



**THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT
AND PUBLIC POLICY
AT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE**

**COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION RESEARCH
REPORT: A PUBLIC VOICE 2002**

November 18, 2002

Submitted by

Ms. Michelle T. Scott, Director
Office of Equity and Diversity
Montgomery College

Mr. Nathan Starr, Interim Director
Center for Community Leadership Development & Public Policy at
Montgomery College

Dr. Robert Walker, Interim Associate Director
Center for Community Leadership Development & Public Policy at
Montgomery College

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the research was to describe selected educational implications on communities of a self-selected Montgomery County public middle school and a Prince Georges County private school.

The students were participants in the National Issues Forums, the Public Broadcast System and Charles F. Kettering Foundation May 1, 2002 taping of *A Public Voice*. Several questions were generated from this broad purpose, and the research study was designed to answer the following questions framed in the context of what are the implications for participants concerning:

1. Age and interest for sustained engagement with deliberative dialogue?
2. Social roles of responsibility for school time and deliberative dialogue pedagogy?
3. Social roles of responsibility for engaging contentious and sensitive issues?
4. Perceived and measured differences among youth participants and their capacity to participate effectively?
5. Implications for administrative and curriculum programming?

Significance of the Purpose

The Center for Community Leadership Development and Public Policy at Montgomery College, in collaboration with the National Issues Forums Institute and the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, were interested in investigating ways to help young people experience and reflect on deliberation for addressing issues in society that are considered contentious. The kind of issues being considered were characterized as Type III problems.¹ These are problems that are not easily addressed in a "by-the-numbers" hierarchical leadership practice, but are in the fabric of the young people, their parents, and teachers' everyday life.

Analysis of the usual "best" practices in their institutions did not reveal an experiential learning activity for a deliberative approach for contentious or sensitive issues. Furthermore, there was caution and skepticism about whether young people could engage the upper levels

of the cognitive domain of learning² considered necessary, by the educators and parents. School administrators were equally concerned with discipline issues.

At the same time, most young people echoed the complaint most adults express about the different spheres of social engagement of their lives, that their voice is not heard. As Harris Sokoloff, mentions in an upcoming article:

They were able to voice an opinion, but that is not the same as having a voice. Having a voice involves both speaking and listening, and then speaking again having considered what was heard and taking it into account in subsequent speaking. In short, having a voice is a form of being engaged with others about some issue.³

In these instances and regardless of age—debate, internet chat rooms, public hearings, and other formats were available but not the same as being heard.

Finally, to paraphrase Sokoloff in the same piece, can we conjure up an image to ourselves about three questions regarding how we want to interact with community members and different organizations:

*What kind of relationship do we really want to have with them or that organization?
Which practices will really enable us to have that relationship - that form of engagement?
Which kind supports excellence in that organization, and creates the kind of world we would like to live in?*

Method and Procedure

Sampling Procedure and Population

A public middle school and private school, from the national capital region, located in two different counties, were used in this research study. A school administrator initiated the interest for the public school and a consultant was the initiator for the private school.

¹ Heifetz, Ronald. Leadership Without Easy Answers, p. 76.

² Bloom, Benjamin, et al. Taxonomy for Cognitive Domain of Learning.

³ Sokoloff, Harris. "Building Common Ground: Rethinking Roles of Engagement." To be published.

The private school became associated with the Center for Community Leadership Development and Public Policy at Montgomery College through a private contract of one of the Center's faculty. The Center's *Leadership and Democracy Education project* were eager and suited to engage this study.

The public middle school's involvement grew out of the interest of the assistant principal's participation in a National Issues Forum *Globalization: Fear or Promise*. The assistant principal asked if the Center would help develop a forum in the school for a select group of students, parents, teachers, and administrators from the Montgomery County school district office.

Practice of Engagement

The two schools were involved in similar engagement practices, and followed the prescribed principles:

- Follow the program administrators of each institution guidelines for the procedures while mentioning the purposes the NIF and deliberative dialogues could serve within organizations or as a part of a practice for building a strong public life in a community.
- Insure sufficient time, equipment, and space for conducting the forums.
- Determine a way to fund the necessary supplies.

