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FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM:
DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

RITA C. MACDONALD-JARVIS

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

LESLEY UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education

May 2015

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From Awareness to Action in the Elementary Classroom:
Developing Culturally Relevant Content and Pedagogy

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Graduate School of Education
Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies
Adult Learning Specialization

Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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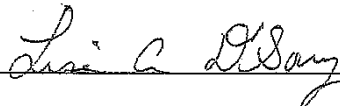
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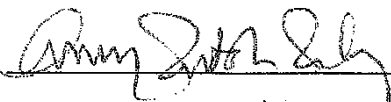
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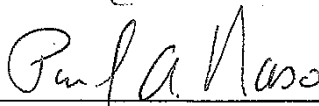
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ABSTRACT

Educational literature suggests an increasingly diverse student population could benefit from culturally responsive teaching practices to ameliorate gaps in educational opportunity, yet teachers face challenges given the developmental and contextual factors necessary for success with this approach. To gain insight into how teachers may be supported implementing equitable instruction, this dissertation investigates the experiential and educational factors that may foster the development of teaching philosophies and practices for a pluralistic and democratic society. Three major bodies of research place this research within a theoretical context including critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and transformative learning theory. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers' experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions?

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, a collective case study was designed to inform these research questions. Consistent with constructivist approaches to research, the knowledge generated from this inquiry was co-constructed with a sample of eight elementary teachers. Primary sources of data included two semi-structured interviews, participant-selected artifacts, discussion of a teaching case, and a written reflection. General inductive analysis was utilized to uncover significant themes and ultimately five key findings were identified. The paramount finding indicated that learning to teach in more equitable ways was an ongoing process for teachers in this study. With varying levels of comfort and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, all were engaged along a continuum of developing awareness, examining their

practices and the educational structures that privilege some members of society, as well as acting within their spheres of influence. Several factors enabled teachers to develop their understanding and advocate for students: opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue regarding dilemmas of practice, transformative learning experiences during pre-service and in-service education, and supports from their district. These findings indicate that the process teachers go through to learn culturally responsive teaching involves a transformative and philosophical shift in ideology. Humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness enabled teachers to view their equity work as partial and ever-evolving. The knowledge generated from this inquiry offers insights for schools of education and professional development initiatives regarding how equitable teaching may be supported and facilitated through cultural humility.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, cultural humility, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, equity literacy, social justice education, teacher education, teacher professional development, transformative learning

DEDICATION

To my sons, Luke and Logan, my greatest of blessings—may you always “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

March 1, 2015

Completing a dissertation is quite a task. It is also quite a task when you are a mother of two very young boys and wife of an Air Force officer. It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the many people who have been supportive throughout my educational endeavors. Without you, this could have very well been impossible.

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I am especially thankful to my Boston friends, Dr. Katherine Petta, Rosie Osser, and Christian Flynn, who have remained close during my Air Force odyssey. To Stephanie Doherty, my oldest and dearest friend, and Godmother to my children, I am so grateful to have grown up with you by my side. Thank you for your humor, love, and support. I feel blessed to have such intelligent and spirited friends.

To my Air Force friends near and far, including the Sweeney Family, and especially Mary Jenny Ward, thank you for being like family to me. You've made it easier for me to not only survive, but thrive, along the way.

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And finally, above all I thank God, for with Him nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37).

With love and gratitude,

Rita C. MacDonald-Jarvis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
CHAPTER	PAGE
1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	1
Chapter Overview	1
Background and Context.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Study Purpose and Guiding Questions	11
Research Approach	11
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	13
Presence of Self in the Inquiry	14
Significance of the Study	20
Key Terms and Definitions	21
Organization of the Dissertation	25
2. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE.....	27
Chapter Overview	27
The Social Context of Education and Critical Pedagogy.....	28
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Related Approaches	37
Sociocultural consciousness.....	44
Affirming perspectives.....	45
Change agency	47
Constructivist views of knowledge, learning, and teaching	48
Knowledge of students, families, and communities	51
Cultivating Culturally Responsive Teaching through Transformative Learning	53
Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory.....	55
Kegan's Constructive Developmental Theory.....	59
Implications for Schools of Education.....	63
Implications for Teacher Professional Development.....	68
Institutional Context Necessary for Transformation.....	71
Cultural proficiency within organizations	76
Beyond Awareness: Towards Sustaining and Equitable Pedagogies	78
Chapter Summary	82
3. METHODOLOGY	84
Chapter Overview	84
Rationale for Constructivist Research Design	84
Case Study Methodology	85
Advantages and Limitations of Case Study Research	87
Description of the Research Setting.....	87

Description of the Research Participants	90
Overview of the Methodology and Research Process	91
Data collection phase 1: Interviews	93
Data collection phase 2: Artifact/document review	98
Data collection phase 3: Teaching case	99
Data collection phase 4: Reflection prompt.....	101
Procedures for Data Analysis.....	102
General Inductive Analysis.....	103
Standards for Judging the Quality of Qualitative Research.....	106
Axiology/Ethical Considerations	107
Researcher-participant relationship	108
Protection and confidentiality	109
Informed consent	109
Limitations of the Study.....	110
Chapter Summary	110
 4. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASES.....	 112
Chapter Overview	112
Case Profiles by School	112
Jaime Escalante Elementary	113
Danica	114
Courtney.....	129
Emma Hart Willard Elementary	140
Josephine.....	142
Matilda	152
Temple Grandin Elementary	164
Peyton	165
W.E.B. DuBois Elementary	175
Noelle.....	177
Leigh	193
Alex.....	207
Chapter Summary	217
 5. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS.....	 218
Chapter Overview	218
Research Findings	218
Finding 1	220
Interview as intervention.....	221
“Multicultural Day Parade” teaching case	224
Finding 2	232
Purpose of education.....	233
Sociocultural consciousness.....	233
Multicultural content integration	237
Finding 3	240
Responsibility	240
Empathy	243

Fear	246
Finding 4	249
Personal and professional experiences.....	250
Educational experiences.....	253
Professional development experiences	254
Finding 5	255
Advocacy	256
Constructivist views.....	260
Knowledge of students, families, communities	261
Influence of district professional learning opportunities	261
Chapter Summary	265
6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	267
Chapter Overview	267
Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching.....	269
Awareness	270
Analysis.....	272
Action.....	274
Ally-ship	276
Influence of Experiences, Education, and Professional Development on Perceptions....	280
Personal experiences	281
Professional experiences	283
Education	284
Professional development	286
Influence of District Supports on Perceptions	287
Poverty and education.....	289
Cultural proficiency within APS.....	294
Beyond Action: Towards Ally-ship through Cultural Humility	297
Recommendations	300
Recommendations for policy makers.....	301
Recommendations for schools of education	303
Recommendations for school districts and leaders	306
Recommendations for professional development.....	311
Recommendations for individual teachers.....	312
Further Research	313
Final Reflection on the Study	314
REFERENCES	317
APPENDIX	
A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	330
B. PRINCIPAL E-MAIL	331
C. PRINCIPAL LETTER	332

D. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER	333
E. INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS.....	334
F. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	336
G. DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY	350
H. DOCUMENT SUMMARY FORM	352

