phinney, 1989). Sue and Sue’s racial and cultural identity development model tracks a person from a racial minority group from conformity stage through the integrative awareness stage. Throughout these stages, the minority person journeys from conforming to the dominant culture to increasing awareness of his or her minority background. This creates dissonance and resistance, and the person self-reflects on deeper levels until the final stage, in which the person has a secure sense of the ability to navigate both (and in some cases, multiple) cultures (Sue & Sue, 2012).

Sue also created a model that tracked a person from the racially dominant white culture as they navigated other races. The first stage begins when the person has remained oblivious to racism up until an initial contact with people of other races. The person then experiences anxiety and ponders maintaining the status quo, or questioning the institutionalized forms of oppression in order to support those in the minority. In the final stage, the person has developed enough autonomy to reshape previous thinking and take steps to “relinquish the privileges of racism” (121-122). In many ways, these models

parallel Allport's Theory as these groups learn more about each other through continuous interactions.

Students need support from adults as they experience these stages. As students interact with peers of differing races throughout their schooling years, in conjunction with questioning what they have known to be as the status quo, they benefit from adult support during this process (Tatum, 1992). Schools are able to support students by creating a safe environment to hold these discussions, opportunities for students to self-generate this knowledge, and strategies for students to see themselves as change agents who have the capacity to change what they see as an unsatisfactory status quo (Phinney, 1989; Tatum, 1992).

Adolescents tend to have a strong need to have a sense of belonging as part of positively developing a strong identity (Samuel L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Samuel L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999). Unfortunately, students tend to receive less school support in secondary school when compared to elementary, at a critical time in their lives when they need it the most (Uwah et al., 2008). Uwah (2008) found that a psychological sense of belonging as well as building academic empowerment had a positive correlation with traditional indicators of academic achievement. Luyckx (2013) also reported that high levels of self-esteem served as a resource for addressing identity issues in high school and college students. As students develop their sense of identity and belonging, they feel more capable of instituting change within themselves as well as the societal and institutional groups with which they are involved (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014; Post, 2005; Tatum, 1992).

### *Group Mentoring*

In thinking of a mentoring relationship, one tends to identify with a one-to-one model in which there is one mentee for each mentor. However, other types of mentoring come up in other contexts, such as group mentoring, which is when a group of mentees work with one or more mentors. Hurd et al. (2012) further elaborates that some relationships are formally established via a mentorship program, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. However, natural mentorships between youth and adults are those as a result of preexisting social networks, such as family members, neighbors, coaches, and community members (Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). In fact, the authors argue that natural mentorships are more prevalent than formal mentorships.

Natural mentoring poses many of the same benefits as a formal mentorship. Several studies have found that a successful mentorship increases adolescents' social skills, psychological well-being, academic engagement as reported from the adolescents' teachers, and a more positive relationship with parents (Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Van Ryzin, 2014). Timpe (2015) found that natural mentorships significantly impacted youth who did not have a steady father figure as opposed to those who had both parents involved with their life (Timpe & Lunkenheimer, 2015).

Can We Talk has the potential to foster mentoring in the lives of the students with which it works. In comparing the literature on group mentoring to Can We Talk's structure, it appears to situate itself more closely with group mentoring than individual mentoring, as there are generally one or two adults interacting with a room full of several dozen students. It also tends to present nuances of a natural mentorship as opposed to a

formal mentorship, in that the group does not belong to a formal organization, and participation from all parties is voluntary and fluid.

### ***Chapter 3***

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of my study was to explore the past and present goals of Can We Talk, as well as the experiences and benefits students report as a result of being involved with the program. I address methodology according to Maxwell's four main components in designing qualitative research (Maxwell, 2012):

- 1) Research relationship with studied participants
- 2) Sampling
- 3) Data collection
- 4) Data analysis

In addition, I address limitations and the validity of this study as well as acknowledge my role as the researcher (Maxwell, 1992).

#### *Research Relationship with Studied Participants*

Establishing a positive relationship with future participants is an important consideration in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998a; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Walcott, 1994). I established preliminary contact with one of the four CWT founders, as well as with administrators at both high schools, and they all verbally expressed their support for the study to be conducted, pending approval with the University of Kansas School of Education, University of Kansas Human Subjects, as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon establishing contact via email with the high school administrators, I personally met with them to obtain copies of their fall CWT schedules and was granted permission to

observe sessions as a visitor during the 2014-15 school year. The purpose of these observations was to get acquainted with staff and students, as well as to gain insights into the program's structure and dynamic (Merriam, 1998a; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

### *Sampling*

The primary settings for this study were Lawrence High and Lawrence Free State High Schools in Lawrence, Kansas. Purposeful sampling was necessary to recruit participants who are involved with either building as a student or program sponsor (Maxwell, 2012). Qualifying participants participated in at least one Can We Talk session during their time at either high school in order to recollect their experiences with the program, which supported the validity of the findings (Merriam, 1998c). In order to strategically target the selected population of participants at each school, I notified students and staff of the opportunity to participate during several Can We Talk sessions. I also followed up with school administrators and program sponsors at each building to initiate contact with students to schedule interview times.

Participation was voluntary, provided that potential participants met the qualifications listed above. Students who were under the age of 18 were required to obtain a signed consent form from their parent or legal guardian to participate in the study. Students who were 18 or older, and all staff members, were required to sign a consent form to participate in the study.

Participation was voluntary; however, I also worked with administrators and staff members to elicit participants who encompassed a balance of races, grade levels, and gender. I was able to interview a total of six students from one building and thirteen

students from the other building, for a total of nineteen students. Tables 1-3 illustrate the demographics of the student sample:

Table 1: Student Participants by Grade Level

Grade	Number of Students
9	2
10	4
11	9
12	4

Table 2: Student Participants by Gender

Gender	Number of Students
Male	5
Female	14

Table 3: Student Participants by Race

Race	Number of Students
White/Caucasian	4
Black/African-American	6
Hispanic	2
Arab	1
Asian	1

Multiracial	4
Other (self-identified as “human”)	1

It is important to note that, while I worked to create a balance of races and genders with my sample population, it is different than the overall building’s demographics. According to the Kansas State Department of Education, one high school reports that 67% of its population is white, 9% is Hispanic, 7% is African-American, and 16% is listed as “other”. The second high school reports that 74% of its population is white, 6% is Hispanic, 7% is African-American, and 13% is listed as “other”. Both schools report that each building is nearly 50% male and 50% female. Clearly, both high schools are predominantly white, yet my sample demographics does not reflect this. As Can We Talk participation was voluntary, it was difficult to outline specific statistics as to student demographics; however, as I describe in Chapter 4, I found a wide variety of students in each program. This leads me to believe that white students are not the dominant population within the program itself. As I also discuss in Chapter 4, it was much more of a challenge to recruit male participants than female participants.

Regarding the adult participants, I was able to interview four of the five CWT founders, a building administrator, and program sponsors from each building. One of the five founders has since moved out of the state; I contacted this founder and sent a series of written questions to return, but did not receive any feedback. I did not solicit an interview with one building’s administrator, because I knew from my program attendance that this person was not involved with the program, whereas the administrator in the other building was heavily involved.

### *Data Collection*

My study addressed the research questions primarily through the use of semi-structured interviews (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Howard, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Larson, 2011). I chose an interview procedure due to the ability to address specific comments and clarifications with each participant. I conducted interviews with students and staff members in their respective high school sites for participant comfort and convenience (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I arranged alternate meeting locations for the founders based upon their preferences, keeping the same goals in mind. I audio recorded all interviews for full transcription and analysis, which will be later destroyed upon the completion of this study.

Interview questions were arranged into categories: 1) Personal demographic information; 2) Experience with Can We Talk; and 3) Perceived future implications regarding self and the program (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) (Appendices B-D). The purpose of the first category was to establish a rapport with each individual participant, as well as to secure demographic information on students and staff for analysis. The purpose of the second category was to probe each participant's program participation and how he or she perceives it has influenced him or her. The third category provided a hypothetical context in which participants were asked about their future personal and/or professional plans, as well as to explore if they would like to see any changes made to the program in its current state. The purpose of questions from the second and third categories was to identify any recurring comments that might yield ways in which Can We Talk supports changes in youth, and to investigate if any influence is long-lasting.

A secondary means of gathering data was through observations and document review. In establishing contact with one building's administrator, I was able to receive a schedule of the semester's CWT topic sessions and trips. The administrator also copied me on several emails to district staff that included synthesized notes from a CWT session and joint community forum, which are provided in Appendices J and K, and are discussed in Chapter 4. I attended four CWT sessions at each building, as my professional schedule allowed. As the sessions were held at the same time in each building, I alternated between one building and the other. Depending on the session's format, I was able to either directly participate in the session and discussion while summarizing my experience after the session in my notes, or I would observe the large-group discussion in my seat and take notes on what was discussed.

### *Data Analysis*

I audio recorded interviews and transcribed them for analysis (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Howard, 2001; Larson, 2011). I recorded interviews using an Apple iPhone that had a lock feature, whose code was only known to myself. These recordings were then backed up twice. First, each file was digitally uploaded on the University of Kansas Hawk Drive, which is a data secured, encrypted server. Second, each file was burned onto an audio CD and kept in a locked security box. During the transcription process, I randomly coded participants to allow for anonymity. Audio files were then labeled with this code. Participants received a copy of the transcript to serve as a member check (Merriam, 1998c).

I read each transcript individually and multiple times. First, during the transcribing process, I took note of the general themes I was noticing throughout interview responses, utilizing the grounded theory (Gibbs, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Second, in reviewing student data, I reviewed and tallied specific responses to questions based on gender, race, and grade level. In reviewing staff member and founder data, I reviewed responses in comparison to their connections with the program (current sponsor or founding member) as well as by gender. All adults self-identified as African-American; thus, I did not disaggregate adult data by race. Third, as I was tallying responses to specific questions, I noted quotes to review at a later time to cite in my results.

### *Study Validity*

In this section, I discuss this study's validity as Maxwell outlined (Maxwell, 1992):

- 1) Descriptive Validity
- 2) Interpretive Validity
- 3) Theoretical Validity
- 4) Generalizability
- 5) Evaluative Validity

### *Descriptive Validity*

Maxwell utilizes descriptive validity as the framework for other aspects to consider. With descriptive validity, the main issue is that the researcher does not conjure or distort what they report to have seen and heard. I believe that this main component has been addressed as I described my data collection and analysis above. All interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed, and study participants had the opportunity to review the completed transcript to verify its accuracy based on their recollections. I base generalizations on particular sessions based on the field notes I made while observing program sessions, as well as a formal schedule that sponsors provided to me.

### *Interpretive Validity*

An essential component of qualitative research is not solely what was observed and documented, but what those actions and events mean to the participants themselves. Maxwell describes this as the “participants’ perspective” as their construction of their experience is inherently mental rather than a physical documentation. While this process involves inferring what participants report, I took great care to note what participants specifically stated, using words such as “reported” and “shared”, rather than stating their specific emotions based on my own intuition. However, this still requires that I construct what participants mean (Maxwell, 1992).

### *Theoretical Validity*

Theoretical validity is more difficult to document, as it relates to the researcher’s capacity to accurately apply a theory based on the data that was collected. Maxwell states, “What counts as theoretical validity ... depends on whether there is a consensus within the community concerned with the research about the terms used to characterize the phenomena (Maxwell, 1992). While I have identified themes and implications from my research, these are still subjective and I acknowledge that another reader or researcher would identify others.

### *Generalizability*

Maxwell defines generalizability as “the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times, or settings than those directly studied” (Maxwell, 1992). This study was designed to explore the current student and adult experiences of Can We Talk in Lawrence, Kansas. While I present my findings as completely as I was able to during the data collection process, internal generalizability remains an area to review. I acknowledge that while I was able to attend program sessions at each building, as well as interview participants at both high schools, it in no way is presented as a means to completely capture the program’s essence. In addition, while I prepared a list of comprehensive questions to use during interviews, these questions are not intended to completely encompass each participants’ thoughts, nor did I expect participants to be able to provide a complete expression of their thoughts during this activity.

Regarding external generalizability, the intent was not to apply these findings to other schools, and I discuss these limitations in subsequent sections. I also acknowledge in the Discussion section ways in which further research could be conducted regarding this program, given that there is an extremely limited body of research accessible regarding programs such as Can We Talk.

### *Evaluative Validity*

Maxwell describes evaluative validity as a means of passing judgment on the actions witnessed and described through qualitative research. I provide implications and critical

questions regarding my study's results in the Discussion chapter. However, I present the results themselves as objectively as possible. I explicitly state that any opinions reported in the results are directly from the participants themselves. Furthermore, I discuss my role as the researcher in this chapter.

### *Study Limitations*

This study is limited to the recent and present experiences of students and adults affiliated with the Can We Talk program in Lawrence, Kansas, high schools since it began in 2009. Thus, this study's results are not necessarily applicable to other school districts without considering the similarities and differences between the sites. Several factors may include, but are not limited to, student body and community demographics, as well as if the school sites provide a climate conducive to supporting a program that focuses on race.

This study's sample size also provides limitations. Given that the student sample size was nineteen, it is difficult to universally apply the results to other students. Even more importantly, I took care not to overgeneralize student responses based on race or gender. Racial minority groups often lament being asked to represent their entire race; while I found distinct responses when comparing by race, I also do not intend nor wish to present a small sample population as a reflection for an entire racial group, and the same applies when comparing results by gender. In addition, while my goal was to interview between 10-12 students at each high school, I was able to interview 6 students from one building and 13 from another building. While this presents a disproportionate level of students between buildings, I was not able to find any distinguishable differences in

student responses when comparing results by building. However, it is important to note this discrepancy.

Because I was interested in students who have participated in Can We Talk and participation in my study was voluntary, I was unable to control for any bias students might have as a result of participating in the program. It is a natural human inclination for people to wish to talk about something in which they hold an interest or passion, so it was not surprising to me that most students were very satisfied with the program and their experiences.