Briefing meetings were held in each school with administrators, faculty, and parents. In the private school, the staff and administrators were also members of the governing body of the school. Both institutions were told that the students and faculty might have an opportunity to participate as an audience member of the taping of "A Public Voice", and the institutions decided to proceed with forums for their students. All briefings included the NIF Promo Tape, *NIF Executive Summary*, the forum starter videotape, copies of the issue book, and the *Moderator's Guide*.

The public school requested members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and its President to attend. A teacher who used NIF for her students in collaboration with the Center during the previous summer months was also present to lend her insights. A second meeting was held with the PTSA Executive Board and members. In the case of the public school, this allowed the school administration to request fiscal support from the PTSA

for issues books on the selected topic, as well as, ask for parent participation in a “demonstration” forum. The issue book selected was, *Public Schools: Are They Making the Grade?* The forum was held immediately after school and involved teachers, parents, and select students who represented a cross section of academic capability and challenges. The school established three forum groups, assigned with three experienced moderators from the Center, and three teachers from the school were the recorders.

A favorable experience with this forum led the school administrators to decide to host a second forum and increase the participant numbers. The forum topic for the second forum was *Racial and Ethnic Tension: What Should We Do?* The forum group involved seventh and eighth grade participants, and one-sixth-grade participant. The school faculty prepared a forum vocabulary list for, and reviewed it, with the student participants. The issues books were distributed to the students ten days before the forum. There were four groups in this NIF practice, led by four experienced moderators from the Center and again the teachers acted in the capacity of recorders. This forum was held during school time.

The second meeting for the private school entailed a request that the consultant and the Center staff engage the entire faculty of the school in a “demonstration” forum on the issue *Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What Should We Do?* The forum was followed by a discussion on the advisability of hosting a forum with their students, the implications for school administration and students, and discipline. The school team decided to moderate forums with the students. The school team selected the issue book *Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What Should We Do?*

NIF Research Interview Questions

The Center arranged for a teacher from another school with prior forum experience to be a roving observer, participant interviewer, and collect additional data on the forum process. The teacher, in consultation with the Center staff, developed an interview format to guide a post-forum group session that included ten students representing a cross section of participants by grade, gender, and ethnicity. The interview took place immediately after the forum and lasted for about an hour and twenty minutes. Also, interviews were conducted with school personnel prior to and after the forum.

The private school held their forum during school time with student participants from the seventh through twelfth grades. The students were divided into three groups. The faculty of the Center worked as co-moderators or the moderator, and the school faculty served as a co-moderator or as a recorder, depending on the comfort level of the faculty member.

The Center extended an opportunity for the students from both schools to participate in the PBS-Kettering Foundation taping of *A Public Voice*. The participants included eight high school students from the private school, who used the opportunity to take the Metro-rail rapid transit to travel into Washington, D.C. to the National Press Club. The Center provided a chartered bus to transport thirty public school students to the taping. One student arrived too late for the charter bus departure from the school, and joined the student group at the National Press Club by riding with a parent into Washington, DC.

Conversations during a continental breakfast among student participants from the Maryland public and private school, and student participants from a Virginia public school created an enriching exchange for all the students. A pre-taping briefing conducted by Dr. John Cavanaugh of the Kettering Foundation was informative and challenged the participants with what to observe in the responses from the panel of public scholars. A post taping briefing occurred during a luncheon setting. Panel participant Maryland Congressman Elijah Cummings and Mr. E. J. Dionne, *Washington Post* columnist and Brookings Institute Fellow, accepted an invitation to join the students at lunch for a lively and informative question and answer session.

Upon their return from the National Press Club, the public school students were asked to assemble in the all purpose room of the school and write thoughtful letters expressing their appreciation to whomever they wished for the opportunity to participate in the taping of *A Public Voice*.

Results and Analysis of Data

The results and the analysis of data begin with a table of participants in the two groups, public and private school.