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Fourth Grade Mathematics Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity, 2013.....	4
1.2 Fourth Grade Reading Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity, 2013	4
1.3 Projected Changes in Racial Demographics within the United States	7
1.4 Student Population in Elementary and Secondary Public Schools, 2011-2012.....	9
1.5 Teaching Force in Elementary and Secondary Public Schools, 2011-2012	9
1.6 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	14
2.1 Forms of Dominance.....	32
2.2 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	37
2.3 Transmission Approaches to Teaching.....	49
2.4 Constructivist Approaches to Teaching.....	50
2.5 Action Continuum within a Cultural Proficiency Framework.....	80
3.1 Overview of Data Collected.....	92
3.2 Framework for Pilot Interview Analysis.....	94
3.3 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	97
3.4 Overview of General Inductive Analysis.....	103
4.1 Jaime Escalante Student Demographics	113
4.2 Emma Hart Willard Student Demographics	141
4.3 Temple Grandin Student Demographics.....	165
4.4 W. E. B. DuBois Student Demographics	176
5.1 Sociocultural Consciousness.....	234
6.1 Change Agency	269

6.2 Sociocultural Consciousness.....	277
6.3 Affirming Perspectives	279
6.4 Constructivist Views.....	288

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
2.1 What Teachers Need to Know about Their Students to Help Them Build Bridges to Learning	51
2.2 Practices Promoting the Development of Culturally Responsive Teaching	63
2.3 Cultural Proficiency Continuum	77
3.1 School Demographics	89
3.2 Participant Demographics and Professional Information	90
3.3 Findings	105
5.1 Participant Summary	219
5.2 Approaches to Content Integration	238
5.3 Examples of Content Integration	238
5.4 Factors Most Influential to Participants	249
5.5 Advocacy Approaches	258
6.1 Findings.....	268

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—

Let it be that great strong land of love

Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme

That any man be crushed by one above.

-Langston Hughes, 1938

Chapter Overview

This study investigates the phenomenon of why some teachers demonstrate greater predisposition towards culturally relevant pedagogy. The purpose of this collective case study is to explore with a sample of elementary teachers their perceptions of the need for culturally responsive teaching approaches and how these are informed by their experiences, education, and professional development opportunities. It was anticipated that the conclusions generated from this inquiry would add to the culturally responsive education discourse and provide insights for teacher education and professional development initiatives. This study utilized a qualitative research methodology and included a sample of eight volunteers from four different elementary schools within the same public school district.

This chapter introduces the focus of the study by describing the context of the research followed by a statement of the problem along with the purpose of the study and guiding questions. The research approach is described briefly, followed by a description of the theoretical framework and researcher's presence and assumptions within this inquiry. The significance of the research is presented and the chapter concludes with a description of key terminology used throughout as well as an outline of the dissertation.

Background and Context

The term “achievement gap” is often used to refer to the disparity in academic opportunity or achievement between different groups of students based on race, socioeconomic status, gender, English language proficiency, and learning ability. There is a plethora of literature regarding the difference in achievement between students of color and their White counterparts, and the notion of gaps in “achievement” is problematized by some scholars who note factors such as school inequalities, overreliance on biased testing, and narrow constructs of intelligence (Howard, 2010; Kozol, 2005). These factors and others contribute to a “hidden curriculum” which may be described as the unspoken rules and norms prevalent in schools. Critical pedagogues and proponents of culturally responsive teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Delpit, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Gay, 2000; 2002; Giroux, 1983, 2010, 2011; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) argue that schools are tied to broader society and are not politically neutral. Whether intentional or not, schools place poor students and students of color at a disadvantage by valuing privileged and dominant ways of thinking and behaving as the norm and therefore subordinating historically excluded groups.

While schools are often portrayed as great equalizers, the privileged and dominant ways of thinking, or the type of knowledge that is valued in schools, typically favors Eurocentric, male-oriented, heterosexist, English-speaking, and middle-class cultural knowledge (Banks, 1996; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Howard, 2010). Within this structure, students of color continue to be over-represented in special education referrals, disciplinary actions, attrition rates, and underrepresented in gifted and talented education programs (GATE), college preparatory, and advanced placement (AP) courses (Howard, 2010). Additionally, poor students and students of

color enroll in lower proportions to post-secondary educational programs (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

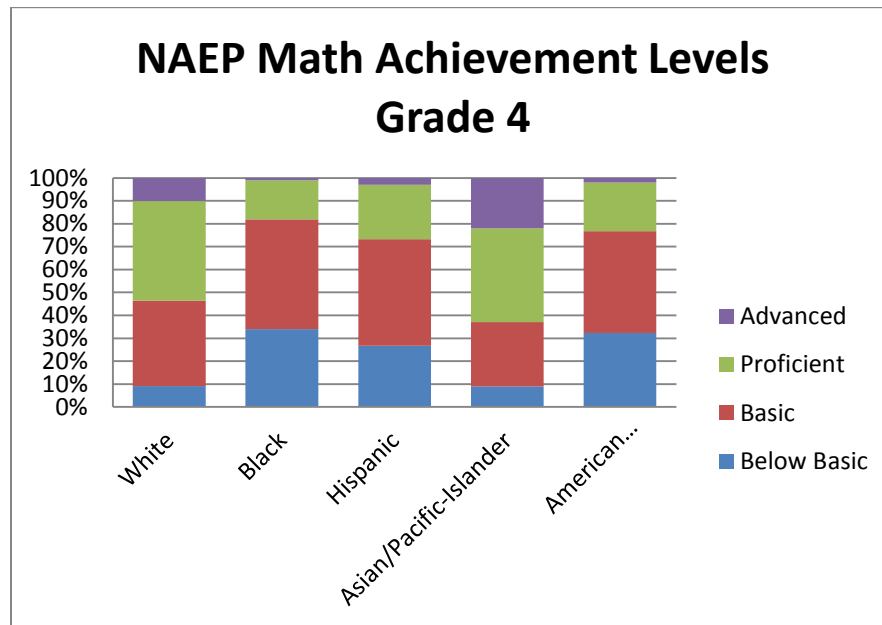
A look at the 2013 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data illustrates the achievement levels of students by race and ethnicity. Described as “the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas,” this data has been used by scholars to document the disparities in academic performance by students of color and their White peers (NCES, 2014a).

Utilizing a sample of more than 376,000 students, the achievement levels in reading and math at grade four underscore concerns regarding achievement by race and ethnicity. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, 34% of Black, 27% of Hispanic, and 32% of American Indian/Alaska Native students are performing at “Below Basic” levels in mathematics compared with only 9% of White and 9% of Asian/Pacific-Islander students performing at this same level. Furthermore, only 18% of Black, 27% of Hispanic, and 23% of American Indian/Alaska Native students are performing at “Proficient” and “Advanced” levels of mathematics. When compared to 53% of White students and 63% of Asian/Pacific Islander students scoring at these same levels, this disparate performance in mathematics is clear.

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, discrepancies in student achievement in reading are just as salient. Among fourth graders, 50% of Black, 47% of Hispanic, and 44% of American Indian/Alaska Native students are performing at “Below Basic” levels of reading compared with 21% of White and 20% of American Indian/Alaska Native students performing at this same level. While 46% of White and 52% of Asian/Pacific Islander students are in the “Proficient” and “Advanced” categories, only 17% of Black, 20% of Hispanic, and 21% of American Indian/Alaska Native students are performing at these same levels.