When the program initially began, there was a targeted audience of black male students, and sessions were held during the school day. Thus, staff was able to more readily track student data in terms of GPA, test scores, and attendance. Now that the program is held outside of the school day and is voluntary, these forms of data are not readily available for scholarly analysis. When students and sponsors remark on improvements towards academics and behavior, I can only report that these statements are made on an anecdotal level, not necessarily measurable with concrete statistics.

This study is also limited due to the fact that any scholarly research related to a program similar to Can We Talk is minimal, as referenced in Chapter 2. However, the generalizations that students and adults provide regarding the program's purpose as well as the topics presented during the program's existence serve as a useful tool for future researchers to explore when examining race relations in school settings and identity development.

### *Role of the Researcher*

While researchers strive to avoid bias when conducting research, it is necessary to clarify my role as the researcher in this study in the interest of transparency. As a native of Lawrence, Kansas, I began teaching at a local elementary school in 2006. In 2009, I attended the Beyond Diversity seminars as a district employee, and became one of the first members in my building's Equity Team, as outlined in the PEG Systemic District Transformation Framework. I first learned of Can We Talk when our building watched the 7-minute documentary from the University of Kansas in 2012, and in 2013 when a panel of students currently participating in Can We Talk came to our building to share their experiences. My experience as an Equity Team member, coupled with initially hearing the student panel, drove my interest in exploring this program further with this study. While the reader may question the objectivity of this research process, it is also important to note that my close professional connections as a district employee became beneficial, as well. I was able to establish a positive rapport with both buildings and sponsors very quickly, as I presented myself as a district colleague who was conducting a research project. While I can only speculate, a researcher with no affiliation with its participant population might encounter additional challenges in gaining entry to its research setting (Bogdan). I was conscientious of minimizing my personal and professional interests during this study, and expect that the generalizations that I have found in this study will be applicable to readers and researchers for future research.

## ***Chapter 4***

### **RESULTS: ADULTS**

The purpose of my study was to explore student experiences from those who have participated in Can We Talk. In order to accomplish this, I first discuss how the program was created in interviewing the founders. Next, I illustrate the current dynamics of the program based on my observations as well as program sponsor reports, including the changes within the student population that have occurred since the program began. Then, I devote the majority of my results towards what current students have to say about the program in the next chapter.

#### *“They Couldn’t Really Stand a Chance”: The Founders*

The founders were Lawrence community members who, in their own unique ways, were involved with community youth prior to beginning Can We Talk. All self-identified as African-American; three were male and one was female. Several were school district staff, while another was involved with law enforcement. It was their direct involvement and observation of African-American males struggling to succeed academically and behaviorally within the schools that was already on their minds prior to beginning the program. As one of the founders shared:

I was intimately involved with the kids playing ball since I coached with AAU. And I saw what was happening to the kids over the years and it was not a pretty thing... I’m saying, “We’re in a community of scholars, what the hell is going on?” .... The system is set up to not helping [black male teens] in any way, shape, or form, but incarcerating them and making them third and fourth class citizens for life, and we wanted to do something to stop that.

Another founder, who was involved with law enforcement, also shared a similar perspective:

As many officers would tell you, we went to certain houses and we would see kids who you just feel sorry for, you know, that in that environment, they couldn't really stand a chance, and as time progresses, you see them getting involved in the system. If you stay there long enough you'll end up not only arresting their parents, and then arresting them, but also arresting their kids, and I would see these kids going through the system.

While each of the founders was making these observations, the school district established a contract with Pacific Educational Group, whose *Courageous Conversations* book and program became a heavy focus to acknowledge and reduce the racial achievement gap. As such, the district began sending school staff to attend the PEG's National Summit. In 2008, two of the founders were asked to attend – one as a high school assistant principal, and the other as a retired district administrator. As one of these participants reported,

I sat in on one of the sessions regarding African-American males, it's always been a topic of mine, so we were in the same session and [an administrator] out of Minnesota was talking about how they were.... Working with their African-American males. And so on the way back at the airport we were... thinking about, "Okay, now what can we do, we can do something similar to that."

As the two talked on the flight back home, they decided that the assistant principal would address what they called the "nuts and bolts" of beginning the program. At this time, the high schools had 90-minute block periods two days per week, which also included a "seminar" study hall period. They decided to use seminar time to hold this program. The retired administrator then approached the other community members, as they were all close friends and strong advocates for supporting black youth in their own capacities.

Meanwhile, the assistant principal ran a report of all the students in the building who had self-identified as African-American and sent invitations to the students and information to parents and staff (See Appendices E-G). These students received office passes to leave their seminar class to attend the program. The founders began using this time to establish the group that they initially called Courageous Conversations, after PEG's book. The founders reported having no problems with recruitment or retention from their targeted student group:

[Seminar time] was a good time for us to meet because a lot of those guys are not going to classes anyway, you know, they were kind of like hanging out, so I thought of a way that we could kind of tie it all in, then, and help ensure that they had an opportunity to be involved in a structured program during seminar that's going towards academics, and so forth.

Another founder shared,

We had one heck of a turnout... We explained to them why we were there, showed them some statistics.... We said, "Black males are leading suspensions, expulsions, lowest test grades, lowest achievement, and we know that you're better than that, and you all should – I know, you know, we do, then show it to us. Prove it.

The founders all agreed that the attendance rate was higher when students were able to attend during seminar period, rather than outside of the school day. They estimated that of the targeted black male population, about 30 began attending, but it grew to approximately 60 students when the girls began arriving. Once the program was open to both sexes and all races, attendance increased to over 100 students regularly attending, and about 10 teachers also participating. In contrast, during my observations of the program, I noted anywhere from 10-20 students attending during late arrival sessions and witnessed 1-2 teachers with inconsistent attendance.

### *Original Program Goals*

Each founder acknowledged that the program's original intent was to specifically target African-American males who were consistently falling through the cracks, both at school and in the community. While their first priority was to immediately target academics, the founders also shared varying viewpoints on other goals for the program.

One founder stated,

The overall goal for the program was to raise conscious awareness of who you were, to give people a hope and an idea of things that they could aspire to, and the different ways of doing that, to show them that not only was education the key to their success, but also their own internal dialogue and their self image was the key to that success. We do that through raising their academic standards.

Another founder shared that part of raising student academics was in addressing the additional, external factors that contributed to their struggles with school:

The entire thing in the beginning was just to talk to young black men to say that, "This is how you're viewed as a society, and you've already internalized that from an early age, so now we've got to go back and show you that you are far better than what society and the media have told you, and maybe your parents have told you because they may have also been internalized with this internal dialogue going on all the time, that you're not worth it, or that you are unintelligent, or that education is a bad thing."

Finally, another founder stated that the program's focus was more to empower young black males through acknowledging institutionalized racism:

[Our goals were] to increase black kids' awareness of the morass that they operate under, in terms of our society and how it is structured, especially black males, and have them understand the systemic racism that they face every day.

As the founders reflected on the session topics they created for students, it became clear that their efforts were focused on more than just academics. Discussion topics

included relationships, conflict resolution, and having students learn about their cultural heritage (See Appendix H). The program also sponsored trips to Kansas City to visit places such as the Nelson-Atkins Art Museum or the Negro League Baseball Museum. In addition, the founders talked with students about the importance of professional dress when attending job interviews. Finally, the founders had guest speakers attend sessions to lend another perspective for students. Older black community members came to talk about their experience with Lawrence in decades past, and most of the founders distinctly recalled a session in which a convicted felon visited students to describe his life experiences before, during, and after his incarceration and, as one founder recalled, to tell them, "This is definitely not the life you want."

*"Very Few Have Asked the Students What Would Work for Them": Working as Equals*

In discussing with the founders their original intent in establishing a program, as well as their philosophies in addressing the racial achievement gap, it became apparent that a core belief they all shared was the power of working alongside students, rather than as an authority figure. Many of them attributed the program's long-lasting effects and success to the fact that students were heavily involved in decisions, as well as treated as equal participants in the group. As one founder shared,

Of course we know that African-American males are probably the most at-risk demographic group in education, and a lot of times educators will come with plans for programs that from the educational point of view seem realistic, but very few have asked the students what would work for them.

While the program's initial name was Courageous Conversations, the founders later changed it to its current name in order to stress the importance of a two-way conversation with students:

That's why we changed the name to Can We Talk, because some key pieces of getting that dialogue going, having a dialogue with students, you know, and having them know who they are so they feel connected, so they feel like they're part of the institution, that they're not being dictated to all the time.... We're not here to expose you, or trying to make you look bad.... That really kind of proved out my theory anyway, that once you get students focused on the topic and how they see themselves as being in this, then they will excel on their own after that.

Even as new staff began to lead the program, and as the program began to expand across grade levels and neighboring school districts, the founders believed that its success was largely attributed to high levels of student involvement:

The people who have led the program, who have led the conversations, are people who really want to hear what the kids say rather than, "I've got a group of kids together, let me preach to them everything I think they need to hear, and that's what would turn them off" .... But then the benefits that you get from it are the kids are invested, they do better, behavior is better, academic progress is improved, graduation rates have improved.

Several founders noted on high school's principal, who became a regular part of the Can We Talk sessions:

He even changed his view on things, he didn't interact with people of color at all, never had, you know .... But he became one of our major, major allies .... It really was kind of rewarding because kids saw him as their ally as opposed to their enemy. As time went on our African-American males would approach him in the hallways in a friendlier manner because he was a part of the conversation.

While Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory primarily addressed racial stereotypes, in some ways this theory could also be applied towards the relationship between Can We

Talk adults and youth. From the adults' perspective, they gave these students a larger voice in this program than in a traditional educational setting, where teachers and administrators have a higher authoritative status in contrast to the students. They were working together in an organized setting towards a shared goal of improving student achievement. As the next section illustrates, the preliminary results showed this to be an effective model.

### *Early Signs of Success*

The founders reported that the earliest sign of success was the large turnout during the initial sessions. By the spring semester, they had documentation that demonstrated the students were improving in their classes as well as in their behavior. The founders cited that the students who were regularly participating with Can We Talk had improved their grade-point averages, increased the number of passing classes, and decreased suspensions and expulsions. In one building, 75% of its black males scored proficient in reading in 2009, an increase of 31 percentage points from the previous year, and 57% of its black males scored proficient in math, an increase of 11 percentage points. In the other building, by 2010, 89% of its black males scored proficient in reading, which was an increase in 27 percentage points from 2008, and 82% scored proficient in math, an increase of 22 percentage points. In comparison, a higher percentage of whites were scoring proficient at this time, yet the proficiency level either remained relatively flat or demonstrated a slight increase. (See Appendix I). In fact, every student participating in the program ended up graduating from high school, while students with similar demographics who were not

participating had a lower graduation rate. Students were also becoming more actively involved with their school, as well. As one founder shared,

One of the things we were telling the kids is, “You’ve got to participate. You’ve got to participate. In every aspect of government.” And one year we had a black student body president at [both high schools] at the same time, and I’m saying, “Damn.” [laughs]

*“Why Should We Separate Them when They’re Not Separated in Society?”*

While the founders initially focused on the black male population, it didn’t take long before female students began asking to participate in the program, as well. At one high school, the social worker had already established a separate program for the girls.

However, in the other building, the founders recalled getting ready to begin a session and:

A couple of young ladies came in and wanted to know if they can come in and join us, you know?.... I wasn’t going to say no, because I didn’t want to send anybody away, you know.

Some of the founders recalled initially feeling hesitant to have girls participate, but all concluded that in the end having a heterogeneous group proved to benefit everyone.

One recalls:

We thought, if we bring women, then you get posturing and you also have guys not wanting to say things and to be open with it, but we found that not to be the case.

Another founder recalled asking the social worker to combine her program with Can We Talk to have an inclusive program, to which she agreed. His argument was that it was necessary for both sexes to have healthy communication with each other, asking, “Why should we separate them when they’re not separated in society?”

Once girls began participating in the program, it quickly expanded so that students from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds were attending. As with the shift to include girls in the program, the founders recalled this as a positive change for Can We Talk:

We had black kids, Hispanic, American Indian kids who knew each other but didn't talk, and they were talking, communicating, and then white kids came in and they were talking and communicating, and the schools became a true community.

Another founder shared:

You mix it up with kids, white kids, black kids, you know, it doesn't make any difference. [Can We Talk] became a black group, you know, and it wasn't really a black group. We just chose those guys initially and then all of a sudden ... white kids start coming...Hispanic kids are coming in, Native American kids coming in.... That makes your program really healthy, I think.... When the white kids came in, oh man, that really gave it a different dynamic, too, a positive dynamic, when the white kids came in because they started seeing things a different way .... That's what you want to do is bring everybody together, have a difficult conversation together, get perspectives, and having people come in and sharing their story .... To me, it got better once we opened it up to move students to come.

Not only did the founders report positive benefits for the group's climate and culture, it also affected the school's academic record, as well:

The better our kids did, the better the entire school achieved, and achievement appreciably with traditional and nontraditional minorities and non-minorities.

After several years of establishing the program, expanding it to a second building, creating a curriculum guide for session topics, and presenting their program to various educational organizations, including the Kansas State Department and PEG's National Summit, the founders gradually exited from being directly involved with the program. Several cited the need to balance this volunteer role with their needs to have a full-time

profession, and others accepted jobs out of town. While this could have resulted in Can We Talk's demise, each building found internal staff members who were willing to carry on with the program.