TABLE A

Number of Participants by Gender, Grade Assignment, Faculty, Forum, Taping Session
By School

	Public School	Private School
Gender		
Male	16	19
Female	27	26
Grade Assignment		
6 th	1	
7 th	16	
8 th	26	
9 th		
10 th		20
11 th		17
12 th		8
Faculty	6	3
Forum	55	45
Taping Session	33	8

This section is divided into selected educational implications from the process and the addresses the Issue content. The purpose of the research was to describe selected educational implications on communities of a self-selected Montgomery County public middle school and a private school from Prince Georges County, both schools within districts of Maryland. The students were participants in the National Issues Forums, the Public Broadcast System and Charles F. Kettering Foundation May 1, 2002 taping of *A Public Voice*. Several questions were generated from this broad purpose, and the research study was designed to answer the following questions framed in the context of what are the implications for participants.

Educational Implications-Process

1. Question number one asks about implications for age and interest for engaging deliberative dialogue through National Issues Forums.

Every participant across all the grade assignments worked on the issues for a three-hour period. There were no experiences of students having to be removed or disciplined throughout the period of the forum. In the case of the public school, the forum time included a lunch break, from which there were no problems encountered at the appointed time to reconvene the forum.

2. Question number two asks about the social roles of responsibility for school time and deliberative dialogue pedagogy?

Parents, teachers, and administrators in both public and private schools are responsible for the decisions about the best use of school time. Support for using school time for this type of pedagogy is generally recognized as useful. In the case of the public school, the interviews with the administrators and a few teachers supported the activity in a very positive way. Evidence to this, is provided by the comments and actions taken by these roles.

Public School:

A reservation was expressed by the Social Studies Resource teacher that these kinds of forums were too difficult for students of this age to engage. These concerns were resolved by the support of the Supervisor of Social Studies for the Montgomery County Public School System and reinforced by her participation in the first forum with the students. This was evidenced by both engaging in the recording process with enthusiasm and unsolicited comments of support for having more of these forums.

The middle school administrators made a decision to have all students in the school across all grade assignments participate in a NIF during the 2002 school year.

The school also provided scholarships for two participants, one in sixth grade and one in seventh grade, to attend the Center's Public Policy Institute Convenor and Moderator

Education seminar. It also provided help for the Assistant Principal and two teachers to attend.

3. Question number three asks about social roles of responsibility for engaging contentious and sensitive issues?

Parents, teachers, and administrators in both public and private schools are responsible for the decisions about the best use of school time and the curriculum. The general context and pedagogy for engaging students in conversation about social, public policy, contentious and/or sensitive issues has been through lecture and debate. There was consensus from the public and private school faculty and administrators that deliberation provides a different context for students to critically think, analyze, and express themselves about a topic. In fact, it was the observation of some faculty of students, and of some students of their peers that the quality of some participants' demonstration of personal stake, knowledge, opinion, and perspective was very different from their daily classroom participation and behavior. Again, support for using school time for this type of pedagogy is generally recognized as useful.

4. Question number four asks about perceived and measured differences among youth participants and their capacity to participate effectively?

There was consensus from the public and private school faculty and administrators that deliberation provides a different context for students to critically think, analyze, and express themselves about a topic. The public school provided a vocabulary list of relevant forum issue words. The vocabulary list was intended to positively impact the capacity of the students to effectively participate in the forum. The students indicated that the vocabulary list was helpful. It was interesting to note that there was no evidence of the private school students' capacity to effectively participate in a forum was any different than that of the public school participants. The pedagogy for deliberation was based upon the prescribed format for moderating and recording a community based NIF. With the NIF as the educational experience format for the students, the participants were treated as and given permission to act as responsible members of "*our*" community. The students provided their own sense self-governance for one another's behavior as forum participants. The students

demonstrated a genuine respect for listening to and communicating their voice to the issue, and held the recorders to a high standard of accurately recording their perspective.

Also, the students expressed an interest about school governance and policy issues affecting student life at their respective schools to be conducted in a deliberative way. It was students who expressed an interest and desire to participate in future forums at their respective schools and within the community.

The observation of school administrators and some faculty of students, and of some students of their peers, that the quality of some participants' demonstration of personal stake, knowledge, opinion, and perspective was very different from their daily classroom participation and behavior. The deliberative process seemed to provide an opportunity and venue for the voices of students to feel welcomed and valued. Perhaps this is the reason why issues that some faculty might encounter in a non-deliberative classroom environment were not issues during the forum process. The school faculty and administrators expressed the observation that students were engaging the upper levels of the cognitive domain of learning more frequently during the forum than is evident in the daily classroom environment. They began considering what they could learn from the implications of the forum as pedagogy versus their classroom pedagogy.