Figure 1.1

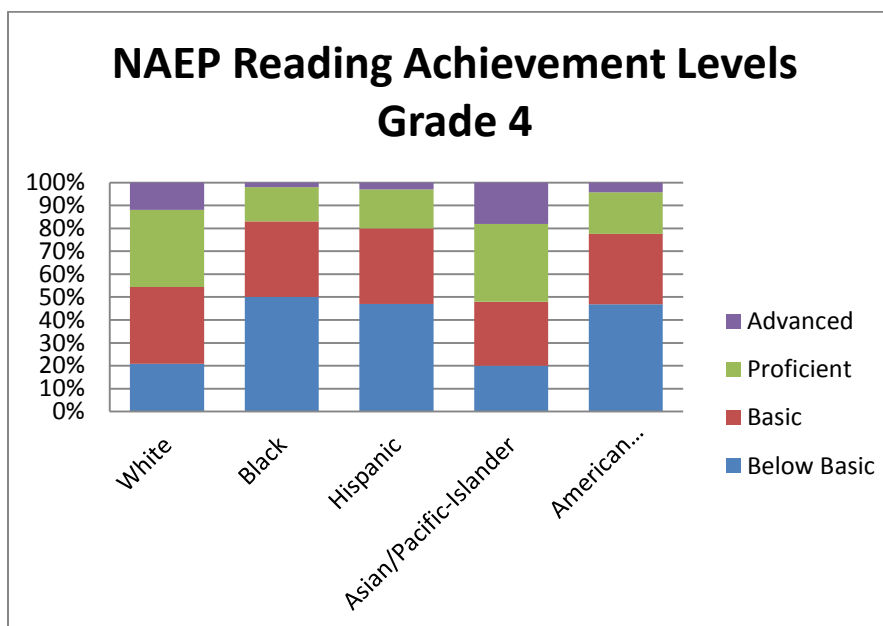
Fourth Grade Mathematics Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity, 2013



Adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014d)

Figure 1.2

Fourth Grade Reading Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity, 2013



Adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014d)

Any discussion of gaps in achievement warrants situating it within a historical perspective. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court, in which the “separate but equal” ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was overturned. The court ruled that schools are subject to review under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and that official racial segregation is in violation of this clause. Over sixty years later, gaps in educational achievement or opportunities remain. According to Darling-Hammond (2007), “Educational outcomes for students of color are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race” (p.320). This is highlighted by data collected in the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which progress was made by students of color. Gains in educational inputs and outcomes were made during the Great Society’s War on Poverty program during the 1960s and 1970s during which increased funding was concentrated in urban and rural schools. However, federal spending for such programs were reduced or eliminated during the 1980s which saw an increase in poverty, homelessness, and decrease in health care access as well as a growth in achievement gaps which persists (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Howard, 2010). Darling-Hammond describes the deterioration of schools since that time. “Drops in per pupil expenditures accompanied tax cuts and growing enrollments. Meanwhile, student needs grew with immigration, concentrated poverty, and homelessness, and increased numbers of students requiring second language instruction and special education services” (p.321). Scholars such as Kozol (1991) and Darling-Hammond (1995; 2007) describe the inequalities across public schools due to the nature of their funding. Darling-Hammond (1995) states, “Because funds from property taxes are typically raised and spent locally, wealthier districts have greater resources with which to fund their schools, even when poorer

districts tax themselves at higher rates. These discrepancies create differences among students' education opportunities..." (p.345). Most recently, educational reform has moved towards standardization of curricula, high-stakes assessment, and increased teacher assessment. While the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has been criticized since its implementation in 2001, one outcome of this legislation has been the requirement of schools to disaggregate performance data by subgroups including race, gender, and income; and furthermore, to show improvement by subgroup, with a goal of all students demonstrating proficiency by 2014. However, as this date approached, most states began operating under waivers granting more flexibility in demonstrating adequate yearly progress (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Many scholars have noted the importance of the classroom teacher as one of the main factors contributing to students' academic success (Howard, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2007). And while they are not able to solve all problems related to academic achievement, Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest they are more influential than often acknowledged. However, a mainly White, English monolingual teaching force often has a more limited understanding of the diverse students they teach, which can result in negative beliefs about their students' ability, low expectations, and deficit perspectives based on their assumptions regarding students' socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, culture, language, and gender (Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). While scholars discuss the importance of recruiting more teachers of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas, 1997), teacher education programs and developers of professional development are charged with re-educating the teachers currently working within classrooms to better understand their own culture as well as the culture of their students in relation to education, to reject add-on notions of multicultural education, and

problematize the practice of teaching by asking questions about the nature of schooling and society (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

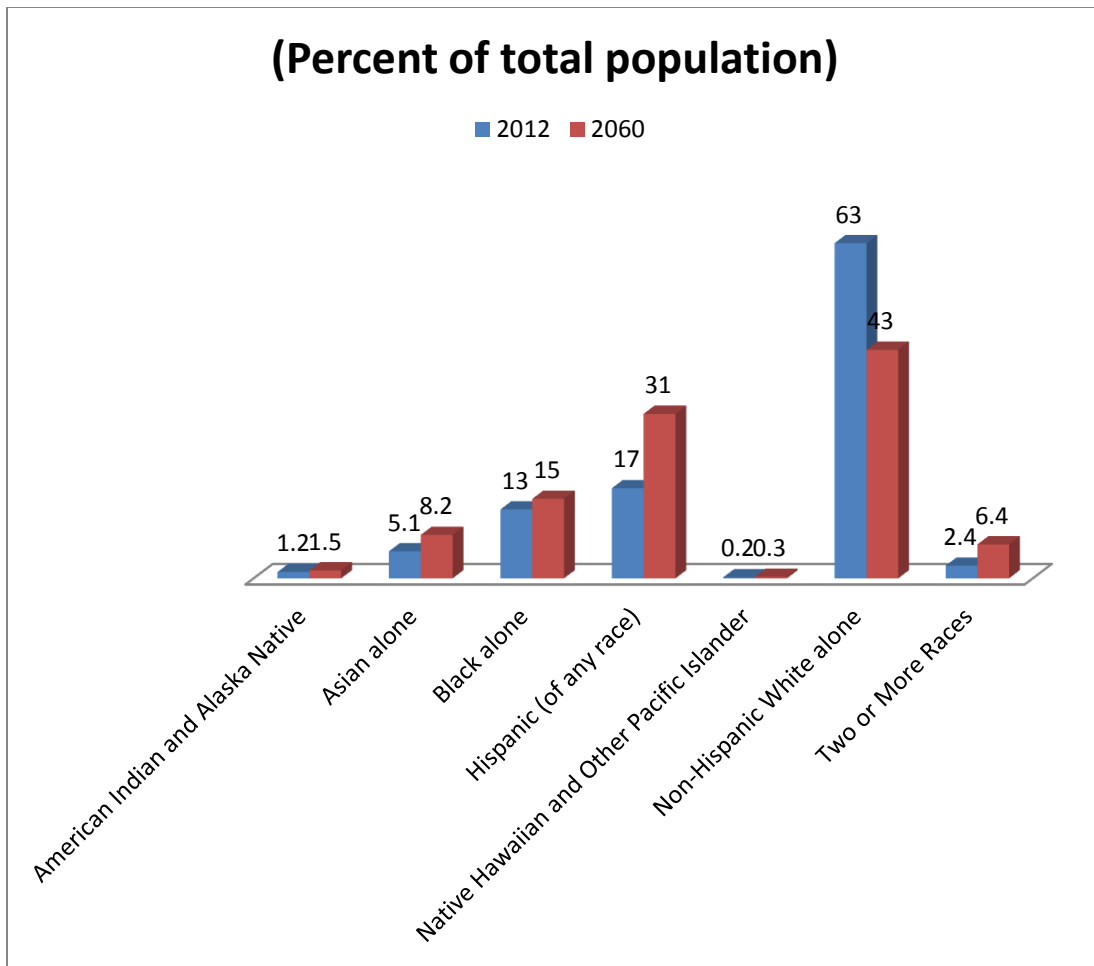
The racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States is rapidly changing. According to Mather, Pollard & Jacobsen's (2011) Report on the First Results from the 2010 Census:

The rapid increase in racial/ethnic minorities has put the United States on a fast track toward "majority-minority" status, when less than half of the U.S. population will be non-Hispanic white. The latest Census Bureau projections show the country passing that threshold in 2042. (p. 8)

Several states have already reached this status. California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas, are majority-minority with "minority" groups numbering more than 50% of the population. In terms of the student population, 46% of young people under the age of 18 are racial/ethnic minorities (Mather, Pollard & Jacobsen, 2011). These rates of the population of the United States have been growing and are projected to continue to grow as illustrated in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3

Projected Changes in Racial Demographics within the United States



Adapted from United States Census Bureau, 2011

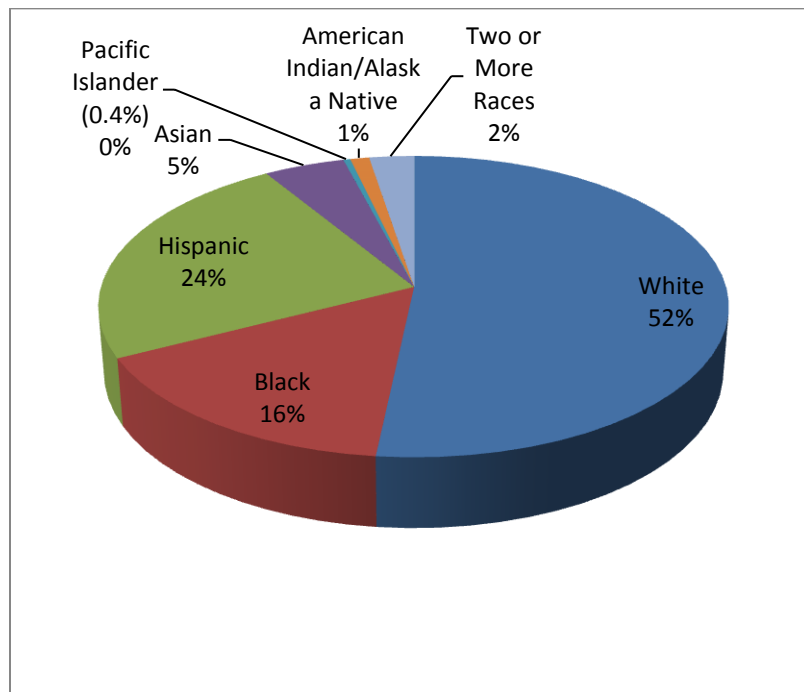
While the total population of the United States continues to shift, the racial and ethnic enrollment in public schools has shown considerable changes since 2001. According to the United States Department of Education:

From fall 2001 through fall 2011, the number of White students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade in U.S. public schools decreased from 28.7 million to 25.6 million, and their share of public school enrollment decreased from 60 to 50 percent. In contrast, the number of Hispanic students enrolled during this period increased from 8.2 million to 11.8 million students, and their share of public school enrollment increased from 17 to 24 percent. (NCES, 2014c)

Figure 1.4 illustrates the student population disaggregated by race and ethnicity for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Figure 1.4

Student Population in Elementary and Secondary Public Schools, 2011-2012

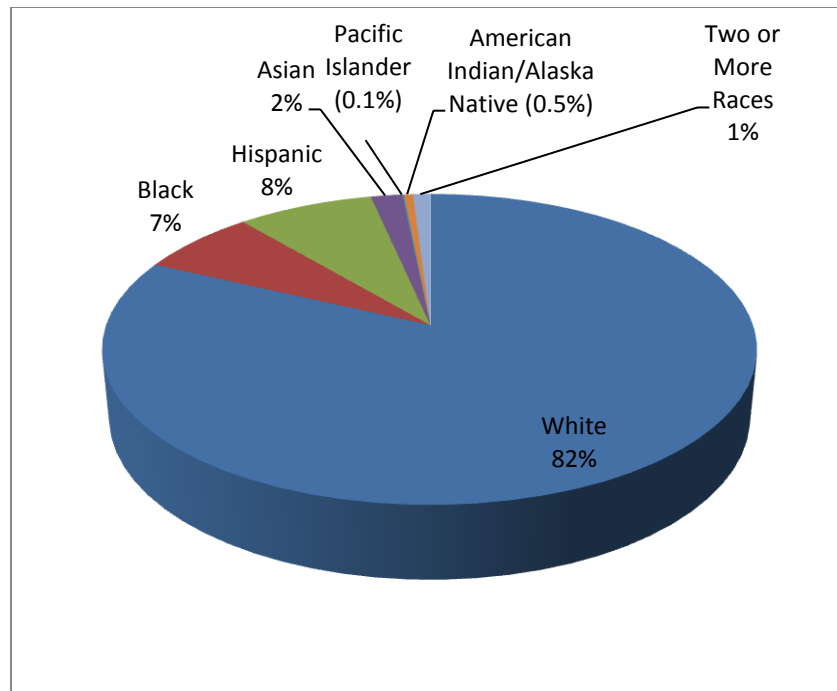


Adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014b)

According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), the number of children of color is not only growing in urban schools, but in suburban as well, suggesting that issues of diversity can no longer be ignored in teacher preparation programs, even if teachers are not planning to teach in urban settings. As illustrated in Figure 1.5, contrasting sharply with the changing student demographics, the teaching force in the United States has remained predominantly White, with teachers of color comprising less than 20% of the teaching population.

Figure 1.5

Teaching Force in Elementary and Secondary Public Schools, 2011-2012



Adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014b)

Villegas and Lucas (2002) problematize the racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences between students and their teachers by stating, “The sharp differences in the biographies of the teachers and their students make it difficult for the instructors to build cultural bridges between home and school for the students” (p. 18). For example, strategies such as selecting materials relevant to their students’ experiences and perspectives, utilizing classroom management which acknowledges cultural differences, and providing opportunities to demonstrate knowledge through multiple modes of evaluation may not come naturally to teachers unless they are prepared for culturally responsive teaching.

Statement of the Problem

More than twenty years of educational research indicates that an increasingly diverse student population could benefit from culturally responsive teaching practices as a way to ameliorate gaps in educational achievement and opportunity (Gay, 2000; 2002; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Yet teachers continue to

face challenges given the developmental and contextual factors necessary for success with this approach. The literature suggests that novice and veteran teachers need support in developing culturally responsive dispositions and teaching skills; however, much of the teacher education and professional development regarding diversity is cursory (Sleeter, 2001). The process of learning to teach in culturally responsive ways is not simply the acquisition of new skills, but an ongoing process of changing one's ways of thinking and critically examining the common educational practices that privilege the dominant group in society. A remaining area of inquiry involves examining which factors enable teachers to develop and implement this approach to teaching. In order to gain insight about how teachers may be encouraged and supported in successfully implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, it is first necessary to investigate the experiential and educational factors that teachers perceive support the development of teaching philosophies and practices for a pluralistic and democratic society.

Study Purpose and Guiding Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore with a sample of elementary teachers their perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive pedagogy as it relates to their experiences, education, and professional development. I anticipate that the knowledge generated from this inquiry will offer insights for schools of education and professional development initiatives regarding how this approach to teaching may be supported and facilitated.

This dissertation research will address the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers' experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions?

Research Approach

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, a collective case study was designed to inform the research questions. Consistent with constructivist approaches to research, the knowledge generated from this inquiry was co-constructed with a sample of eight participant volunteers through four phases of data collection. All participants were elementary teachers and primary sources of data collection were two semi-structured interviews with each participant. In addition to the interview data, participant-selected artifacts and district documents were collected, a teaching case was discussed and analyzed at length, and a written prompt was collected after a two week period of participant reflection.