*How it is Today: Current Staff*

It is 8:00 on a Thursday morning. Walking into the building, I find small groups of students loitering around the school grounds, as the first period of class does not begin for another hour. In less than a minute of entering the building, I am able to locate where Can We Talk is being held, as these same students told me the room. Just by the door, several students are sitting at a table with a list of names. They explain to me that students are to sign in when they attend a session, and I can add my name to the list. I walk into the room and find a student leader at the computer, loading up YouTube clips and CNN articles that are projected onto a screen. The group sponsor welcomes me and invites me to sit wherever I would like, as there are black chairs lined up in several rows. Within a few minutes, the room fills with about 15 students. I see students with a variety of skin tones, indicating to me that there are multiple races and ethnicities present. Two girls with olive skin tones next to me whisper that this is their first time attending, as they are new to the school. After some brief announcements regarding upcoming trips and scholarship opportunities, the group sponsor turns the discussion towards the topic of the day: current events. First, students watch a video clip of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity members from Oklahoma State University shouting a racist chant on a bus, unaware that they were being recorded. Next, the sponsor pulls up the latest news from Ferguson, Missouri, in which a police officer was not indicted in the shooting and killing of a black teenager the previous

summer. "I'm showing you these because you need to know what you might be facing in the real world," the sponsor tells the group of students. The students sit quietly as they watch the videos. Afterwards, the sponsor shifts the conversation to a more local topic of ACT test reminders. As it was nearing the end of the fall semester, the sponsor and administrator told the students that they would need to "buckle down" to make sure they stayed on top of their assignments and not to argue with their teachers. They were witnessing firsthand more discipline referrals to the office and reminded them that it was a critical time of the year to make sure they were successful in their classes.

Across town on another Thursday morning, I walk into the other high school and also encounter students loitering both inside and outside of the school. Since I had graduated from this school, I have a better sense of the room's location, yet I find the poster-sized signs and arrows directing me to the room to be helpful along the way. The program sponsor also greets me warmly and invites me to sit wherever I would like, and I again find a black chair among a row of about 20 already laid out. Students come in and congregate by the front table to sign in, and grab donuts, grapes, and juice while they are there. I notice that the room is filled with predominantly black students, but there are several white students as well. A black male student is sitting next to a white adult, and after listening to their conversations I later infer that it is a staff member escorting this young man with a disability to the program. As with the other building's session, the sponsor opens up the meeting with housekeeping notes on upcoming events and reminders for high school and college deadlines. The sponsor's student intern leads the group into the core activity. The room is separated into four quadrants, indicating Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Everyone begins in the middle of the room

and listens to either the intern or sponsor read a statement. The statements are focused on race and gender roles, both nationally and locally. Example statements include: *I am able to see someone of similar skin color to me positively portrayed on TV. Sexual harassment is an issue in our building. I learn about people from my culture in school. PDA is a problem in our building.* After each statement is read, students move to the quadrant that they feel best matches their opinions on the topic. Once everyone is in a corner, students volunteer their reason for choosing that particular quadrant. Most students of color either disagree or strongly disagree that they are able to see someone of similar skin color to them positively portrayed on TV. They cite movies, music videos, and TV shows where the people of color on screen had a thug or gang image, if there was anyone of similar skin color in the first place. The sexual harassment sentence brings up a discussion within each quadrant as well as with the entire group, as some students feel that sexualized comments are undesired and unwarranted, while others feel that both males and females encourage this type of attention and that it is not necessarily a strict gender line. A small number of students do not witness or directly experience sexual harassment and disagree that it is an issue to begin with. Along those lines, students share that they feel that PDA is a mixture of over-the-top physical contact and an issue to be dealt with, a result of pressure to display a relationship status, or are not a part of it as either a participant or a witness.

I witnessed a similar session structure in attending another session at the first building, and I also observed a lecture format in the second building. Thus, it would not be accurate to conclude that one building has shifted to a lecture format while the other building emphasizes student activity and engagement. However, I highlighted these sessions as they each illustrated the unique and varied ways that Can We Talk sponsors

structure sessions, yet keep the focus primarily on race, while also addressing college and career readiness. One building published a fall semester agenda, which began with listing an introductory August meeting and then shifted to September focus areas of setting goals and time management. October focused on college and career preparation, including visits to several college and high school campuses, attending a Symposium at the University of Kansas, and having guest speakers representing Asian American, Latino, Native American, and Black Leadership. November focused on professionalism, and December focused on relationships, including interracial dating. Throughout each month, additional dates were included that had affinity groups scheduled for males and females. The affinity groups began during the 2014-15 school year as an experimental way to facilitate conversations as it related to each gender. These groups are held 3-4 times per semester and discuss topics such as interpersonal skills, dating, parents, and peer pressure. Because these are held after school and run separately from the morning Can We Talk session, staff members report that there are a few new students who only attend the affinity groups, but most students who participate in the affinity groups also attend Can We Talk regularly.

While this same building had a set series of topics planned, early in the fall they revised their plans when news broke that several students from this building had been arrested after vandalizing the other high school's football field and wrote racial epithets and sexually explicit drawings in shaving cream (Nightengale, 2014). The sponsors felt that this incident was imperative to use as a teachable moment, not only for the students, but also the staff as well. The next Can We Talk session after this incident was moved into the auditorium, as the administration had correctly predicted a large turnout of both students and staff. There were upwards of 150 students present, and about 12-15 staff

members who attended. The assistant principal briefly noted the specific incident, yet stressed that this act was not to be the main focus, but to be used to reflect on the current climate and culture of the building. He praised those in attendance, saying, "Showing up is half the battle."

Students formed groups of 10-12 each and a staff member led a small group discussion in which students talked about the stereotypes and misconceptions they felt while at school, as well as changes they believed needed to be made in the building, in terms of student/teacher as well as peer relationships. These ideas were recorded on chart paper and then the administration compiled them into cohesive notes to share with district staff. Students shared that they felt the most pertinent racial issues in their building were the lack of classroom discussions about race, inconsistent enforcement of school rules, self-segregation, and students hesitating to confront their peers when they witness racist insults and name-calling. Students reported that they felt creating classroom discussion starters and diversity-centered field trips would be effective strategies to raise awareness about race (see Appendix J). Several weeks later, both high schools hosted a joint community forum at the public library, where students from both buildings interacted with each other and discussed similar topics (Hughes, 2014) (see Appendix K). Students from both buildings shared the stereotypes that they felt each building was portrayed as having. One building, built well over 60 years ago in the center of the city, was often associated as "ghetto" while the other building, established nearly 20 years ago in the northwest area of the city, was the "rich white" school. Students suggested having Student Councils work collaboratively to organize a shared event or fundraiser, allowing staff to implement diverse curriculum, and having more community forums in the future to have a more

positive relationship with each other as well as within the community. However, it is unknown what changes, if any, were made as a direct result of facilitating these sessions, or in sharing the information with district administrators.

While Can We Talk is present at both Lawrence, Kansas, high schools, each building runs their program individually. At one building, a staff member who self-identified as an African-American female, runs the program essentially on her own. In the other building, a staff member and building administrator, both who identified themselves as African-American, co-facilitate sessions. Thus, in this section I review the responses from three individuals who are currently in direct involvement with Can We Talk. The assistant principal had been involved with the program since arriving at the district two years ago, while the staff members had each begun their involvement about six years ago, while the founders were still actively running it, and then assumed full responsibility for the program once the founders exited.

#### *Current Program Goals and Session Topics*

When one of the staff members began his involvement with Can We Talk, he recalls approaching the students' academic and emotional needs:

When I first started with the program, there were ... about 50 kids and about 30 of them were failing.... I put together a stack [of their grades] and everything that I was looking at just came up with three things on why they failed. Not turning assignments in, afraid to approach the teacher for help, and attendance.... I [also] had students of color write down how they felt about being in this building. And when I turned that over to [the administrators]... they couldn't believe that's what these kids had in their minds about this school.

Once these new staff members were able to establish positive relationships with student participants, the topic choices remained similar to what was discussed when the

founders were leading the program. Both schools cited topics of interracial dating, professionalism, college tours, and current events as some of their overarching topics. Especially with race-related current events, all three staff members reported that they left some session topics open to discussing local and national news, and also gathered input from students on additional topics they would like to discuss.

Both buildings also have a CWT Board of students, in which students are selected via an application and election process. If selected, Board members work with the program sponsors to solicit and elicit feedback on topics for future sessions. In addition, Board members in one building work to establish norms for the group, such as requiring a dress code for events held outside school grounds, and seek community donations from local businesses for special events.

Both schools also sought guest speakers from a variety of professions. At one building this past year, Can We Talk staff was able to add affinity group sessions in addition to the regularly scheduled CWT sessions. While the CWT sessions were held in the mornings on late arrival days, the affinity groups met for an hour in the afternoons during early dismissal days. Students would then be in small groups based on either race or gender, depending on the topic. The purpose of this time was to allow students to discuss topics with peers who were of similar racial and gender background. This philosophy also stems from Pacific Educational Group's practice in conducting sessions that are heterogeneous as well as homogeneous in race and gender.

An unexpected change during this time period was when the Lawrence school district opted to move 6<sup>th</sup> graders from elementary buildings into middle schools, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders from what were junior high schools to the high schools, around 2010. When this

happened, school administrators eliminated the seminar block from the schedule to accommodate the influx of additional students and established late arrival days, when school began at 9:00 a.m. and staff members attended Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Thus, Can We Talk could no longer be held during the school day as it was originally scheduled. The session moved to 8:00 a.m. on late arrival days, so students who were interested in attending were responsible for their own transportation. As referenced earlier, this schedule change resulted in a decrease in student participation.

*"I'm Constantly Learning"*

One of the key elements of Can We Talk's early beginnings was to involve the students with the process as much as possible. It appears that this philosophy is still in place with the program. Both buildings reported that they routinely gathered student input on topics to discuss, as this staff member shared:

Many of times we get away from, you know, looking at what the kids really need, and we decide what they need without asking them, not making them part of the process, so what we do is we get students together and we ask them what topics of their concern they would like to talk about. And that's how we come up with a lot of the topics, like this year we had being biracial in America, interracial dating.

This was typically done in working with Can We Talk student Board members, although I also observed a CWT participant provide a topic of rape culture, which students later reflected on as one of the most meaningful topics that they had discussed.

Staff members at both buildings reported that students who were involved with Can We Talk went on to become more involved in school with extracurricular activities. Both attributed it to Can We Talk as a network for students to find a sense of belonging within the school that they might not have felt before, which gave them the confidence to try

additional activities. As one staff member shared, the opportunity to listen to students in this setting benefitted both herself as well as the students:

Some of them have evolved, and done some maturing.... I see them getting involved in other things... I really appreciate being able to be there and listen to them and – you know, hear their perspective and meet them where they're at.... The ones that I thought were quiet didn't end up being quiet, and the ones that would be a little bit more outspoken about things weren't.... I'm constantly learning because the things that I've assumed or thought about every culture, in that sense, sometimes is called into question, because they're all different, so I absolutely appreciate that piece because I'm always learning.

The administrator also reflected on what he learned from students after participating with Can We Talk:

Every student at Can We Talk kind of has a story, and I think that they feel some type of personal connection.

Similar to what the founders reported, once students became comfortable with the program, they began to demonstrate signs of increased confidence and school satisfaction, which was noted in their behavior, academics, and formal leadership opportunities. As a staff member recollected:

When we first started the program, students of color weren't involved in anything. They didn't run for Student Council, they didn't run to be part of LinkCrew, the ones that played sports, after sports was over with, they did nothing, you know?... This gives them a sense of belonging... And one thing we do in the group, too, is we make them police themselves.... We have a Board of about 12 students that represent the group, and they come up with the rules, like a dress code, they can't be failing, they can't be going to ISS or OSS.

As will be discussed in the student response section, from my sample size of 19 students, two were serving as Can We Talk Board members, while another was a member of Student Council. In addition, nearly all students were involved in another extracurricular activity besides Can We Talk.

*“Lost Its Original Mission”: Becoming an Inclusive Group*

The three staff members currently associated with Can We Talk noted the shift from targeting African-American males to opening the program for all students and fighting the stigma that it is a group only for blacks. Each person reflected on the benefits of having a heterogeneous group, while acknowledging that the original targeted audience has become less of a focus in the process.

One staff member shared a similar sentiment as the founders in that separating students by race or sex ultimately would not appropriately prepare students for the ability to function in a heterogeneous society:

If you keep it separated, society is not separated. So what you're saying is that we're going to have a group that's just for color, but when you go out into the world, the world is not just of color, okay, the makeup and what have you. And one of the biggest issues we had to deal with was that kids weren't comfortable doing it because they felt it was a black thing.

An offset of this, however, is that African-American males continue to be the most at-risk demographic in schools, yet the original focus towards them gradually faded as students of all races began attending. One staff member reported:

We do not have that many black males coming .... We don't have as many [overall] as we did before, either. With them already being in the minority, I don't think it's helping necessarily the people that we wanted to help initially. Some of them, but not all of the ones that we probably need to snag.

These adults had mixed feelings on whether a shifting back to the original group's focus population would be effective. A staff member in one building shared,

It's not just a matter of black kids, but every kid that is struggling, because we have a list – a 45-page list – of kids that are getting F's that are clearly not connected somewhere.

On the other hand, another staff member felt that politics played a stronger role in preventing Can We Talk from focusing on only African-American males:

I feel that we've made the program kind of politically correct to fit the powers that be, you know what I'm saying? .... I think it's fine either way. But I think that Can We Talk has lost its original mission on why they started it in the first place.

*Moving Forward: Planning for the Future*

The staff members universally shared that the first change they would like to see occur for Can We Talk would be the ability to adjust the scheduled time so that students could attend it during the school day:

A lot of people can't attend because they have other obligations or arrangements between 8 and 9 ... we'd have double the kids if it was put in a spot where they could get to it.

One staff member was able to find a benefit to the smaller group sizes, noting that it allowed for more intimate and personal conversations for students. However, staff from both buildings reported that holding Can We Talk during the school day would not only increase the group size, but more teachers would be able to become involved, as well:

When we used to do it during seminar, we could have at times up to 8 to 12 teachers, you know, and that was allowing the teachers to get into more personal settings with the students as well, and I think that made a difference in a lot of students' lives, because a lot of times they come here and they have no connection anywhere.