The students were fully engaged, shared an informed and fresh perspective on the issue, and demonstrated a commitment to engagement that might be observed at any community-based forum. Again, support for using school time for this type of pedagogy is generally recognized as useful.

5. Question number five asks about implications for administrative and curriculum programming?

The administrators and teachers expressed an interest and desire in providing the forum experience for all students, and not just a select group of students. The Center has engaged in conversations and meetings with school administrators to include deliberative forums as a component of the curriculum programming for all students during the 2002-03 academic-year.

The opportunity accorded students by participating in *A Public Voice*, through direct interaction with national and local public and elected officials and members of the press might have an undocumented impact in enhancing their confidence, and helping to recognize the value of and their responsibility for developing their public voice.

Recommendations

It is the interest of the Center, the Montgomery County public middle school administrators, faculty, and students; several members of the Montgomery County School Board, and several members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and its President:

- 1) To continue to foster a deliberative forum practice in curriculum programming for school age children;
- 2) To support a curriculum to further cultivate a leadership and democracy education agenda for students;
- 3) To understand how to, and the benefits of, cultivating an engaged community and civic participation, with deliberative forums as a practice.
- 4) To cultivate the capacity of students to effectively participate in deliberative forums and *A Public Voice*.

Appendix A

NIF Research Interview Post-Forums Questions

These interview questions were asked of the Montgomery County public middle school student forum participants following the April 25, 2002 deliberation on *Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What should we do?*

Directions: Eight pre-selected middle school students each to answer in the round. This activity takes about an hour. Ask them if they read their issue book.

Students selected: Brittany Goetsch, Surer Sajanlal, Zulpikar Iskander, Chelsea Johnson, Staci Arwenannii, Kevin Jenkins, Dexter Korto, Iris Carlo, Abigail Philips

Questions

Personal (Passion)

1. On a scale of one to ten, how important was the issue to you? Why?

Process (Reflection)

2. Did you think your story (personal stake) had an impact on the discussion (deliberation?) [Why is it still a problem?]

Process (Content – passion - deliberation)

3. Did you think your opinions were valuable to the group as you participated?
4. Why did you think that happened?

Personal (Passion)

5. How do you FEEL after the deliberation of this issue? Angry, happy, relieved, energized?

Content (Common ground – action)

6. What does the idea of “common ground for action” mean to you now?
[this term suggests the *relationship* we have made when we have reached common ground—this is the time we must take action together as a community even if we do not agree with each other.]

Process (Reflection)

7. Have you even had a formal discussion like this before where you learned to weigh the options before making a decision? Do you see any differences?

Process (Content – Action)

8. You are a member of the community who has learned how to talk through tough issues with your classmates (peers) today. Do you see yourself talking about this issue when you leave here? At home? School? Restaurant?
9. Do you see any changes in your life? In other words, has a personal experience that happened here connected with you? Did some conversation here help you increase the level of awareness with a friend of another culture?

Process (Passion)

10. Which types of learning do you like better—debate or deliberation?

These interview questions were asked of the Montgomery County public middle school principal of student forum participants following the April 25, 2002 deliberation on *Racial and Ethnic Tensions: What should we do?*

The importance of Racial and Ethnic Tensions for Middle Schools relates to data and achievement issues, especially on a national basis.

This issue is important not because of its relationship to violence, but because of disparities. For example:

1. How does a cultural group blend in?
2. What is it like, or what does it take to be an American?
3. Are there racial issues in the school? Definitely.

It has to do with tension.

This tension is people trying to divorce themselves from their own culture/heritage while learning to become an American.

The tension also rests with the Americans and how they view a group coming into their neighborhoods, schools, etc.

Historically, all immigrants have had to blend with the American culture.

It is a shallow view and ethnic tensions to view the tension as just “punching” between students. It is so much deeper and broader than that when it relates to ones own culture and how to blend into the American culture.