A general inductive analysis approach was utilized to uncover significant themes from the data collected. This process involved the revision of data through five steps including initial coding, the creation of categories using the research aims and conceptual framework, In Vivo coding using meaning and phrases from the actual interview text, further revision and combination, and ultimately the construction of five key findings.

Trustworthiness was maintained throughout the process through the use of triangulation of a range of sources, peer debriefing and member checks, the use of thick description, and personal reflexivity. Ethical considerations included the protection of participants through confidentiality and use of informed consent as well as reciprocity.

There were several limitations intrinsic to this research study. While generalizability is not the hallmark of case study, the small sample of eight elementary teachers within one large district limited the range of experiences and perceptions highlighted. Each of the participants was teaching in an elementary school setting. Had more teachers across grade levels been included, findings may have yielded a broader range of perspectives. Difficulty attracting participants led to the selection of six early career teachers (<5 years of experience) with the exception of one

mid-career (5-15 years of experience) and one veteran teacher (>15 years of experience). The inclusion of more mid-career and veteran teachers may have impacted outcomes. While qualitative methods were chosen to document the richness of participant description, a mixed-methods research approach including a district-wide survey along with the case studies may have resulted in a deeper understanding of the particular context. Given the sensitive topics intrinsic to this research such as race and class, it is important to consider that participants may have disclosed what they perceived I wanted to hear and withheld ideas they thought may not have been taken favorably. Additionally, the sample of volunteers may have attracted teachers with a predisposition to the topic being researched. Finally, while participants shared many stories of their practice, there may remain disconnect between what they articulate and their actual practice having had no opportunity to observe them at length.

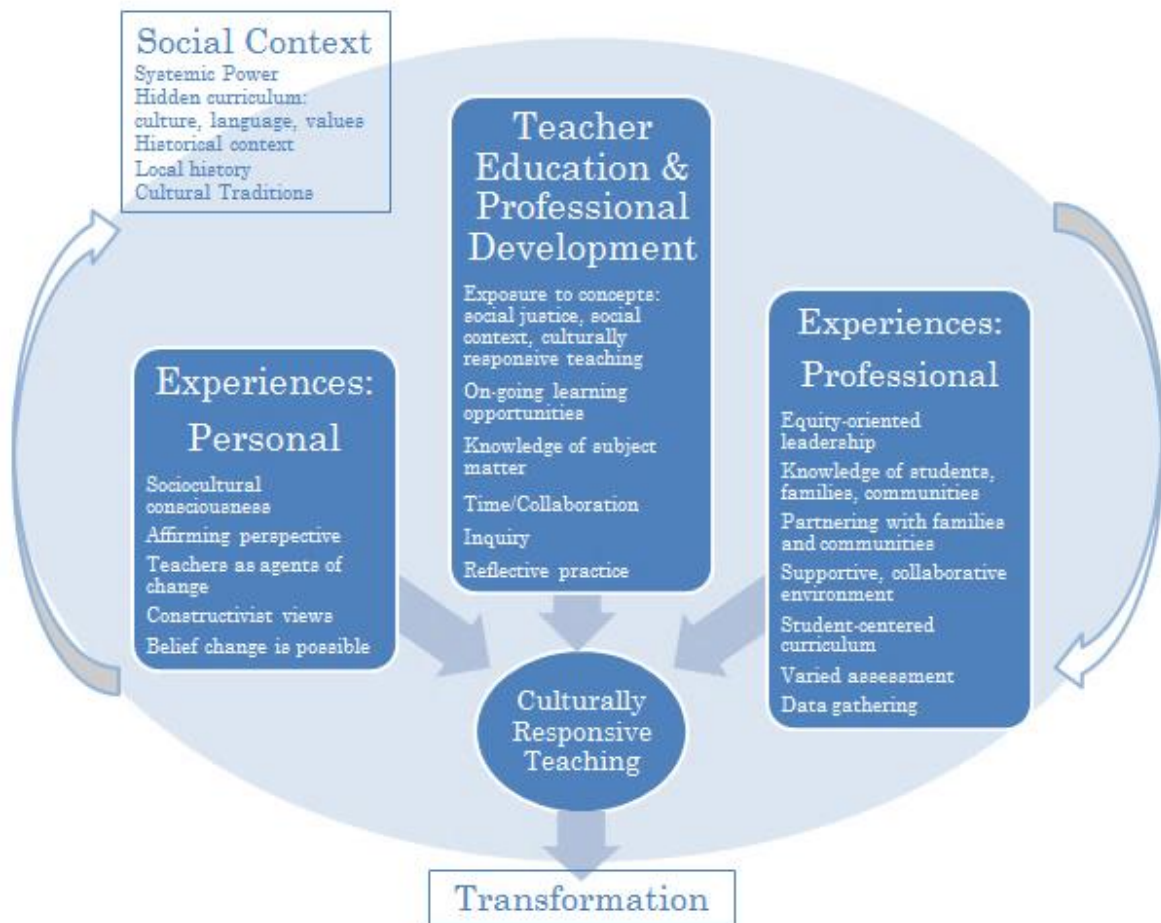
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Three major bodies of research place this research within a theoretical context. These include critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and transformative learning theory. Understanding the tenets of culturally relevant and related pedagogical models and their connection to the social context of education and critical pedagogy theory may be a transformative process of coming to terms with socially constructed world views. Accepting that, an understanding of the developmental aspects of this type of adult learning may inform how pre-service and in-service teachers have constructed their understanding of the nature of schooling and developed the sociocultural consciousness necessary for culturally relevant pedagogy. As illustrated in Figure 1.6, the social context as well as teachers' experiences, education, and professional development influence perceptions and teaching practices related to culturally relevant pedagogy. While such approaches to teaching arguably have critical and

transformative outcomes, the process of learning to utilize such pedagogical approaches is in itself a transformative process.

Figure 1.6

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework



Presence of Self in the Inquiry

An important step in the research process was ensuring reflexivity about my position in the research. This was maintained through the use of a research journal reflecting personal biases and decisions made over the course of my doctoral study and research (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). While social scientists often have an ethical obligation to situate

themselves as researchers, locating my evolving epistemological stance became a transformative process to avoid what Ladson-Billings (2014) describes as “death in the classroom” or the de-skilling of the profession of teaching (p. 77). She asserts, “If we ever get to a place of complete certainty and assuredness about our practice, we will stop growing. If we stop growing, we will die, and, more importantly, our students will wither and die in our presence (p.77). For her, the ongoing process of learning is essential to her own pedagogical stance as well as a call for the practice of meaningful teaching for democratic participation.

I began my doctoral work thinking critically about the democratic purpose of teaching and the role of social justice in our public education system. For example, William Ayers (2004) writes:

Teachers in an open, democratic society must learn to think freely and without fear, to have and to use minds of our own, to discover and to make sense for ourselves without any connect-the-dots formulas, without bowing or genuflecting to any authority, and without any absolute guarantees whatsoever. This is required of us if we hope to teach students who will continue to develop minds of *their* own. (p.10)

He poses that teachers should ask themselves what they are teaching for and what they are teaching against. I worried some of these ideas were radical. With a plethora of questions and a sliver of uncertainty, I embarked on my studies hoping to learn how teachers and educational leaders reflect on their practice and promote equity for their students. As a graduate of Boston College Lynch School of Education, the Jesuit identity and concern with social justice was central to my teacher education, yet I felt limited in my understanding. Growing through continued professional development and two disparate teaching experiences, I developed a clearer understanding of this concept, its controversies, and its importance to me.