I just wish that more adults would be open to getting invested in it. I think that what's interesting to me is we've been able to have these real conversations with kids that we can't even have with adults.... We can't translate [Courageous Conversations] to how that looks in a classroom, and getting at all kids to be motivated on a daily basis.

As of this writing, the school district had no plans to adjust high school schedules.

It is clear from listening to the adults who were previously or are currently involved with Can We Talk that they have a strong passion for the program. The student demographics have expanded in terms of race and gender, but the broader ideal of supporting students academically and providing a comfortable environment to discuss race-related topics and other controversial issues remains a constant factor with the program. The adults reflected that they found their experiences to be just as meaningful for them as they perceive it to be for students. They also wish that the program were able to include more students and staff members, as they see a strong benefit for those who participate. This echoes student responses, which I will review in the following chapter.

## ***Chapter 5***

### **RESULTS: STUDENTS**

The purpose of my study was to explore student experiences from those who have participated in Can We Talk. I centered the results by first reporting what the founders and current sponsors shared as to the original and current goals and activities of the program. In this section, I share what current students have to say about the program. I first identify the major themes I found from the entire sample size. Then, I break down my results to analyze student responses by grade level, race, and sex.

#### *General Themes*

In this section, I explore the broader themes that I found in analyzing student responses, as these were the most predominant. First, I review the ways in which students reported benefits of discussing race and multicultural viewpoints and perspectives from the program. Second, I explore students' identity development, both as an individual and as developing a strong affiliation with Can We Talk.

#### *"Maybe There's More to This Person": Understanding Multiple Perspectives*

Students reported a strong desire to continue participating with Can We Talk because they were able to learn multiple perspectives on a variety of topics. For some students, simply discussing the topics broadened their knowledge of the local and national issues surrounding them, which they felt benefitted them. A female biracial freshman shared:

Before I joined Can We Talk, I really just, whenever someone mentioned something I was like, “What’s that?” But now I know what they’re talking about.

For other students, it was the ability to devote the time to explore these events and topics on a deeper level that helped them to understand the complexities of what they first perceived as a superficial issue. A female Hispanic sophomore shared:

Tying [topics] into the news, and really understanding the true meaning of some stuff, and not just saying, “Oh, this is why this happened,” because there could be many more reasons of why it happened and how it could happen, so it’s really opened my eyes to more than just, you know, black and white or barriers that have always been there.

Once students were able to process these topics on a deeper level in these sessions, many reported that they were then able to develop an understanding of the varying opinions that their peers had on a similar topic, which many of them reported as one of the top appreciations of the program. A female biracial junior shared,

Your viewpoints and [the] perspectives you hear are from all away around the table, not just from these people or these people, you get a perspective from everybody.

A female white sophomore stated,

It’s just really eye-opening to help me understand things, and I respect people because then I learned to, like, understand that maybe there’s more to this person and what I feel like I’m going through, because I think most people are blind to, like, these racial stereotypes and ... they don’t want to talk about it, but it’s out there, and it’s happening, so I think we should talk about it.

A male Hispanic junior shared that if he were not participating in Can We Talk,

I think my attitude towards, like, different cultures wouldn’t be ... I guess racially biased, not racist, but just, like, assuming what it’s like and not knowing what it’s like.

A female black senior shared a similar outlook:

I think that I would be more so towards, you know, like, “Oh, white people are all the same, they’re all mean, they’re all rude,” ... When you go to Can We Talk, it gives you a perspective on every race, you know, because we’ve had Hispanics come talk to us about their lifestyle, and just a whole abundance of races telling, like, how they feel, and so it gives a great outlook. And without it, I don’t know if I would have that perspective, like I do now.

Finally, a male biracial senior connected the comfort level of the program in developing a stronger empathy for his peers outside of CWT:

With the [CWT] environment, I feel like people are more open to speaking, whereas in a classroom they might not say something, but in Can We Talk they will, which has taught me that even if someone doesn’t speak, you should definitely know that they have an opinion on something.

While most students focused on how participating with Can We Talk has helped them to learn multiple peer perspectives, several students noted that some of the program’s topics focused on academics and college readiness. The sessions provided a comfortable environment for students to clear the air regarding how they felt their teachers were treating them and learn how to become more academically successful. As a female black senior reported:

There are people, African-Americans who say, like, that they feel their teachers pick on them a lot, but we’ve come to realize that it’s not like they’re picking on you, they just want you to succeed, and whether people want to believe it or not, there is like a stereotype on us to where we’re not expected to do much, so, you know, we’re in there and they say, “Oh yeah, I feel a little pressured by my teacher,” but they’re not really understanding that the teacher just wants them to do better, you know.

*“It’s Important That We Know Where We Come From”: Identity Development*

In addition to learning about students’ varying background experiences and opinions, as well as from specific program topics, they were also able to further develop an understanding of themselves. For many students, it is in learning about their peers’ opinions that they were able to realize their own viewpoints on topics, which helped to further their development and identity. A male Asian-American junior reported,

It gives you more of an appreciation for your own heritage, and it really opens up a broader spectrum. You get to learn from other students in your school about their heritage and where they come from and how important it is to them, which it should be, and then it gives you new ideas and you get to share yours and other students, which is nice.

A female black junior shared:

I’m from Africa and I’ve been here about six years now, and when I moved here, the whole stereotype about black people, they’re so ghetto, blah blah blah, things like that ... I was never raised like that, so when I moved here I always had, like, a stereotype of black people in America are ghetto, but [CWT] changed my whole entire perspective on that.

As referenced earlier, the quadrants activity resonated with several students. While this activity as used throughout the school year, one session focused specifically on racial stereotyping, which resonated with this male biracial junior:

There was this one [question] saying, “Are people stereotypical of your race?” and I... was in the middle ... for neutral, or I didn’t know, for that question, and just stuff how, like, other races think that other races are stereotypical and have the same cliché, you know, Kool-Aid, chicken, you know, and whites don’t like black people, or something like that, and Mexicans are – just cliché stuff about races.

For this student, it appears that the activity helped not only to raise awareness about racial stereotyping of all races, but it prompted him to reflect on his own actions and beliefs.

In other instances, the program's topic focused on students learning about each other's cultural heritage. Students were then able to learn about their peers' backgrounds, but also to deepen their understanding of their own heritage. A female black junior shared,

We watched a whole presentation about our history [with Schlagel High School] and why it's important that we know where we come from and stuff....Like, we had different racial backgrounds there, and it was mostly the ones that are, like, minorities here in America. Every type of history, and it also had Irish history and everything, so, like, everybody.

*"I'd Still be with the Rough Crowd of Kids": Self-Improvement*

Many students reported that one of the main benefits they felt they received from Can We Talk was improving their outlook in a variety of ways. As discussed earlier, many students shared the benefits in learning about a variety of controversial topics as well as how their peers may perceive these issues differently from themselves. Another benefit students shared was that their affiliation with Can We Talk helped to improve their behavior, attitude, and academics. As a female white sophomore stated, the sessions themselves helped her and her friends stay out of trouble:

Instead of going and smoking weed for the hour of school that the bus or their parents drop them off [on late arrival days], you know, instead of getting themselves in trouble they're just like, "Oh, yeah, let's go to *Can We Talk*", it's like a positive, fun activity to do.

For a female freshman who had recently moved from the Middle East, she felt that attending Can We Talk was a rare time in her everyday life where she was able to speak her mind, which helped her emotionally:

I usually do not sit with people and tell them how I feel, and with my opinions, but then I, like, come to Can We Talk, I actually to start to talk about my opinions. And then I kind of feel better.

Other students cited Can We Talk's long-term impact on their high school years. Several students reported bullying and poor peer relationships that they felt had improved since they began high school. While students did not necessarily attribute these improvements to Can We Talk, several students felt that the staff and program structure helped them to improve their relationship with the school and staff. A female black sophomore discussed how Can We Talk has helped her overcome shyness and public speaking when sharing her experiences with being bullied:

I'm just a quiet one, and now I'm out there, and I actually did speak ... I just got to stand up there and [talk] about how I got bullied and just about basically my life ... [People] actually had emotional, like, I saw some parents cry and some kids just, like, they started smiling through their tears, but during the speech all I saw was just smiles and tears.

A female black senior, who happened to have attended both high schools, reflected on how she had grown as an individual through the years:

I didn't take anything seriously, I was probably the kid who, like, not going to a few classes and not taking my grades seriously, but going to Can We Talk, they opened my eyes to a lot of things and how important it is for us to succeed and how we needed to go class and, you know, do the right things to be a better person, so I think that really changed me then. I mean, ever since then, even my principals and everything are like, "You're different, a lot different than you were [when you first came]" ... Different in my classes and my attitude, personality, everything.... I've kind of seen it in myself as well.... Being in *Can We Talk*, I feel like if I wasn't there, I'd still be with the rough crowd of kids and not really focusing, and I just think they kind of help you get your head on straight with that.

*"We All Need to Actually Take a Stand and Actually Do Something": Call to Action*

For some students, knowing and processing topics provoked a sense of duty to actually instill change. A female white junior shared,

It's really cool to get to know, like, all of these diverse people and, like, get to know more people around the school that you don't see and know .... Some of my views have changed slightly, and ... I realize that there are people that actually want to make a change.... Going back to the topic of today, like, all these rape cases, like, how people could just stand there and watch, I figured at least someone would do something, so I didn't realize that people don't actually do anything, and we all need to actually take a stand and actually do something with the world.

Other students shared that they felt learning about racism and social injustices through Can We Talk sessions spurred their passion to support their peers as well as call for student participants to work towards turning a vision into reality as they became adults. A male white junior shared,

[Can We Talk] just gives me an overall sense that I'm helping people, I suppose ..... I like to go there so that I can express that, "You're not alone, and we're here for you, and you don't have to put up with that," trying to change it so that they're not discriminated against.... You are who you are, and you were put on this world for a reason.

A male Asian-American junior shared a similar sentiment:

Those problems are going to carry over into the younger generation and older people will still be facing them, so hopefully with my generation we'll be able to and those problems, and if not, then to make it better.

Sadly, for others, these topics instilled a personal sense of duty in what they perceived to be necessary in their adult lives in order to protect themselves and loved ones.

A female black senior reported that in the session topics regarding police brutality in the news,

You know, we're going to, for African-Americans, we're going to have to tell our children and our sons, you know, "Watch out for this," and, like, you may just be pulled over because you're African-American, and how that affects us into the future...

Thus, while many students reported motivation and confidence to improve racial tensions as they develop into adulthood, this particular student felt that it was more necessary for her to prepare for adulthood as if these changes did not occur. It is also important to note that while the other students cited in this section were a variety of races, it was the black student who felt the need to prepare for what she perceived to be a tumultuous future.

*“It Basically is Kind of a Family”: Group Identity*

When I asked students to explain why they maintained their association with Can We Talk, the most common response was it was due to strong identification with the group itself. As a white female sophomore said:

It basically is kind of a family, like, I can talk to anybody in there and nobody’s going to judge me on what I have to say, and we support each other and we help each other and... we have really strong morals of the group, too, and I like that. We respect each other, we respect the rest of the school and the community.

A black female senior shared:

Can We Talk is like family to me, because I’ve known [program sponsor], she’s actually my Girl Scout leader when I was growing up, so I actually met her and she knew my family so it’s, like, another mentor I can go talk to.

Students elaborated on other ways in which they felt strong connections with the program. For some, it was the comfort of finding a group that fit their racial profile, as one female black senior shared:

When I entered the room, there were a lot of faces like me, so... I was like, “Ooh, I really like this” ... [my school] was pretty diverse, but it was nice to be around my race as well.

Other students shared that the ability to discuss a variety of hot-button topics in what they perceived to be a risk-free environment was what prompted them to keep attending. As a biracial male senior described:

I really like the idea of having an open air where everyone was comfortable discussing things like that, because in most situations if you try to bring up, like, an issue about race or anything like that, I notice people usually are uncomfortable discussing it, or if they do, like, if you discuss in a classroom setting oftentimes some people won't be serious about it, and when you're discussing things like sexual harassment and how catcalling is an active issue, it becomes very hard to discuss that when people aren't being very serious about it.

Students also reported that the relationship they had with the adult sponsors in the room was unique from the relationships they perceived to be able to have with other school staff during a typical classroom setting. A female junior who self-identified as "human" for her race said:

It's kind of like a safety net in a way where kids can express their views and actually be listened to, other than adults, like, telling them, "Well, no, this is how it is," instead of that they actually listen.

Finally, perhaps a female black junior put it best by simply saying:

It's more of like a time where we can just get together and just....I don't know, be yourself?

### *School Involvement*

As will be elaborated on in subsequent sections, many students were involved in at least more than one additional extracurricular activity at their school. Many students were involved in a variety of clubs, sports, and organizations that reflected their involvement and investment with their school. Two students were Board members for Can We Talk in

their buildings, and one student was also a member of Student Council; these positions hold a title within student governance and indicate formal signs of youth leadership. Of the nineteen students interviewed, all were planning to graduate high school, and eighteen students were able to state a specific college and/or career that they would like to pursue once graduating, regardless of their grade level. This serves as an indication that these students feel comfortable and confident in stating as well as acting towards these goals as they enter adulthood.

However, there are informal instances that demonstrate youth empowerment that are not measured by these formal positions and organizations. It is important to note that most student participants did not report involvement in these formal positions, yet many of them still shared instances in which they felt that they had the capability of causing positive change. In some instances, this change was geared towards self-improvement. For others, they were able to expand their vision for change towards their peers, school, and society as a whole.

### *Responses to Specific Questions*

In the following sections, I outline the results from specific questions I asked students during the interview process (see Appendix B). As I reviewed student transcripts, I began a tallying process with particular questions in order to gauge if there was any overwhelming perspective or pattern to student responses on particular questions. I was interested specifically in questions regarding: school involvement, school satisfaction, assumptions they had about Can We Talk prior to joining, what factors caused them to join and continue participating, attendance patterns for Can We Talk, favorite Can We Talk

topics, changes they would like to see in the program, and plans they had after graduating high school.