Appendix B

Racial and Ethnic Tensions Forum Observer Report from Montgomery County Middle School

Introductory Remarks by the Principal:

- 1) There are many important issues for forums.
- 2) We are all in this together as a democracy.
- 3) There are national issues that permeate our school.
- 4) Issues require us to address them together.
- 5) The purpose of a forum is to train good citizens as leaders to talk about issues.
- 6) We are looking for ideas from all of you.
- 7) You are reflecting on what America is—This is what makes America great.
- 8) America gives you a voice to come up with solutions.

Introductory Remarks by the Vice-Principal:

- 9) How many of you read all of the issue book from cover to cover?
- 10) How many of you scanned the issue book?
- 11) You are talented, beautiful, wonderful students—welcome to this forum.
- 12) Restroom privileges without needing your agenda book today. Don't get used to it for tomorrow!
- 13) About (20) 8th graders here. About (20) 7th graders here, one 6th grader.
- 14) Lunch provided for staff and students participating in this forum.
- 15) Those attending the “Public School” Issue Forum – also participating here, about 13 students.

Introductory remarks by Michelle Scott:

Reminder: Ground Rules—everyone talks around the circle—this is an adult dialogue. Moderator helps you stay focused, but you talk to each other. Your opinion counts. Your voice is part of democracy. Our discussion focuses on choices. This issue has three choices. This is not a debate—this is an exercise in deliberation. You should feel free to offer your opinion. If you have a question, ASK. You are allowed

to ask your classmates questions. This is your chance to understand why people think the way they do. If you had to live with one of these choices—which one of these choices would be best for you and the group—which one? Think thoughtfully. By the end of the day, the groups will come together and have a discussion on which choice your group can support. Look at the pros, cons, tradeoffs, and choices. In summary, we will have a reflection at the end of the day, so we can talk about the direction your group is headed. We will be interested in how the **individual** thinking has changed. Have you heard something different in your group? We are also interested in how we have been impacted as a **group**. Take about 20 minutes talking about each choice, then we will reconvene.

Vice Principal:

Teachers throughout the school are very interested in learning about the process of this forum and the subject of it. They want to know: What you are saying and how you are saying it—this makes a difference. However, pretend like they don't exist when you are in your group.

VIDEO:

Students focused. Look interested. None are talking between themselves.

Choices summarized and described: #1 Americans in a melting pot. #2 Americans making up a patchwork quilt. #3 Americans blended in the colors of a canvas.

FOUR FORUM GROUPS:

Two students were selected from each group for the Research Questions Discussion following the Post-Forum activity.

- 1) Mr. Nathan Starr/Marcia Snaveley (Social Studies Teacher)
- 2) Ms. Michelle T. Scott/Nancy Unger (Head of the Social Studies Dept.)
- 3) Dr. Robert Walker/Susie Scoffield (Montgomery County PTSA President)
- 4) Dr. Nettie Baldwin/Adam Shively (Social Studies Teacher)

PERSONAL STAKE

Group #1

“We need to understand other cultures so we can understand each other better, so we are not afraid to hang around other people.”

“I am really interested in what other people say. I want to understand other cultures and learn how to bridge the gap between people.”

“I have been subjected to racism. I think we are afraid of things we don’t know about other people. People outside of public school are so uneducated about what racial diversity is all about.”

“When you learn about both sides—you can be much more successful in life.”

“My friend has a strong African accent. He didn’t lose it when he came to America. A cashier shouted at him to get out of his store.”

“My Muslim friend wears a full scarf to school. The boys pull off the scarf to tease her. This teaches me that we need to get arrogance and ignorance out of our lives—this is more important than racial issues.”

Group #2

Moderator shares that she investigates complaints of discrimination for a living—why it is happening and what the problem is—looking for a solution.

She states: “Racial and ethnic tensions keep me in business.”

Moderator states: My hope is that children in American can go to out to eat anywhere, go to any movie theater, and live anywhere. When she was growing up, she remembers a theater in North Carolina where the blacks sat in the balcony and the whites were downstairs.

Moderator: “We recognize that America is the land of the free and there are opportunities for everyone. Do you believe that? Has that been your experience?”

A student shares that her mother works with Ben Carson at John Hopkins Hospital. When they ate lunch together, he remarked to her mother that he was told to go away from visiting a neighbor’s home because he was black. He wants his children to be able to associate with white people.