Before I began teaching in Massachusetts and had the opportunity to participate in Empowering Multicultural Initiatives (EMI), I had a more limited understanding of the concepts of ethnocentrism and racism. This course, which examined personal, cultural, and institutional racism and how these impact schooling, helped me to better understand David Wellman's (as cited in Tatum, 1997) definition of racism, "a system of advantage based on race" (p.7). Tatum (1997) argues:

This definition of racism is useful because it allows us to see that racism, like other forms of oppression, is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a *system* involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals. (p.7)

Before this course, I thought of racism as the overt actions of hatred towards people of color; however, I developed a keener understanding of how all people contribute to the system of advantage based on race unless they are actively anti-racist. White people often do not think of themselves as racial beings because society is structured in such a way that they do not have to think much about race. Taking this course allowed me to reflect on my own racial identity as a White woman and how we are all damaged by the injustice of racism.

While often seen as politically neutral spaces, there is misunderstanding regarding the role racism plays within schools. Certain practices within schools can perpetuate this cycle of oppression. The formal curriculum is supposed to create meaningful learning opportunities for students; however studies have shown that many instructional materials and practices trivialize, distort, or leave out the perspectives of women and non-dominant groups (American Association of University Women, 1992). Recognizing these biases is important for working towards the implementation of an equitable curriculum. As part of the EMI course tenacity challenge, I was

motivated to buy more multicultural books for my classroom and closely analyze materials for prejudice and stereotype. Although this was a paltry example of how I could be an agent of social change, I have come to the realization this was an important initial step for me in a continual process of learning to act as an ally. EMI deepened my understanding of social justice, giving me a new set of lenses through which to view the classroom and my personal life. Being aware of inequities and the way people think is so important; however, what is even greater is working towards being an agent of change and educating others about social injustices, both in the classroom and out.

After moving to the western part of the United States and continuing my teaching career in a new school, I hoped to encourage critical thinking skills and meet the standards by reading diverse literature and having students reflect in writing about these texts and multiple perspectives. During a meeting with the principal, she claimed these goals were not important since the school and the state were not very diverse. While this assertion seemed dubious to me, had the demographics of the school been homogenous, in my view these goals would still have been significant. Ortiz and Jani (2010) might describe this as an “example of micro aggression [or] the conspiracy of silence that often appears as a means to avoid obvious racially charged situations” (p. 179). In other words, the principal was in a privileged position to ignore issues of race and practices that perpetuate White hegemony. Later in the year, the principal made a pejorative comment about a transracial adoptive family. When confronted about the comment, she appeared to shift her language by saying that she used the terms “White” and “Black” to refer to this family’s good and bad children. It was evident to me, that it would be challenging to have a conversation about racial sensitivity.

Through my doctoral study I have learned teachers have the ability to act as “tempered radicals” (Meyerson, 2001), or informal leaders seeking to bring about transformation within a culture in which the status quo might otherwise prevail. According to Meyerson, working in moderate ways to promote changes in the belief system of those with whom they work, a “tempered radical” often works “quietly to challenge prevailing wisdom and gently provoking” organizations to change (p. 60). These experiences were opportunities in which I might have initiated dialogue regarding conflict with this school leader. Had I been more confident in my own understanding of identity politics, I may have had the opportunity to enlighten the principal when she dismissed my proposal for including diverse literature. Later, when she and I were unable to have a conversation about racial sensitivity this understanding may also have facilitated dialogue.

Ortiz and Jani (2010) describe critical race theory (CRT) as belonging to the critical postmodern theory family and providing the opportunity to understand oppressive forces in society to facilitate transformation. They write “proponents of CRT are also committed to social justice, locating the voice of the marginalized, and employing the concept of intersectionality” (p. 176). In other words, this paradigm facilitates transformation through social relationships and the use of dialogue. Ortiz and Jani recognize “not infrequently, racist and/or classist remarks are overtly or covertly made in the classroom, wittingly or unwittingly by faculty or students” (p. 180). Elements of CRT may be used to examine the position of power and privilege the principal had in choosing to hear or dismiss concerns related to race and diversity, issues proponents of critical thinking believe should be confronted. Because of my initial educator experiences focusing on social justice, our values were at odds. While certain practices and beliefs were

privileged in the school, alternative points of view were seen as lesser versions, causing me great conflict in my perceptions of my role as a teacher.

These professional experiences as well as recent tragedies within the United States that have brought racial concerns to the forefront of national debate continue to make it clear to me how race and privilege intersect and why these issues ought to be confronted instead of disdained and ignored. Chimamanda Adichie (2009) describes the danger of a single story as flattening experience and stereotyping. She describes how when those in power show people as one thing, that stereotype is what they ultimately become. While the mainstream media reports spectacle as news and leaders are oftentimes merely actors on a political stage, all semblance of critical thought is removed. I worry about how my sons will learn to make sense of the world around them. How will they develop minds of their own? What actions will they take to alter the status quo? Will they be able to navigate ignorant and privileged points of view and choose a path determined by their own conscious? I fear the conflicts they face will be much harder and the stakes much higher. It is my hope they are equipped to question everything, trust their judgment, make choices that are unpopular, and act in service to and alongside others.

My belief is that teachers should have these same fears and hopes for all of their students. The authors of *The Humanities and the American Promise* (as cited in Minnich, 2005) write, “A citizenry that is humanistically aware is a citizenry that is capable of confronting diversity, ambiguity, and conflict, overcoming prejudice and self-interest, enlarging its sympathies, tackling tough public issues, and envisioning possibilities beyond the limits of circumstance” (p.167). I no longer worry ideas such as these may be too radical. There is more at stake than scores on standardized tests. Teachers are also in a position of power. Improving academic achievement through fostering positive social identity, citizenship, critical thinking skills, and

recognizing those things that ought to be *unlearned*, is a matter of social justice and a true practice of democracy. For me this is the educator's moral pursuit. Awareness, although an important first step, is not enough. Awareness is the stuff that makes people feel good about themselves without actually having to do anything. Action towards real change is imperative, the sine qua non for us to actualize what Langston Hughes (1938) described as the dream for an America "that never has been yet—and yet must be."

Significance of the Study

Legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented to close the achievement gap and raise the academic performance of all students; however direction as to how to effect such changes remains unclear given that many of the inequalities contributing to gaps in educational opportunity remain. According to Bruch et al. (2008), "NCLB mandates that schools that fail to meet targets for student test scores implement professional development programs for their teachers" (p. 1). However, schools with greater capacity and more advantaged student populations tend to get more effective professional development (Smith & Rowley, 2005).

Individual districts across the nation have made commitments to directly confronting the role of systemic advantages based on race, and the state of Connecticut has adopted a state-wide plan including culturally responsive teaching as one strand in its plan for improvement (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010). Currently, the teaching population is overwhelmingly White, female, and monolingual English. Along with a commitment to recruiting and hiring more teachers of color, given the current demographics, teacher education and professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and other pluralistic and democratic approaches to teaching is desirable within districts nation-wide. Although there is a

need for improvement among all students, without targeted interventions for students of color, the improvement trend will continue to include a gap between some groups of students. At the heart of this problem is the misunderstanding between the terms *equality* and *equity*. While equality ensures the same outcome for all students, equity ensures the same *quality* of outcome with interventions that fit individual needs. In other words, the playing field needs to be leveled to create fair access and redress historic injustices. According to Blumer and Tatum (1999) “Much of what passes for school reform is superficial and ultimately fails because the difficulty of the task—institutional change—is underestimated” (p.262).