The first section provides a basic overview of the majority response by grouping students as a whole entity. The subsequent sections disseminate these results by grade level, race, and gender, and highlight particular differences in responses among these demographic subgroups.

As previously stated, these distinctions are not intended to turn a small number of students' responses into a generalization for their entire subgroup. For this reason, and due to a particularly small sample size for students who identified as Hispanic (2), Arab (1), and "other" (1), I did not include a separate analysis of their responses in the results section by race. However, it is also important to explore the broader differences within these subgroups in order to gain a better understanding of the different perspectives students bring as a result of their unique backgrounds.

### *Majority Responses*

### *School Involvement*

Based on my sample selection, I found that most of the students were involved with their school in other ways besides Can We Talk. Ten students reported that they were involved in at least one other sport, club, or routine school activity in addition to participating in Can We Talk. Two students were CWT Board members, and one student was a Student Council member. Five students reported that they were involved in anywhere from two to four additional activities. One student was involved in six additional school programs. It is unknown whether students joined these activities simultaneously, or

if they began attending one program before another. It is also interesting to note that program sponsors from both buildings observed Can We Talk participants becoming more involved with their schools as they became invested with CWT.

### *School Satisfaction*

Nearly all students reported feeling satisfied with their academic careers, which included relationships with teachers and peers in addition to their coursework. Many of these students reported that they had always had a positive outlook towards school, but several students shared that their grades and attitude towards school had changed in the past several years. Some specifically cited the CWT staff as being responsible for this change in their academic success, while others reasoned that it was due to moving from a school in which they did not have the same satisfaction.

### *“It’s Not Just What People Think It Is”: Can We Talk Assumptions*

While students tended to acknowledge that Can We Talk was originally begun to support African-American males, I was surprised to find that the majority of students did not have any assumptions about the program before they joined. Many students reported that they just wanted to try it.

However, the second most popular response to this question was that they had assumed it was a “black club” for African-Americans only, which demonstrates that the program may still hold some exclusive perceptions. This perception was shared across all races that were represented in this study. For example, a female white sophomore shared:

I thought it was just going to be like a bunch of black people and they were all going to judge me, and I was going to be the only white kid there, and I was pretty scared until I got there, to be honest. [laughs]

Additionally, a female black junior shared her initial hesitation in joining:

I just thought, like, just – black people who are angry at, like, the other races of just who don't like the way that they're treated, if that makes any sense, just, like, angry black people, I guess you would say.

Students had the opportunity to share whether their friends also participated in the program, and were asked to speculate reasons why their friends may not be attending, if that happened to be the case. While many students denied the ability to accurately explain for their friends, many others cited scheduling and transportation issues. Still, other students were able to specifically cite the perception that Can We Talk is exclusively for black students. A female biracial junior shared:

A lot of people kind of categorize it, assume that, like, only black people go, so my friends are like, "Oh, no, I don't want to go, but it's not like that at all ... if everybody got the opportunity to go to at least one meeting they'd really see what it's all about, and that's what it really is, is it's for everybody.

A female black senior also speculated that her peers declined to attend due to the perception that it was only for blacks:

I've tried to get a few of my friends to come, but they're like, "No, I don't want to go," it's like, "It's just a lot of black people in there talking about, you know, racial issues and stuff," or, like, I have some friends that are white and they feel like it's not welcome because more of – there are more black students that go to group than other races, so I think that's what makes them feel, like, that they're not welcome there.

On the other hand, a female black senior shared that she initially felt that white students who were in attendance were not going to be taking the program's topics seriously:

When I just see different white kids coming in and stuff, I kind of – I would have thought that they really wouldn't like it because, as [program sponsor] says, it's really for all kids of all races, but now when they started coming, I said, "Oh," I was like, "I didn't know if they was really interested in it."

As discussed earlier in this chapter, most students realized that their initial biases regarding the program itself as well as its participants were not what they had presumed prior to attending their first session. When probed, all students who shared an initial assumption about the program reported that they found their presumptions to be inaccurate.

#### *Motivation to Begin Attending Can We Talk*

While students wanted to go into the program with an open mind, it often was a friend or family member who first convinced them to start. In this instance, a family member was reported to be an older cousin or sibling who was already involved in the program. Some students also reported that they joined in high school because they were members of the program at their local middle school, or had heard about it when a CWT panel visited their middle school.

### *Can We Talk Attendance*

More than half of the students reported that they continue to participate in each CWT session, having missed only due to a field trip or illness. The second most popular response was that they would attend half of the scheduled sessions on average; their reasons for missing were mostly due to other school responsibilities, or a desire to sleep in during late arrival days.

### *Favorite Topics*

Many students reported their favorite topics to be about police brutality and instances of racism in the news, interracial dating, as well as college preparatory discussions. They reported that these topics were their favorites because in many ways, they were able to somehow make a personal connection with the topic. As a black female sophomore shared:

People make fun of me because I'm adopted, and my parents are - my mom is white, my dad's black and my two younger sisters are mixed and I'm like, "Well, that doesn't make me like a bad person or anything I'm just - that's just me, who I am."

A black female senior reported that she connected strongly with the topic because

People find it a little odd or weird to, like, see interracial couples, I mean it's getting to be more acceptable, but I experience it also with, like, talking to guys who were different races than I am and having other people talk about us, things like that.

Students reported that they felt more educated and aware about events happening around them, particularly when discussing current events. Students were also able to provide instances in which interracial dating discussions had connections with their daily observations and experiences with high school and family. Finally, students reported that

college preparatory visits and campus field trips helped them to understand not only the importance of academic success in high school, but also specific actions they would need to take in their coming years in order to attend college.

### *Proposed Changes for Can We Talk*

Most students were very satisfied with their participation in *Can We Talk*, and did not cite any specific changes they would make with the program itself. However, the second most common response to this question was that they wished the program had more publicity within the school and that more students would attend, or at least be willing to attend, and understand that the program is for all students. A female black junior shared,

I believe that the word should be spread more and more people should know what it really is about, just like I started not knowing what it was about, it was just the whole stereotype that was just for black people and things like that, and how I try to get my friends to join but they still have that stereotype going, or that rumor going that it's just for black people.

Other students felt that attending the program would benefit their peers in a way that they felt it had benefitted them. A female black senior said,

I think everybody should attend at least two sessions out of their whole high school career just to, you know, just have a different perspective than what they're used to and to be able to have those conversations about race that they wouldn't have on a daily basis.

A white male junior shared a similar belief:

The people that are not as nice as others, if they attended, I think they would get a better understanding as of...life, they would get a rude awakening, a little bit, and maybe change the way they think, maybe.

Given that most students said that they or their friends would not attend *CWT* due to scheduling concerns with the late arrival time, perhaps it would benefit school staff to examine other times in which students could participate in this program without having to provide their own transportation. A male biracial senior felt that it would be beneficial for *CWT* to be offered as an elective course, which would provide students with an easier opportunity to attend, as well as to provide an increased frequency and time duration for sessions in which topics could be discussed further:

I feel like with issues like this, I can't see how an hour discussion of rape culture in America is really going to have a huge impact on someone's life. I feel like things like that have to be discussed more in-depth. I think that you need more time to talk about stuff like that, and since *Can We Talk* is in the morning on late arrivals, usually people aren't 100 percent there in the morning... but I wish it was offered as a class, that way we could process it later in the day when there's more time. And then we could get more in-depth with things instead of just, like, once a month.

### *Postsecondary Goals*

Given that the students I interviewed reported current academic success and satisfaction, and expressed an interest in learning more about college preparation, I was not surprised to find that nearly all students reported having specific plans and goals once they graduated from high school. Many students cited a postsecondary school in which they would like to attend, and many upperclassmen were able to list particular areas in which they would like to major as their course of study. I was unable to determine the extent to which students felt that *Can We Talk* had in their postsecondary education decisions.

### *Results by Grade Level*

I analyzed student responses according to grade level. The purpose for doing this was to investigate whether the themes of group identification and empowerment or leadership were more prominent in one particular age group, and also to see if the upperclassmen, which I defined as the juniors and seniors, reported any desire or need to mentor the freshmen and sophomore groups. I interviewed 2 freshmen, 4 sophomores, 9 juniors, and 4 seniors. Through this analysis, I found patterns in what prompted students to begin, their attendance through the years with the program, as well as what kept them coming and what changes they would make with Can We Talk. In general, I found that the responses from the juniors and seniors to be more articulate and detailed overall, which I attribute to their development and maturity level in comparison to their younger peers. For example, the upperclassmen provided comments regarding why some students might not attend giving specific instances, such as this multiracial male senior:

Well, they have variety of reasons, some of them drive to school and so they figure, "If I can go to school at 9 o'clock, why would I wake up early in the morning?" I do feel like there is still this assumption or the stigma about it that it's like a black people only club and, I mean, I imagine that also comes with the whole idea of race issues that we discuss. I imagine it's uncomfortable for everyone, and I feel like those are the general two reasons.

A white female freshmen responded to the same question as:

But mainly because it's so early in the morning, I think, and they don't even know what it's about, so they don't come, probably.

I present what I found to be the most significant differences in responses in the table below, after which I describe my findings:

Table 4: Results by Grade Level

Freshmen and Sophomores	Juniors and Seniors
No assumptions about Can We Talk	More likely to assume “black club” Grade/attitude improvement Slight CWT attendance decline

Freshmen and sophomores were more likely to report that they did not have any assumptions about what Can We Talk was like before they actually began attending. In contrast, the juniors and seniors were more likely to assume that it was a “black club” meant for only black students than the younger students. This could be attributed to the timing in which the program shifted from focusing on black students to advertising its inclusion of all students in recent years. The upperclassmen were also more likely to note an improvement in their grades and attitude. It is possible that the freshmen and sophomores did not report this, as it is their early years of high school. Finally, juniors and seniors were more likely to report that their Can We Talk participation had declined from when they initially joined, as they stated they had work and family commitments or simply wanted to enjoy their last years of high school and sleep in an extra hour.

*Results by Race*

I reviewed student responses according to how students racially identified themselves. I interviewed a total of 4 students who identified as white or Caucasian, 6 students who identified as either black or African-American, 2 who identified as Hispanic, 1 who identified as Arab, 1 who identified as Asian, 4 who identified as multi-racial, and 1

who identified as “human”. In this comparison, I only reviewed the responses of white/Caucasian, black/African-American, and multiracial students as they were a sample size of more than 2 students. A summary of participant responses by race is below, after which I describe my findings:

Table 5: Results by Race

Black	White	Multiracial
Student Council and CWT Board members Challenges with peers No CWT assumptions; some hesitated on white involvement Middle school exposure Want stronger leadership/expectations	Challenges with peers Friend/family	“Black group” Middle school exposure Want more people involved

All three students who shared that they were involved with Student Council or the Can We Talk Board were black. Both black and white students were more likely to share that they had challenges with peers, either socially with interracial dating, bullying, etc. When probed further, they reported that Can We Talk helped them strategize ways to combat these situations, but still did not feel comfortable bringing up the specific problem with the group. Black students were more likely to reflect that they did not have any assumptions about the program before attending, although some shared that they initially

worried that the white students wouldn't take the program seriously. A female black senior shared:

I'm not saying that one does not deserve to go, but we'll get kids in there who will just come for one day just to say that they came just to go on a college tour so they can get out of school, you know?

This was also echoed in the black students' desire to have the program include stronger leadership and expectations from the Student Board, which other racial groups did not state as a desired change to the program. Both black and multiracial students were more likely to say that they had heard of Can We Talk while attending middle school, and in some cases had participated in the program before even entering high school. No white students shared this, which leads me to question what the recruitment process is like in advertising the program at the middle school level. Multiracial students were also more likely to say that they desired more student participation and publicity about the program when compared to black and white students.

### *Results by Sex*

When I began this study, I had made the assumption that student responses would fall into more distinguishable race-based patterns. However, I was surprised during my analysis that I found greater differences in responses between sexes than when analyzing based on student racial backgrounds. Noting the sample population itself is important. I was able to recruit and interview a total of 14 girls and 5 boys. Despite numerous attempts to recruit and contact more male participants, I found it a greater challenge to initiate and

sustain contact with the male participants when compared to the female participants. I summarize the findings when compared by sex, and describe my findings thereafter.

Table 6: Results by Sex

Female	Male
Student Council and CWT Board members Fewer CWT assumptions Group identity, "like a family" More consistent attendance Topics: school climate, rape Specific improvements	"Black club" Identity development Topics: bullying, discrimination, domestic violence Most declined specific improvements

Of the 3 students who reported that they were involved with either Student Council or Can We Talk’s student Board, all 3 were female. Female participants reported having fewer assumptions than male participants, who were more likely to share that they initially thought of Can We Talk as a “black club”. Females were more likely to cite Can We Talk in reference to group identity, saying the program members were “like a family”, while males were more likely to share that they benefitted from helping it develop their identity in some capacity. All students stated that current events and interracial dating were their favorite topics, but after those subject areas, females were more likely to report topics discussing school climate and culture and rape as a topic that resonated with them the most, whereas males were more likely to cite topics such as bullying, discrimination, and domestic violence. Finally, females reported having a more consistent attendance and

were more likely to share specific improvements they would make to the program, but the male participants tended to have attendance as less frequent or declining over the years and sharing no specific areas in which to improve the program. The relationship between these could be interpreted that females are more involved with the program and thus find areas in which they would like to see improvements.

It is evident firsthand that these students have a strong affiliation for Can We Talk, and hold the program in high regard. Students shared that they benefit from hearing about different viewpoints from topics themselves as well as the discussions held during sessions. They learn more about themselves as they confront perspectives different from their own, and in some cases as they explore their cultural background through program activities. Many students feel that they are improving themselves, whether it is academically, behaviorally, or socially. Many students report that Can We Talk gives them a strong connection with the group, often calling it “like a family”.