Another student shares that a black neighborhood in NY which she identified as a “ghetto with gangs and no white people” has a lot of problems with violence.

“The police don’t show up because they are scared.” There is violence and death there on a daily basis.” “The kids learn to live with metal detectors at school.”

Group #4

“There is a fear of black students coming to town.”

“I don’t get how people can be so cruel to people who are of different color or races. I think everybody is the same on the inside!”

“I looked in the book [issue book] about immigrants that were treated so differently. That’s messed up. It’s wrong to give them the bad jobs. My sister from Africa got fired from her job. Now they want to rehire her because they have new management.”

“My mother is half Asian and half black and my father is half Asian and half black. Biracial people are being put down by one race. I am treated like dirt.”

CHOICE ONE

Group #3

“There’s always going to be one person to clash with a group. That’s why racism is never going to be gone forever.”

“We can’t just wipe out racism. We have to start with one person talking to another person—we have to talk to each other.”

We shouldn’t stop all the ethnic festivals. They help us learn about other cultures.”

“Festivals help us see that we have more in common.”

“We should have festivals. To eliminate festivals means that we eliminate the past.”

“If we took away the festivals, it would be like a dictatorship.”

“Racism depends on how kids were brought up.”

“Racism isn’t going to go away because of tragic things that happen. Talking about this issue won’t make racism end, but it will make things better.”

“Racism isn’t going to end because they keep looking back to the past for beliefs and everything.”

Moderator asks question: What are Americans?

“American wouldn’t be America if there weren’t so many different kinds of people in America.”

Regarding bilingual issue: “We need to think more about other people’s environment and not just think about ourselves.”

“American means equal opportunity.”

(Moderator?) “My concern is dictating Americanism.”

CHOICE TWO

Group #1

“You shouldn’t get mad over the fact that some cultures have more holidays than you.”

“We should find some things that we agree about.”

“Everybody’s culture has something different to offer—you should learn about your culture.”

“You shouldn’t have to censor people’s opinions but you need to be tactful. You can get your point across in a humorous way.”

“We shouldn’t judge people because of bad things that some other people do from that culture.”

“Peer pressure forces you to hide who you are.”

“I think it’s a good idea to celebrate your culture like music and food, but don’t throw it in someone’s face.”

“We should celebrate everybody’s culture everyday—not celebrate people’s cultures separately.”

Group #2

“Festivals would put a spotlight on minority cultures. It would be a good thing if all American cultures could be celebrated together.”

“Festivals help you become more familiar with other cultures even if you don’t celebrate their holidays.”

“Black should have a month because we were in slavery. The Hispanics should have maybe two weeks. The Asians don’t need any because they weren’t discriminated in America.”

“Oh, yeah? The Japanese were in internment camps.”

“We shouldn’t have black history month. If we celebrated everybody’s culture, we’d be off school for holidays every other day. I think we should just use the holidays we already have to celebrate everyone. Let’s just take two months at Christmas.”

Group agreed to:

- 1) We should take time to celebrate different groups or cultures.
- 2) It would be a hassle to celebrate all the different cultures.
- 3) We don’t have a problem. We are already friends of other races. It’s the adults that have a problem with racism.
- 4) Who’s going to judge what the most important holiday is in order to celebrate?

Further comments:

“People might not want to hang out with black people because of the movies.”

“Parents influence everything that we think about.”

“Think about Georgia—they still behave in their thinking like the time during the Civil War.”

Group #4

“Choice two would cut down on stereotypes.”

Tradeoffs studied on p. 20 of the book.

Moderator read about dangers of segregation spreading without encouragement, reverse racism having a mushroom effect, charter schools, empowerment zones, entertainment, political correctness and first amendment rights.

“If you form a group there could be collateral damage like a riot, or the group could do something bad to society.”

“We have more positives than negatives. The book tells us the political view, but we live in this society. I can’t see what’s so bad about this one.”

CHOICE THREE

Group #4

Moderator: We need to move integration beyond where we are today.

Refers to page 23 and reads about house, etc., crackdown on profiling, police abuse on minority communities, affirmative action (mend but don’t end), forming groups, use of media. Asks: What do you think?