Howard (2010) raises several questions that are significant to this study. He asks “What steps can educators take to ameliorate the persistent achievement disparities?” and “How can researchers and practitioners help educators to better understand discrepancies in academic achievement and offer plausible ways of rethinking schooling in order to create more equitable outcomes for all students” (p. 27). This study contributes to an expanding body of research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, social justice, multicultural, cultural humility, equity literacy, and culturally responsive education. For teacher educators and professional development leaders, this research situates these approaches to teaching within a developmental framework. For individual districts and teachers, as well as policy-makers, it aims to inspire continuous improvement and movement from awareness to ally-ship and teaching as a moral endeavor.

Key Terms and Definitions

Achievement gap: the difference in performance between subgroups of students. This term is critiqued; the gaps in achievement between subgroups are defined by disability, gender,

race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and are understood within a broader social context of oppression, suggesting a gap in educational opportunity.

Ally: a person who stands up against unjust treatment of members of an identity group other than his or her own. An alliance is when people from two or more identity groups act together to stop inequitable treatment of either or both groups. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xi)

Andragogy: the art and science of teaching adults.

Critical reflection: unlike other forms of reflection, critical reflection includes an aspect of critique regarding personal frames of reference. Mezirow (1990) states, “Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do” (p.13). Mezirow describes this type of reflection as a trigger for transformative learning.

Culture: a complex constellation of values, mores, norms, customs, ways of being, ways of knowing, and traditions that provides a general design for living, is passed from generation to generation, and serves as a pattern for interpreting reality. (Howard, 2010, p. 51)

Dominant group/culture: the dominant group within a society has greatest power, privileges, and social status. It may or may not be the majority of the population. In the United States, the dominant group has historically been White, Christian, affluent, and male. A dominant group achieves its position by controlling economic and political institutions, communications/media, education and health institutions, the arts, and business. The dominant culture is the way of life defined by the dominant group as “normal” and right. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xi)

English language learner (ELL): a student whose primary language is other than English and participates in the ESOL program to learn English.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): a program provided for English language learners to meet their needs as they simultaneously learn English and academic content.

Equity: treatment that is fair and just, taking into account the capacities of individuals, while not discriminating because of racial identity, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, or any other aspect of their identity. The concept of equity goes beyond equality, the latter implying identical treatment of individuals or groups despite their differing needs. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xii)

Hegemony: the process by which dominant group power is reinforced and maintained through a learned system of beliefs and practices which are uncritically embraced as in the best interests of the masses. Brookfield (2005) elaborates “knowing of hegemony makes it easier to understand how racism and sexism flourish unchallenged and unacknowledged” (p.97).

Historically excluded group (HEG): any group of people that have been excluded from the full rights, privileges, and opportunities in a society or organization, including students of color. I utilize this term in lieu of terms such as “minority” or “non-White,” except when referencing other sources.

Kagan Cooperative Learning: an approach to instruction which utilizes methods for active student engagement and social interaction for greater student achievement.

Minority: use of this term is critiqued given the demographic changes within the United States; however some scholars believe this term is useful for recognizing the power differentials between Whites and people of color. I utilize this term only when referencing others.

Neoliberalism: a political philosophy which couples capitalism with democracy and favors privatization and deregulation as well as the reduction of public spending on social services.

Pedagogy: the art and science of teaching.

Priority School: a school receiving “additional support in order to meet their benchmarks for student achievement.” (APS, 2013c)

Professional development: I use this term to refer to the in-service education teachers received after entering the classroom. Professional development learning may be understood as a continuation of pre-service teacher education.

Responsive Classroom: an approach to teaching and classroom management that emphasizes strong academics along with social and emotional learning through strategies such as community building, academic choice, and partnering with families.

Students of color: a term used to collectively refer to groups that have been historically excluded or groups that have been targets of racism. People of color comprise the “majority” of the world population, but are the “minority” in terms of power. I utilize this term in lieu of terms such as “minority” or “non-White,” except when referencing others.

Teacher education: I use this term to refer to the pre-service education participants received prior to entering the classroom; although generally teacher education may be understood to also include the ongoing learning process throughout induction and continuous professional development.

Title 1: federal funding schools receive based on the percentage of low-income students in attendance.

Race: a social construct that fraudulently categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on an arbitrary basis such as skin color and other physical features. Historically, it has been used as a rationale for colonization of other peoples' lands, enslavement, and war and oppression by one group against another. The scientific consensus is that race in this sense has no biological basis in the human species. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xiii)

Racism: a system of advantage based on race. (Wellman, as cited in Tatum, 1997, p.7)

Reflection: reflection in teaching practice usually refers to the process of setting lesson goals and then reflecting afterwards, using more or less specific protocols, about what worked and didn't [sic]. The process enhances and develops important shifts in teaching practice. This is valuable, necessary, and good pedagogy. (Cochrane, 2013, p.33)

Social identity: as compared with individual identities, this denotes memberships in groups that are defined by society, are shared with many other people, and have societal advantages and disadvantages attached to them. These identities include gender, economic class, racial identity, heritage, religion, age group, and so on. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xiii)

White: a socially created "racial" group who historically and currently receive the benefits of racism in the United States. The category includes all the different ethnic groups of European origin, regardless of differences in their histories, ethnicities, or cultures. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.xiii)

White privilege: the unearned benefits and privileges unconsciously and systematically afforded White people within the racist social system of Western society.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter provided an overview of the study situating ongoing teacher development as a central task for culturally responsive teaching which is suggested as one approach to

ameliorating gaps in educational opportunities. Chapter two includes a review of the selected literature focusing on three main bodies of research including critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and transformative learning theory. The review will highlight gaps in the literature between transformative learning and cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices. Chapter three presents the design of this research and an overview of the school district selected for this study. Chapter four presents a description of the participant cases organized by their respective schools. Chapter five presents the study analysis and five key research findings. In chapter six, I conclude with a discussion of the major findings as well as recommendations for educators and researchers along with a final reflection on the study. The paramount finding indicated that learning to teach in more equitable ways was an ongoing process of transformative learning for teachers in this study. The knowledge generated from this inquiry offers insights for schools of education and professional development initiatives regarding how equitable teaching may be supported and facilitated through cultural humility.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this review of the literature is to explore the central issues connected to this dissertation research. In order to understand how an increasingly diverse student population can be better served, it is important to first identify how adults learn to teach in culturally responsive ways, since these findings have implications for schools of education and teacher professional development. In this pursuit, three major bodies of literature were reviewed: (a) the social context of education including critical pedagogy, (b) culturally relevant and related pedagogical models, and (c) teacher education and professional development within a developmental framework. Since teachers in pre-service education and professional development programs are adults or emerging adults, theories of adult learning and development are useful. Literature in this category investigated the transformational learning theory of Jack Mezirow and the constructive development theory of Robert Kegan, as well as how institutional contexts affect teacher education and professional development. Applications of these theories within the field of education will illustrate their relevance to the K-12 education setting and may provide implications for the education and professional development of teachers.

In conducting this review, various sources of information were used, including Internet sources, books, and professional journals. Electronically retrieved sources were accessed using ERIC and ProQuest, and the keywords employed for searches included: critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, social justice education, teacher education, teacher professional development and transformative learning. This selected literature

review was ongoing throughout the study and the information reviewed here was collected during the research planning, data collection, analysis, and synthesis phases of research.

The Social Context of Education and Critical Pedagogy

Given the gaps in educational opportunities experienced by students of color alongside their White peers, teachers ought to have knowledge about how biased, privileged, and dominant ways of knowing are valued and operate within schools and society. Further, they need to learn the skills to problematize these forms of oppression within curricula and school practices. Ultimately, teachers should be taught strategies that disrupt the status quo, so they might choose to teach in more equitable ways.