I found that the younger students were more likely to have attended without having any preconceived ideas of what the program was about and tended to have more consistent responses of school satisfaction and success than juniors and seniors. Only students who self-identified as black were in any formal positions of student leadership. Finally, female participants were more likely to have consistent attendance, stronger group affiliation, leadership roles, and concrete suggestions to improve the program than male participants.

It is easy to understand where the adults are coming from when they express the benefits of opening the program to any interested students. More students have access to

the academic supports, and a heterogeneous setting enables students to learn about their peers' racial and cultural experiences. On the other hand, it is also clear that the original targeted audience has slowly disappeared, as the majority of students in the program are not black males. This brings into question if this population is receiving the necessary supports. In the next chapter, I will reflect on these changes as well as implications for practitioners and for future research.

## ***Chapter 6***

### **DISCUSSION**

#### *“The Story Itself is Worth Telling”*

This study was designed to explore the ways the original and current goals of Can We Talk, as well as to learn more about students’ experience with the program. I created this study in order to address the research questions:

*What were the original goals and mission when Can We Talk was established?*

*What are the current goals and mission of Can We Talk?*

*How do students at Lawrence High School and Free State High School describe their experience with the Can We Talk program?*

As with any study, while the specific research questions for this study have been answered, this information also yields additional questions, which could be explored through future research.

#### *Current Events*

It is important to note that by the spring of 2015, both the head principal and assistant principal at one building announced their resignations, having found administrative positions in neighboring districts. The assistant principal was heavily

involved with planning and facilitating Can We Talk, and both founders and current staff referenced the strong administrative support from the head principal to continue and expand Can We Talk. The program's stability could be open to change with new administration; however, given that equity remains a district goal, and there is strong student support for the program, along with the additional staff member remaining as a facilitator, I would hesitate to predict a substantial change in the way the program currently runs. Moreover, when the founders began to shift away from directly running the program, other adults were willing and able to continue the program, and Can We Talk remains intact today. As one of the founders reflected:

I think the telling of any success is that it can survive after the original people are gone. That means that the story itself is worth telling.

In addition, one of the buildings experienced some political and public conflict this past academic year when the administration created a mentoring program for its male population, citing the disparity in graduation rates between males and females. This program paired 15 males with 15 successful community members, and began the program in December 2014. However, by late January 2015, the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union requested that the building cease with the program as it violated Title IX by discriminating against female students (Hughes, 2015). In the same semester, the administration began a trial period of enrolling students in separate English classes according to gender, but this was also halted. Due to the ramifications this building experienced when targeting students according to gender, it in some ways suggests why administrators would not opt to revert Can We Talk back into targeting only African-American males.

### *Implications for Education Practitioners*

Currently, the program at both high schools consists of students who experience a strong connection and association with the program itself, as well as the people who are involved with it. Students report that they find a significant benefit in listening to their peers' perspectives, which helps them to identify and strengthen their own beliefs on a variety of topics. In turn, they have found ways to improve themselves through an increase in leadership at school, academics, and a belief in their capacity to instill societal change. Most students feel satisfied with their school climate and experience academic success, which is also noted in the strong numbers of students who were confident in their plans to attend a postsecondary institution of higher education (Beaton et al., 2012; Flaxman, 2003; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; González & Brown, 2006; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Luyckx et al., 2013; Rowley et al., 1998; White & Abu-Rayya, 2012). All adults, whether they were the original founders or current staff involved with the program, also highlighted these instances. Students were more willing to join additional extracurricular activities at school, and several were taking on formal leadership as CWT Board members or Student Council members. Graduation rates at both high schools were high for CWT student participants. The adults also identified that the opportunity to listen to and understand multiple perspectives provided a benefit not only among students, but also for the adults involved (Camino, 2000; Jones & Perkins, 2006; Post, 2005; Roffman et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2013; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013).

As stated in Chapter 1, the school district reported in the fall of 2014 that the racial achievement gap continues to narrow, both in state assessment scores as well as graduation rates at both high schools. However, it is difficult to discern the number of

external factors that would lead to this. An example of this could be that the district initiated and expanded AVID programs in the high schools and middle schools, beginning in 2012. AVID is a national program designed to support struggling students academically and provide mentoring and college preparation during the school day. This may take into account some of the achievement gap, and may in fact be supporting students' academic needs, but still leaves out the opportunity for students to discuss racial and social issues both nationally and in their schools. More recently, the local newspaper identified a number of factors that contributed to an achievement gap between both high schools in the city (Valverde, 2015). In reviewing Advance Placement enrollment, average ACT score, percentage of students on free/reduced lunch, graduation and dropout rates, National Merit semifinalists, AVID enrollment, and state assessment scores, it appeared that one high school was outperforming the other. The superintendent, as well as a high school's newspaper editor, pointed out that the socioeconomic demographics between the schools were substantially different, not program offerings, and that the higher poverty rates contribute to student success (Kelly, 2015). At any rate, the gap exists, and continues to exist in other forms beyond race.

While Can We Talk tracks student participation, to date there has not been a study that specifically compares these data points with CWT participants as compared to non-participants. When the program was in its early years and focused on the black male population, it was able to document student improvement and progress with assessment scores, graduation rates, and suspension rates as well. As the program has shifted to a heterogeneous setting, as well as become a voluntary program held outside of the school day, it is challenging to be able to track student improvement using these same factors to

specifically find a correlation between Can We Talk participation and student achievement and engagement at school. Even without these specific data sets, however, student and staff participants shared the power of structured conversations about race in and of itself. Implementing and organizing some form of data collection is one way that the program could provide concrete evidence that its work positively affects students using these measures.

It was fascinating to observe that the black female students I interviewed for this study were the most likely to report having a significant academic and behavioral turnaround in their personal lives. Moreover, they were the only demographic that was in my sample size to report taking on formal leadership opportunities at school, as Can We Talk Board members and as a member of Student Council. This may indicate that, while the program's focus originally was to target black males students, then widened to encompass all interested students, perhaps it is black female students who may currently be benefitting the most.

In addition, these results bring into question whether the program's current state at both high schools is targeting its original audience of African-American males, who remain disproportionately the most at-risk subgroup. Many of the adults reported that it was a benefit for everyone involved to have a heterogeneous group, yet at the same time they acknowledged that the original focus has whittled away as the group became more inclusive. The group is voluntary and recruitment is essentially through word of mouth and advertising within the building; staff makes attempts to recruit certain students whom they feel would benefit from the group, but little else is done. Because the program is held before school, scheduling and transportation concerns, along with motivation to come to

school early, remain a significant barricade for students to overcome in order to be a Can We Talk participant. In addition, many students from my sample population reported having a positive interaction with school for most of their K-12 experience; this also questions whether students who opt to join the program are as academically at-risk as the initial cohorts.

The shift from holding Can We Talk before school in contrast to its original time slot within the school day could be one change that the schools could make in order to recruit more students, which was a strong desire from both adult and youth participants. In addition, it would enable teachers to be able to attend sessions, which was an element that the adult participants expressed would be a strong benefit for students as well as the building climate in general.

The adults expressed a strong desire not only to continue Can We Talk, but also felt that any high school would benefit from having a similar program. As the program has since expanded to several Lawrence middle schools as well as with high schools in Topeka and Independence, it appears that perhaps neighboring districts are listening to this heed. The racial achievement gap presents itself nationwide, and as one founder reflected,

Every high school should have it going on, you know, because we just breathe stereotypes. We breathe it in our school and our systems in not having those kinds of conversations.

### *Equality vs. Equity*

While continuing the program at both high schools, and even supporting other buildings and districts to begin their own version of Can We Talk, is widely supported, it still calls into question if the program ought to have a targeted set of students, or be open to any interested student. The program itself has demonstrated to have positive experiences

for both students and adults alike. A strong mix of both founders and current program sponsors alike found that equal access to this program was not only necessary for students, but beneficial to have a broad set of perspectives in which to engage in conversations.

However, very few black male students are currently involved with the program at either school. In reflecting back on the program's original mission and target population, are black male teenagers receiving the same benefits from this heterogeneous group as when it was a program designed specifically for them? Whose voices are lost in the conversation when a once-homogenous group becomes a mix of races and sexes? More specifically, if this population is not participating in the program, what are they choosing to do instead?

While this study was designed to explore student experiences with Can We Talk, these questions must also be considered after noting the changes the program has undergone since it began. It also highlights a continuing conflict in the need to balance equality with equity. As the high schools experienced this past year, there are legal ramifications when programs are designed to specifically provide supports for some students and denied to others on the basis of race or gender. On the other hand, if our nation and our nation's schools continue to observe and predict student achievement by race, how are schools to combat this longstanding issue by not acknowledging race directly?

### *Implications for Future Research*

This study contributes to a minimal body of literature regarding programs involving youth and adults to discuss race-based topics. Thus, there are many ways in which further

research into Can We Talk, or similar programs across the country, could contribute to the literature.

First, in analyzing results by race, it became apparent that students of color were more likely to have experienced the program in middle school, whereas white students did not report learning of Can We Talk until they began in high school. The recruitment strategies and program dynamics at the middle schools could be studied and compared with the high schools. In addition, the program could also be examined in neighboring districts to determine if the program has any commonalities or consistencies with the programs held in Lawrence.

Second, analyzing student responses by race and sex also found that black females were most likely to report an improvement in grades and behavior. It is also important to note that the two Can We Talk board members and Student Council representative were all black females. Future studies could explore the impact that Can We Talk has had on black females in contrast to other student subgroups.

Third, the research could be replicated to determine the validity and reliability of my findings. In addition, the sample size could be adjusted to address the limitations that I experienced in recruiting male students as well as a more balanced number of student participants at each building.

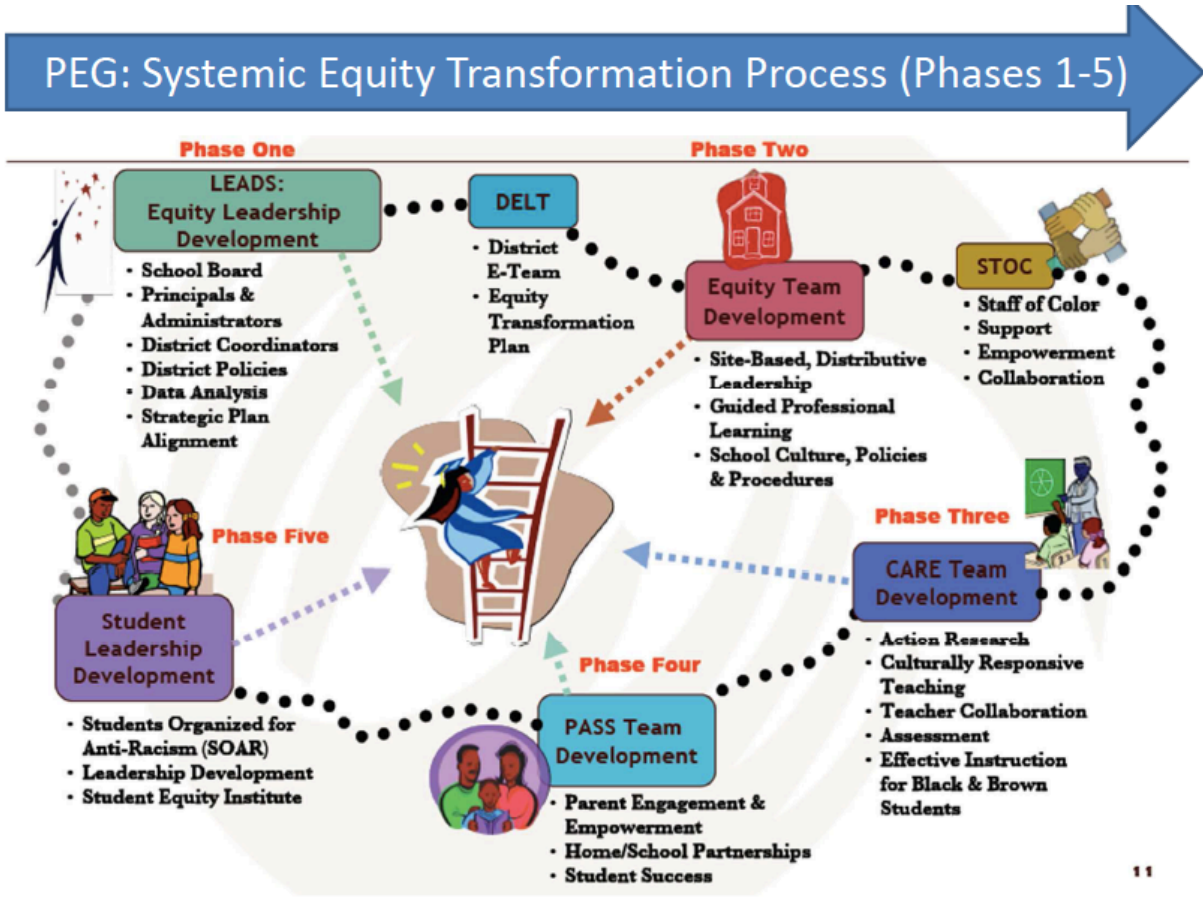
Fourth, my study only recruited students who had an experience with Can We Talk. Subsequent studies could investigate how students of similar backgrounds who do not attend a program such as Can We Talk respond to similar questions regarding school satisfaction and success as those posed in my study. Similarly, another study could explore reasons why students choose not to participate in Can We Talk.