“I like civil rights as much as the next person, but you can’t force it because that would be taking away freedom of speech. You can’t enforce about how people feel.”

“This choice would help immigrants.”

“If all the doors are open, economics would not decide what school to go to and what place to live.”

“If all the doors are open, we have more of a chance to deal with each other.”

“Equality gives us an equal playing field.”

“There’s a difference between going too much and too little. This choice helps us to stay right in the middle.”

“If you are not on a certain level, you should not be allowed in a certain door because of the choice YOU have made—like not paying attention in school makes you end up in a bad house, a bad neighborhood. YOU put yourself in that situation. Choice three would not work for me.”

“Discrimination is still going on. Enforcing the law is important. People should follow this issue in the newspaper.”

CHOICE FOUR

Group #1:

“I just thought it would be a talk about blacks and whites but I learned more about other cultures.”

“We learned about society, class, finances, cultures, and religion.”

“I thought only Choice three would be good. Now I see pro’s for others.”

“I gained a lot more knowledge and insight about Muslims.”

“I listened to what other people had to say and actually considered it.”

“Usually it’s the people who are the loudest that are heard. This way you can hear everybody even if you don’t totally agree with everyone’s views.”

Moderator reflecting on a personal stake. “This is where people start to develop a respect for you.”

“I agree with everyone on at least one point.

“I had tension when people make jokes about race. Those people never really felt the racism that we experience toward us.”

“I had no tension. We wanted to listen to each other’s opinions and not attack each other.”

“I thought the video was good. It helped me a lot especially since I didn’t have time to read the whole book.”

Agree as a group that: Racism, sexism, and religious bigotry is bad.

Group #2

Agreed as a group that:

- 1) “You need to define American culture. In a few years we will need to do it again. We won’t remember how we thought in 8th grade so we need to do this annually.”
- 2) “We need to have meetings together with little people of government and big people of government.
- 3) We need to have forums with different ages, for example, MS and HS
- 4) We need the media to promote forums.

Group #3

“If a person doesn’t like ME, I’m not going to adjust ME to their needs.”

“I’d rather hurt my parents than myself.”

“I think we should encourage other cultures, but not discriminate against them.”

“I don’t think we should eliminate people from celebrating their cultures because it’s a good thing for people to celebrate their cultures.”

Moderator: It’s time to take some action. What are we going to do about this issue!

“Pilot a good experience in a community.”

“Try to teach some stuff about equality.”

“Place people in jobs on ability, not on race.”

“Immigrants shouldn’t come here and be pampered. They should work to earn the jobs they want.”

“We should eliminate all stereotypes.”

“We should give people who work and are poor some extra money to help them, like a buffer, to guarantee them a certain level of money for their household.”

“We need to use our common sense to come up with a definition for an American.”

“We should take one day like July 4 and make it “America Day” where different ethnic groups come together.”

“Some how we need to get people like those people on death row and Bill Gates to understand each other.”

“The USA is the world summarized. That’s what America is because it has everybody from all over the world living here.”

“Other groups are splitting us up in America like on September 11.”

“You can never define America.”

“We can come together as a family with our issues and talk about them.”

Group #4

“Hearing everybody’s point of view has given me a different perspective.”

“This forum helps us learn that we are part of one another. We are important, we can make a difference for ourselves and then it will help someone else. It shows that we are connected.”

“We should have our families take a more active roll instead of just expecting it to happen in the schools.”

“I didn’t think that anything I said would help, but it affected my subconscious and I don’t have such a negative attitude anymore. It is all changing in my subconscious part of my mind.”

“If you have an issue like this, how do you get the government—the people to accept it and deal with it?”

“Get your parents to share with people at work.”

“How about forums with middle school students and parents?”

“No.”

“Get people to talk to each other at church about these issues.”

“Promote this issue on public television (even though nobody watches it.

“People should write magazine articles about this issue.”

“How about commercials about this issue?”

“We just need to reach out to people.”

“We need debates on this issue like the presidential debates.”

“Before the government makes a change, we need to have forums. The government will listen!”

“We need to get people involved—like doing more marketing with festivals.”