Many programs and organizations change and evolve over time, as the result of specific events, or a combination of both. Can We Talk is no different. The broader ideals in which this program began – mentoring struggling students and discussing race in a comfortable and risk-free environment – are fully intact. Students report a multitude of benefits that they experience from participating in the program, such as understanding different viewpoints; an increased awareness of events and issues locally, nationally, and globally; an increased desire to improve academics, attitude, and behavior; and a call to action to support themselves and each other when faced with issues that they have discussed in this program (J. A. Banks et al., 2001; J. A. a. B. Banks, Cherry A., 2010; Beaton et al., 2012; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Flaxman, 2003; Glaser, Hildreth, McGuire, & Bannon, 2011; Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; González & Brown, 2006; Luyckx et al., 2013; Meeus et al., 1999; Milem, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Rowley et al., 1998; Tatum, 1992; Uwah et al., 2008; White & Abu-Rayya, 2012). In echoing a prominent response from both adults and students, this program would benefit a substantially larger amount of students, and possibly increase the number of black male participants, if it were held during the school day. This would eliminate a host of barriers that prevent students from attending, such as transportation and scheduling conflicts. For new and incoming students, there would be a heightened knowledge that this program even exists. As one student suggested, it could be held as a class for an elective credit as well. This would allow conversations to go deeper as they would be more frequent and include the same students each time.

The achievement gap fluctuates as it widens and narrows over time, yet it still exists. Programs such as Can We Talk appear to be working to specifically address this in

their own specific ways. While the gap has not been eliminated, participating students find success in high school and have specific plans for postsecondary education and careers. In reflecting on events that have captured national headlines in recent years, from police brutality, to college fraternities' racial and sexual harassments caught on camera, and a University president and chancellor resigning based on student protests over their inaction to address blatantly racist and sexist harassment on campus, it is overwhelmingly clear that our population is in desperate need of a safe platform in which to engage in productive, meaningful conversations that yield results in some capacity. The more that young adults are able to participate in these conversations now, to the point that it becomes routine for them, they will be better prepared to not only directly address these events in a productive manner, but may have an increased capacity to prevent them from occurring in the first place.

# Appendix A: Pacific Educational Group's Systemic District Transformation Framework



## **Appendix B: Student Interview Questions**

### **Personal Demographic Information**

- 1) What grade are you in?
- 2) How long have you attended Lawrence High/Lawrence Free State?
- 3) Are you on any extracurricular activities or programs? (Sports, clubs, fine arts, Student Council, etc.) How long have you been participating?
- 4) How do you racially identify yourself?

### **Experience with *Can We Talk***

- 5) How long have you been coming to *Can We Talk* What made you want to start coming?
- 6) How often do you attend?
- 7) What makes you want to keep coming?
- 8) Prior to attending your first session, what assumptions do you remember having about the program?
- 9) Are the assumptions you had about *Can We Talk* accurate? Why or why not?
- 10) Do your friends come? Why or why not? What do they think about the program?
- 11) Which *Can We Talk* session topic resonated with you most?
- 12) What were some assumptions you had about your peers (not friends)? Has that changed? How?
- 13) Talk about your classes. How do you feel about your teachers? Has this changed since you first started attending here? Why do you think so?
- 14) Talk about your day at school. How do you feel about school in general? Has this changed since you first started attending here? How? Why do you think so?

15) Do you feel that *Can We Talk* has influenced you in any other ways? How so?

**Future Implications Regarding Self and the Program**

16) What do you think you would be doing if *Can We Talk* did not exist?

17) Have you thought about what you would like to do after high school?

18) Have you thought about joining another version of *Can We Talk* once you graduate?

19) Is there anything about *Can We Talk* that you would like to see change?

## Appendix C: Staff Member Interview Questions

### Personal Demographic Information

- 1) Describe your position and any positions you held prior to this one.
- 2) How long have you been working at Lawrence High/Lawrence Free State?
- 3) Do you sponsor any additional programs? (Sports, clubs, fine arts, Student Council, etc.) How long have you been sponsoring these programs?
- 4) How do you racially identify yourself?

### Experience with *Can We Talk*

- 5) How long have you been working with *Can We Talk* What made you want to start participating?
- 6) How often do you attend? Describe your role.
- 7) How are you involved with planning each session? Why do you select these formats? Is there a preferred format? What are the pros and cons of each format?
- 8) How do you select topics for sessions? Are there other topics you would like to address?
- 9) What have you learned about the students who participate?
- 10) Have you noticed any changes in any students after they begin participating? How?
- 11) Describe some assumptions you may have had about students. Were they accurate?
- 12) How have you changed as an educator (curriculum, pedagogy, classroom management)? How much of this can you attribute to participating in *Can We Talk*
- 13) How do you feel the school as a whole has changed regarding disciplinary policies or student support for special education/academic interventions? How much of this can you attribute to *Can We Talk*

- 14) Describe the level of support from your colleagues and the administration with this program. What pros and cons are there to this?

**Future Implications Regarding Self and the Program**

- 15) What components of the program would you like to see remain the same? (Non-negotiables)
- 16) What would you like to see change regarding the program, including any of its components that we talked about? (Structure, function, support, etc.)
- 17) What future plans do you have for the program?
- 18) What future plans do you have for yourself as a professional educator?

## **Appendix D: Founder Interview Questions**

### **Personal Demographic Information**

- 1) Describe your current position (if applicable).
- 2) How do you racially identify yourself?

### **Experience with *Can We Talk***

- 3) How did you get the idea for *Can We Talk*
- 4) Who did you first talk with about the idea?
- 5) How did you approach schools about the idea?
- 6) How did building staff and administrators react to your proposal?
- 7) How did you recruit students? What was your rationale for recruiting them?
- 8) What was your goal for the program?
- 9) How did you structure it? How did you decide the topics?
- 10) How did the program change? What caused it to change?

### **Future Implications Regarding Self and the Program**

- 11) How are you affiliated with the program now?
- 12) How do you think *Can We Talk's* goals have changed since it began? How do you feel about this?
- 13) What advice would you give to educators or community members wanting to establish a program such as this?

## Appendix E: Invitations to Initial Student Cohort

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

You are in Group \_\_\_\_\_ for the Courageous Conversations With Black Males. You will meet during Seminar on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ in the **Black Box Theater**. It is located in the Music Wing of the building. There is a short hallway between the **Choir Room** and the **Orchestra Room**. Turn right at that hallway and follow it to the end. There will be a door on the right. A sign will be posted to identify the **Black Box Theater**.

Please follow these instructions on that date:

- 1) Report to Seminar for the announcements.
- 2) Use the pass attached to this note to be excused from Seminar at 9:45. (If you lose your pass, your teacher has been sent an email to let them know that you will be participating in this activity.)
- 3) Report directly to the **Black Box Theater**. You will be released to return to Seminar at 10:55.
- 4) Report directly back to Seminar to wait for the bell that releases you to the next class period.

If you have any questions or any academic conflicts, please let me know as soon as you can. Thanks!

Mrs. New

### **COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS**

**You are invited to participate in the next session of Courageous Conversations With Black Males at Lawrence High School.**

**Your participation is voluntary, but Dr. Willie Amison, Mr. Craig Butler, Mr. Vince Downing, Mr. John Nelson, former KU and pro-basketball great Mr. Bud Stallworth, and Capt. Brunt will be there to continue the "conversation".**

**You may use this note as your pass.**

**Black Box Theater**

**9:55 to 10:55**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

***(If you were unable to attend the first session, please show up and be prepared to share a little bit about yourself.)***

Hey Guys,

Looking forward to seeing all of  
you during Seminar on 12-11-08.

We will start Part Three of our  
Conversation.

Be There!

Thanks,

***Mr. Butler***

## Appendix F: Letter and Forum Notice to Parents and Guardians

Lawrence High School  
1901 Louisiana Street  
Lawrence, Kansas 66046-2999  
Telephone: (785) 832-5050  
Fax: (785) 832-5054



October 13, 2008

Dear Parents/Guardians of \_\_\_\_\_:

Within the upcoming weeks, we will be hosting a "Conversation" with Black male students at Lawrence High School. This will be a forum for them to not only discuss their goals for the future, but also to talk about current issues related to their educational experience.

We are excited that Dr. Willie Amison, a former LHS administrator and currently an educator at The University of Kansas, will be facilitating each session. Students will meet in small groups as he and his colleagues lead the students in what we believe will be a rich experience in dialogue for the students. This will take place during one seminar period for your student, and we believe the benefit of participation will be invaluable, both academically and personally.

If for any reason you prefer that your student not attend, please feel free to contact me at 330-2728 by October 29, 2008. Please contact me as well if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Beryl A. New, Ed.D.  
Assistant Principal  
Lawrence High School

**TO OUR PARENTS:**  
You are invited to come  
and hear about what we  
have been doing in our  
*Courageous Conversations*  
*With Black Males*  
meetings this year.

USD497 Lawrence High  
School



LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS /  
NAACP Advisory Board Meeting

Date: 4/15/09 Time: 6:30 PM

Where: Langston Hughes Elementary School  
1101 George Williams Way

Your son will be sharing his experiences in the *Courageous Conversations* meetings this school year. We would appreciate your attendance and support.

If you have any questions, please phone:

Dr. Beryl New at LHS — 785-330-2728

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU!

1901 Louisiana St.  
Lawrence, KS 66046

USD497 Lawrence High School

**LAWRENCE HIGH  
SCHOOL COURAGEOUS  
CONVERSATIONS  
MODERATORS:**

- Dr. Willie Amison
- Mr. Craig Butler
- Mr. Vince Downing
- Mr. John Nelson
- Staff Sponsor—Dr. Beryl New

**Appendix G: Memo to Building Staff**

Conversations with LHS Black Males

Lead Facilitator: Dr. Willie Amison

Co-Facilitators: Mr. Craig Butler  
Security Officer Vince Downing  
Security Officer John Nelson

Purpose: To provide a forum for Black male students at Lawrence High School to converse with adult Black males about their educational experiences, their personal and professional plans for the future, and their present academic issues.

Meetings: Six seminar periods between October 30 and November 20, 2008.

Format: Students will be grouped according to grade level on the following meeting schedule:

SENIORS	JUNIORS	
SOPHOMORES		
Group 1 - 10/30 11/13	Group 1 - 11/6	Group 1 -
Group 2 - 11/5 11/20	Group 2 - 11/12	Group 2 -

Time: Each session will last approximately 65 minutes. Sessions should begin no later than 9:50 and end no later than 10:55. Students will be released to return to Seminar ten minutes before the end of the period.

Place: Meetings will take place in the Black Box Theater.

Outcome: It is hoped that Black male students, who represent the most underserved population of the traditional high school as evidenced through comparatively low test scores and a perceived lack of motivation toward success due to a low level of expectation from adults in the school system, will realize that they do have a “voice” among educational professionals. They will be able to share their challenges, their frustrations, and their successes within a group of their peers under the leadership of highly capable Black male adults. It is also hoped that they will emerge from this experience inspired to achieve their personal goals and will gain insight into how to successfully negotiate their way through high school.

Outgrowth: An additional group may emerge based on student interest and need. This group may continue the “conversation” with a book talk on Courageous Conversations about Race, by Glenn E. Singleton, et.al. Students may choose to participate in a Life Coach program sponsored by area adults. The students may choose to define and design the type of follow-up program in which they would like to participate.

## Appendix H: Founders' Discussion Topics

### *Discussion Topics*

- Do you plan to graduate from high school?
- Do you plan to go to college?
- Do you plan to have a job? A career?
- Savings and Checking Accounts
- Paying taxes
- Athletics
- Dating

- What have you done to encourage your teacher to teach you?
- Do you care about your peers' academic success? Do they care about yours?
- What has to be done in order to get rid of the notion that learning is not a cool thing for students of color?
- What role do you have for positive educational experience in your school?
- What teachers' personalities or behaviors help to engage you and help you learn?

- What personalities or behaviors turn you off to learning?
- What would make the school environment more conducive to learning, based on your assessment?
- What roadblocks do you see to educating our youth of color in your school?
- What do you want to do as a career?
- How do you plan to get there?

## Appendix I: Student Assessment Scores

### LHS State Math Assessment Data, 2003-2008

- African American Students' Scores on the Kansas State Math Assessment:

●	2003 -	35% Proficient
●	2004 -	25% Proficient
●	2005 -	28% Proficient
●	2006 -	49% Proficient
●	2007 -	54% Proficient
●	2008 -	45% Proficient

### 2009 KANSAS STATE READING AND MATH SCORES

For African American Students at LHS:

Reading - **75% Proficient**

(A significant increase of 31 percentage points!)

Math - **57% Proficient**

(A significant increase of 11 percentage points!)

### FSHS Kansas Reading Assessment

% Proficient	
<u>African-American</u>	<u>White</u>
2006: 50.0	2006: 89.4
2007: 54.2	2007: 91.3
2008: 62.1*	2008: 87.5
2009: 85.7	2009: 95.6
2010: 89.5*	2010: 96.4

\*not reflected in AYP reports due to size of subgroup population

### FSHS Kansas Math Assessment

% Proficient	
<u>African-American</u>	<u>White</u>
2006: 41.1	2006: 74.9
2007: 48.6	2007: 82.0
2008: 50.0*	2008: 84.1
2009: 63.6	2009: 85.3
2010: 82.4*	2010: 89.2

\*not reflected in AYP reports due to size of subgroup population

## Appendix J: Can We Talk Open Forum Meeting Notes

### Can We Talk Open Forum Meeting Notes

#### Things that are problematic at Free State regarding race:

- Stereo-types exist about certain cultures: some black students are loud, not articulate and whites are rich stuck- up
- The building lacks awareness of diversity (not discussed in the classroom)
- Self-segregated student groups
- Racial slurs are still being used (sometimes in jokingly manner)
- Dress code is not equally enforced among races
- Teachers do not address students when they see someone who makes inappropriate comments
- The term “acting white” insulting to kids who are successful in school
- Bullying is taking place
- The issue of race is not just a black problem but other races need exposure
- Students of color are not wanting to be in advanced courses
- Encourage students to think for themselves
- Some people don’t understand how racial comments hurt
- People are reluctant to talk about race
- People who don’t experience racism are blind to it
- Some whites feel they have “pass” to say certain words or slang due to their peer group being diverse
- People use social media to bully others
- Students are afraid to stand up sometimes and correct their peers
- At sporting games our fans use inappropriate language to the other team

#### What strategies need to be done to raise awareness about race?

- Develop a diversity fair (invite students and community)
- Create a working definition of diversity as a school (like a goal or vision statement)
- Create detailed lessons or conversation starters for staff to lead with students
- Continue to have diverse field trips for all students to educate students (not just for Can We Talk Kids) Brown vs. Board etc.
- Implement a class about diversity awareness (I don’t think people are aware of our African American History class.) Why don’t we have a Korean History Course?
- Implement a leadership course
- Have an all school assembly—people who are racist don’t come to volunteered events (there are pro’s and con’s to it being forced)
- Teachers could use current events to bring about race
- Have daily facts about all races included in the video production video that plays in the cafeteria

#### What can the administration do to help bring awareness about diversity?

- Support staff and provide the tools for diversity training
- Provide conversation starters for classroom discussions
- Have a visual display of the diverse backgrounds that exist in free state (maybe flags displayed in the commons) It would spark conversation
- Introduce 4 agreements to students and teachers to have tough conversations
- There should be zero tolerance for race related actions
- Revisit curriculum and look at opportunities to implement diversity (books, standards)

**Interesting Quotes:**

*"We have "white" black kids, then we have "black" black kids."*

*"I can say the N word because I have a "pass" I have lived in the south."*

*"Just because you say, "I was joking" or calling your actions a prank doesn't erase the impact of your words."*

**Appendix K: Community Forum Notes**

**Community Forum Notes: Lawrence High School and Free State High School**

**❑ What stereotypes or concerns is there about your school that concerns you?**

Lawrence High School

1. Single Parents homes
2. Crime/Poor/Ghetto
3. More diverse population
4. Better Athletic programs
5. Can We Talk Program is not taken as serious/no support

Lawrence Free State High School

1. Upper Class/affluent
2. Elite/superior
3. Not as diverse
4. Uncomfortable to talk about race (black and white)
5. Druggy school (if you want to get drugs easily)

**❑ How can the two Lawrence Schools collaborate with one another to make a positive impact on the community?**

1. Student Councils join together and do an event together (support Breast Cancer at a football game, or get behind an initiative that both schools can support)
2. The questions was asked, how could the staff from both schools collaborate to

implement diverse curriculum in the lessons?

3. Have more community forums for parents and community members to come discuss things that are going on in the schools
4. Have open house night for middle school students at both schools where presentations are made about the history of the school and the expectations
5. Stop bad mouthing one another (including staff members who speak negatively about the other school)
6. Make a t-shirt (Town of two schools with one mission: Excellence)

**□ What proactive strategies can each school implement to raise the awareness about diversity?**

1. Pass out a bracelet at basketball or sporting events: "Eliminate the "N" word"
2. Have district event such as MLK Day
3. Each principal could model what healthy competition looks like between both schools
4. High school organizations could go talk with middle school students about race (the comment dealt with having courageous conversations at a younger age therefore when students get to high school it will not be as uncomfortable)
5. Incorporate diversity into everything, not just during Diversity Week
6. Celebrate every culture on it's original date instead of lumping all cultures into one Diversity week

## REFERENCES

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, Mass.: Reading, Mass. : Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on psychological science, 1*(2), 164-180.
- Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W. D., Irvine, J. J., Nieto, S., . . . Stephan, W. G. (2001). Diversity within Unity: Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(3), 196-203. doi: 10.2307/20440100
- Banks, J. A. a. B., Cherry A. (2010). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (7th ed. Vol. 1). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Beach, R., Thein, A. H., & Parks, D. (2008). *High school students' competing social worlds: Negotiating identities and allegiances in response to multicultural literature*: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Beaton, A. M., Monger, T., Leblanc, D., Bourque, J., Levi, Y., Joseph, D., . . . Chouinard, O. (2012). Crossing the divide: The common in-group identity model and intergroup affinity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 36*(3), 365-376.
- Bogdan, R. Biklen. SK (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods, 2*.
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(1), 65-84.
- Camino, L. A. (2000). Youth-adult partnerships: Entering new territory in community work and research. *Applied Developmental Science, 4*(S1), 11-20.
- Chang, M. J. (2001). The Positive Educational Effects of Racial Diversity on Campus. Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Teachers in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey. (2013). Retrieved December 1, 2015, from U.S. Department of Education <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=55>
- DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American journal of community psychology, 30*(2), 157-197.
- Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills. *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (NJ1)*.
- Esposito, J., & Swain, A. N. (2009). Pathways to Social Justice: Urban Teachers' Uses of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Conduit for Teaching for Social Justice. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education, 6*(1), 38-48.
- Fennimore, B. S. (2005). "Brown" and the Failure of Civic Responsibility. *Teachers College Record, 107*(9), 1905-1932.
- Flanagan, C. A., & Faison, N. (2001). *Youth civic development: Implications of research for social policy and programs*: Society for Research in Child Development Ann Arbor, MI.
- Flaxman, E. (2003). Closing the Achievement Gap: Two Views from Current Research. ERIC Digest (pp. 4): ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY

10027. Tel: 800-601-4868 (Toll Free); Tel: 212-678-3433; Fax: 212-678-4012; e-mail: eric-cue@columbia.edu. For full text: <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/pubget.asp?show=1>.
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2005). Understanding and Addressing Contemporary Racism: From Aversive Racism to the Common Ingroup Identity Model. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(3), 615-639. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00424.x
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2012). Common ingroup identity model. *The encyclopedia of peace psychology*.
- Galda, L., & Beach, R. (2001). Response to Literature as a Cultural Activity. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36*(1), 64-73. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.36.1.4
- Garrett, K. (2009). CAN WE TALK? (Vol. 75, pp. 4-9): Prakken Publications.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2008). *Analysing qualitative data*: Sage.
- Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2007). Youth activism in the urban community: Learning critical civic praxis within community organizations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(6), 693-710.
- Glaser, M. A., Hildreth, W. B., McGuire, B. J., & Bannon, C. (2011). Frederickson's Social Equity Agenda Applied. *Public Integrity, 14*(1), 19-38.
- Glasford, D. E., & Dovidio, J. F. (2011). E pluribus unum: Dual identity and minority group members' motivation to engage in contact, as well as social change. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47*(5), 1021-1024. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.03.021>
- González, R., & Brown, R. (2006). Dual identities in intergroup contact: Group status and size moderate the generalization of positive attitude change. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 42*(6), 753-767. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2005.11.008>
- Howard, T. C. (2001). Telling their side of the story: African-American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. *The Urban Review, 33*(2), 131-149.
- Huggins, E. M., & Celio, M. B. Closing the Achievement Gap in Washington State: Holding Schools Accountable for Equity (pp. 95): Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington, Box 353060, Rm. 109K, Parrington Hall, Seattle, WA 98195-3060. Tel: 206-685.2214; Fax: 206-221-7402; e-mail: crpe@u.washington.edu; Web site: <http://www.crpe.org>.
- Hughes, E. (2014, October 8, 2014). Lawrence high school communities gather to talk about race, stereotypes. *Lawrence Journal-World*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2014/oct/07/communities-lawrences-two-high-schools-gather-talk/>
- Hughes, E. (2015, February 25, 2015). Free State High program will include female students after ACLU raises concerns. *Lawrence Journal-World*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2015/feb/25/free-state-high-program-will-include-female-studen/>
- Hurd, N. M., Sánchez, B., Zimmerman, M. A., & Caldwell, C. H. (2012). Natural mentors, racial identity, and educational attainment among African American adolescents: Exploring pathways to success. *Child development, 83*(4), 1196-1212.
- Hurd, N. M., & Sellers, R. M. (2013). Black adolescents' relationships with natural mentors: Associations with academic engagement via social and emotional development. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 19*(1), 76.

- Hurtado, S. (2001). Linking Diversity and Educational Purpose: How Diversity Affects the Classroom Environment and Student Development.
- Johnson, J. (2013). *Disruptive Demographics: Implications for Workforce Planning and Development*. Paper presented at the The Scholarship of Diversity, University of Kansas
- Jones, K. R., & Perkins, D. F. (2006). Youth and adult perceptions of their relationships within community-based youth programs. *Youth & Society*, 38(1), 90-109.
- Kelly, Z. (2015). Achievement gap figures don't tell the whole story, Editorial. *Lawrence High School Budget*. Retrieved from <http://www.lhsbudget.com/opinion/2015/11/08/editorial-achievement-gap-figures-dont-tell-the-whole-story/>
- Koebler, J. (2011, July 15, 2011). Close Achievement Gap by Discussing Race, Expert Says. *U.S. News and World Report*.
- Kohfeldt, D., Chhun, L., Grace, S., & Langhout, R. D. (2011). Youth empowerment in context: Exploring tensions in school-based yPAR. *American journal of community psychology*, 47(1-2), 28-45.
- KU Students Document Courageous Conversations Journey. (2012). 2014, from <http://www.usd497.org/CanWeTalk>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). The interview situation *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (pp. 124-175). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Landsman, J. (2011). *White teachers/Diverse classrooms* (2nd ed.). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Larson, R. W. (2011). Positive development in a disorderly world. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(2), 317-334.
- Luyckx, K., Klimstra, T. A., Duriez, B., Petegem, S. V., Beyers, W., Teppers, E., & Goossens, L. (2013). Personal identity processes and self-esteem: Temporal sequences in high school and college students. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 47(2), 159-170. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2012.10.005>
- Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3), 279-299.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach: An Interactive Approach*: Sage.
- Meeus, W., Iedema, J., Helsen, M., & Vollebergh, W. (1999). Patterns of adolescent identity development: Review of literature and longitudinal analysis. *Developmental review*, 19(4), 419-461.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998a). Being a careful observer *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (pp. 94-111). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998c). Dealing with validity, reliability, and ethics *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (pp. 210-235). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Milem, J. F. (2003). The educational benefits of diversity: Evidence from multiple sectors. *Compelling interest: Examining the evidence on racial dynamics in higher education*, 126-169.
- Nieto, S. (2000). Placing equity front and center some thoughts on transforming teacher education for a new century. *Journal of teacher education*, 51(3), 180-187.

- Nightengale, B. a. S. S. (2014, September 18, 2014). Suspects identified in LHS football field vandalism that included racial epithet. *Lawrence Journal-World*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2014/sep/18/police-school-officials-investigating-football-fie/>
- Noguera, P. A. (2008). Creating Schools Where Race Does Not Predict Achievement: The Role and Significance of Race in the Racial Achievement Gap. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 77(2), 90-103.
- Okeke-Adeyanju, N., Taylor, L. C., Craig, A. B., Smith, R. E., Thomas, A., Boyle, A. E., & DeRosier, M. E. (2014). Celebrating the Strengths of Black Youth: Increasing Self-Esteem and Implications for Prevention. *The journal of primary prevention*, 35(5), 357-369.
- Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity development in minority group adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9(1-2), 34-49.
- Post, M. (2005). Youth Engaged for Action. *The Prevention Researcher*, 12(5), 7-9.
- Rhodes, J. E., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. L. (2000). Agents of change: Pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents' academic adjustment. *Child development*, 1662-1671.
- Roddy, E. (2010, March 29, 2010). Master mentor: Former principal organizes 'Can We Talk?'. *Lawrence Journal-World*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2010/mar/29/master-mentor-former-principal-organizes-can-we-ta/>
- Roffman, J. G., Pagano, M. E., & Hirsch, B. J. (2001). Youth functioning and experiences in inner-city after-school programs among age, gender, and race groups. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 10(1), 85-100.
- Rowley, S. J., Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Smith, M. A. (1998). The relationship between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college and high school students. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74(3), 715.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*: Sage Publications.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Singleton, G., and Curtis Linton. (2006). *Courageous Conversations About Race* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Ltd.
- Singleton, G. E., & Comer, J. P. (2012). *More Courageous Conversations About Race*: SAGE Publications.
- Smith, E. P., Osgood, D. W., Caldwell, L., Hynes, K., & Perkins, D. F. (2013). Measuring collective efficacy among children in community-based afterschool programs: Exploring pathways toward prevention and positive youth development. *American journal of community psychology*, 52(1-2), 27-40.
- Staff, N. (Producer). (2014, August 14, 2014). Can We Talk? That's exactly what some local students are doing thanks to the mentoring program. Retrieved from <http://freestatestudios.com/news/local-news/10140-can-we-talk-that-s-exactly-what-some-local-students-are-doing-thanks-to-the-mentoring-program>
- Strauss, V. (2014, August 21, 2014). For first time, minority students expected to be majority in U.S. public schools by this fall. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/08/21/for-first-time-minority-students-expected-to-be-majority-in-u-s-public-schools-this-fall/>
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2012). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking About Race, Learning About Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1.
- Thein, A. H., Beach, R., & Parks, D. (2007). Perspective-taking as transformative practice in teaching multicultural literature to White students. *English Journal*, 54-60.
- Timpe, Z. C., & Lunkenheimer, E. (2015). The long-term economic benefits of natural mentoring relationships for youth. *American journal of community psychology*, 56(1-2), 12-24.
- Uwah, C. J., McMahon, H. G., & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School Belonging, Educational Aspirations, and Academic Self-Efficacy Among African American Male High School Students: Implications for School Counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(5), 296-305.
- Valverde, R. (2015, November 8, 2015). High school achievement gap. *Lawrence Journal-World*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2015/nov/08/Numbers-show-achievement-gap-between-Lawrence-high/>
- Van Ryzin, M. J. (2014). Exploring relationships among boys and men: A retrospective, qualitative study of a multi-year community-based group mentoring program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 44, 349-355.
- Walcott, H. F. (1994). Confessions of a "trained" observer *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation* (pp. 152-170). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- White, F. A., & Abu-Rayya, H. M. (2012). A dual identity-electronic contact (DIEC) experiment promoting short- and long-term intergroup harmony. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(3), 597-608. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.01.007>
- Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American journal of community psychology*, 51(3-4), 385-397.