“We need flyers at school about this issue.”

“Everybody should be able to study it at school. This issue should be included in the school curriculum.”

Common things/shared views of Group #4.

“Different people have different things. We have different perspectives. We can change our community by sharing together.”

“I don’t like forums. I like a debate so we can show emotions. In a forum you have to be more careful.”

“In a debate we can fight for what we believe in. We can’t do that in a forum.”

Moderator: We are trying to look for critical thinking and problem-solving.

“How you express your emotion doesn’t affect the community. It’s the action you take that affects your community.”

“Deliberating in a forum is slow. You forget what you are going to say by the time everybody takes their turn.”

“I think that a forum has more control. Maybe that’s the way we can get more done.”

“I think we should have a smaller group.” (13 participants in circle with this statement)

REFLECTIONS AND GROUP REPORT

Group #1:

“Racism is a learning experience because we had no idea how much this subject would affect us.”

“We all agree we should express our cultural differences. Choice Four had all the pros of Choices 1,2,3. We decided on a combination of pro’s.”

Group #2:

“Our group thinks that we should focus on prejudice in general. We should have another forum like this in front of congress.”

“We should have a council and an intergenerational forum.”

“We should celebrate different cultures for one month.”

“We need laws that support fairness and ban hate groups.”

“English should be the dominant language.”

“We should have up-to-date ideas as new immigrants arrive.”

Group #3:

“The real problem is discrimination.”

“We need to encourage celebration of other cultures.”

“Jobs should be based on ability, not on someone’s background.”

“Financial problems should be addressed.”

“We tried to define Americanism. What makes America unique is the different groups.”

“Our group would not suggest having days off for each religion in American, even if it’s nice to celebrate different cultures.”

“We need pilot programs to help communities with the issue of racism.”

“We thought prejudice is wrong.”

Group #4

“When we started, we were scared to say something, then we couldn’t stop and ran out of time.”

“We weren’t sure what to do with Choice Two. We came up with a Choice Four.”

“ We thought of some things to do to help get rid of racism like—
publish some books about it. We think education is the key to changing prejudice and racial tensions.”

“Some people in our group are afraid that nothing will happen after this forum. We also spent 30 minutes talking about whether we would rather have a debate or a forum.”

Group #1:

“Our group spent more time on international ideas of racism. We wanted to talk more about national and regional issues of racism.”

“When we discussed culture and racism, I was hoping the book would discuss discrimination against women.”

“Are we really going to take our ideas to action?”

“We should talk more about ways to educate people more about other cultures so that we can do a better job at respecting each other’s differences.”

WHAT WE CAN DO

- 1) We can talk to our parents, they can talk to their friends and people at work.
- 2) We can also talk to our friends.
- 3) We can go to public places like other schools.
- 4) We can have other activities that go into more detail on racism.

- 5) We can tell people that racism is still out there.
- 6) We need to get a petition going against racism.
- 7) We need to have a council that studies and deals with this.
- 8) We need to promote the problems of racism in the media.
- 9) WE need to get more people in the school involved—include everybody!
- 10) We would like to get student learning service hours in working with this issue.
- 11) We need to hold seminars about this issue.
- 12) We need to have a culture day here at school.

LUNCH TIME DISCUSSION

Adult: “I am so impressed by all our students.”

Adult: “The students have learned to put their thoughts into words.”

Adult: “The kids did a lot of research. The kids knew their stuff.”

Adult: “You have taken chances to express your real feelings.”

Adult: “You showed a lot of respect in listening to each other’s opinions.”

Student: “The first time we did a forum, I just wanted to make a good impression. Compared to the first time, I was more comfortable with my peers today.”

Newcomer: “The food is great!”

Student: “I didn’t get stressed out over the topic.”

Student: “The first topic was easier.”

Student: “I didn’t know if everyone knew what we were talking about.”

Adult question: “Is it more difficult to talk about this in a diverse group?”

Student: “No, you get to learn.”

Student: “You feel more secure in a forum. Nobody’s going to jump down your throat when you say something.”

Announcement regarding the first 40 permission slips for the National Press Club, 5.01.02.

Appendix C

Montgomery County Public Middle School A Public Voice Participant Letters