Critical pedagogy has to do with the study of oppression in education as well as how issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, appearance, language, religion, and ability shape the nature of education (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; 2010; McLaren, 2007). For many people, education is regarded as politically neutral. Teachers are merely technicians and learning is reduced to preparing a capable workforce. Critical pedagogues reject those ideas in favor of teaching students to read the world critically, as independent thinkers. Rather than relying on those in power to tell them “truths,” an aim of critical pedagogy is to equip students to hold power accountable. Rather than embracing a narrow vision of education, critical pedagogues believe educational institutions are one of the few remaining public spheres that might confront orthodoxy and dogma. For critical pedagogy, this is essential to democracy since without an educated and critical citizenry democracy will fail.

Critical pedagogues critique neoliberalism, or the promotion of private enterprise and what they claim to be a demise of public welfare (Giroux, 2011). The hyper-individualism and consumerism peddled by those in positions of power have led to a loss of democratic public

spheres. Giroux (2004) calls for the reclaiming of schools and universities as places that promote critical thinking and provide students with the conditions to view themselves as critical agents. For example, Giroux believes public schools are one of the most important democratic public spheres, but sees them in crisis due to reform efforts being made that ultimately undermine principles of democracy such as the corporate backing of charter schools who receive public funding while privileging certain students, excluding others, and weakening the power of faculty and unions. Giroux (2010) states that “students deserve an education that enables them to become fully responsible and critically engaged citizens rather than one that views them as customers, low-skilled workers, or criminals” (p. 346). Giroux criticizes educational reform efforts that take their model from the business world valuing capitalist ideals of competition and profit. He rejects the idea of a pre-packaged set of techniques, teacher education programs that value praxis in lieu of theory, as well as the standardization of K-12 curriculum that disregards context. He states:

Not only is [education] context sensitive, critical pedagogy recognizes that the standardization of curricula, knowledge, teaching, and social relations does an injustice to the multiple and varied narratives, issues, histories, and experiences that students bring to schools and that operate in classrooms within different cultural, economic, and political contexts. (p. 355)

Diane Ravitch (2010), an educational historian and former Secretary of Education during the Bush Administration, mirrors Giroux’s criticisms. Drawing on research to argue against high stakes testing, she recants her former support of privatization, standardization, and influence of well-intentioned private groups on education such as the Gates Foundation. Similar to Giroux, she offers suggestions for improving America's schools which include leaving decision-making

up to educators, paying teachers a fair wage, devising a national curriculum, eliminating competition, and ending reliance on flawed testing. With somewhat of a turnaround from her former post-positivistic views she exemplifies critical thinking and a willingness to adapt political points of view in light of research.

Critical pedagogues (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; 2010; McLaren, 2007) reject the idea that students passively receive knowledge. They believe students need to learn how to think critically about individual and social responsibilities and become engaged citizens to participate in democratic public life. In their view, education is a political and moral project in which pedagogy is deliberate and related to the formation and acquisition of agency. Educators and students recognize that knowledge and authority are connected to power and individuals need to critically examine such power rather than accept the status quo.

Giroux (2010) criticizes Arne Duncan, the United States Secretary of Education, for his “call for reforming teacher education [that] produces a mode of moral and political illiteracy that both depoliticizes teaching and renders pedagogy merely as a technique designed to provide a priori outcomes” (p. 353). Instead, Giroux suggests the role of teachers is to reinvigorate democracy by prioritizing debate, deliberation, dissent, and dialogue, skills not easily quantifiable or testable. Giroux places a great deal of responsibility upon the educator to uphold the democratic tradition. In calling teachers to become change agents, he places their responsibilities within a social justice framework (Guilherme, 2006).

Critical pedagogy emerges out of the body of research and literature from The Frankfurt School of critical theorists such as Adorno and Marcuse as well as Dewey, Horton, and Freire. There is an obvious tension between critical pedagogues who are rooted in Marxist social theory and feminist or anti-racist based agendas of critical pedagogy, who feel excluded from the

dialogue of Marxist social theory. In an attempt to address the myriad interest groups who wish to align themselves with critical theory, several forms have emerged, including feminist, Black, queer, race, or red (Breuing, 2011; McArthur, 2010).

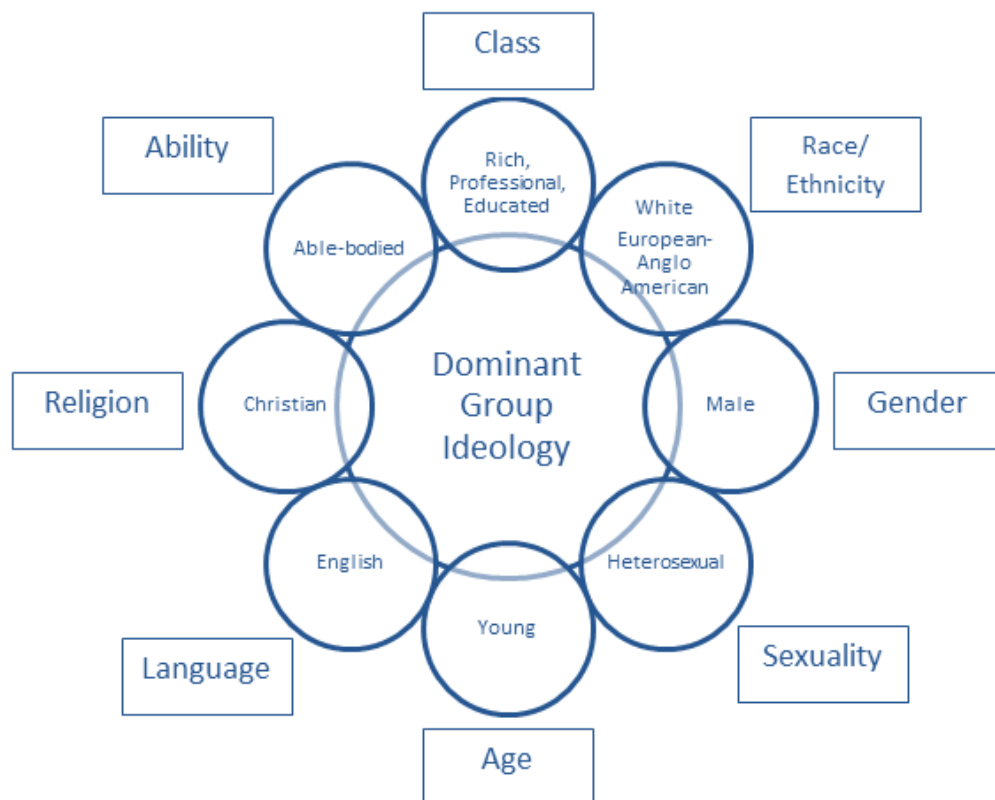
Ortiz and Jani (2010) describe critical race theory (CRT) as belonging to the critical postmodern theory family and providing the opportunity to understand oppressive forces in society to facilitate transformation. They write “proponents of CRT are also committed to social justice, locating the voice of the marginalized, and employing the concept of intersectionality” (p. 176). In other words, this paradigm facilitates transformation through social relationships and the use of dialogue. Ortiz and Jani recognize “not infrequently, racist and/or classist remarks are overtly or covertly made in the classroom, wittingly or unwittingly by faculty or students” (p. 180). However, these sociocultural issues may not always be addressed or even recognized within the field of education. The “hidden curriculum” can be described as practices within schools that maintain the status quo and keep certain individuals disenfranchised. Minnich (2005) describes this “faulty generalization” as working “both to continue prejudicial stereotypes and to keep the supposedly normative few at the defining center” (p. 106). As a result, we develop a mystified concept of education. Practices that are deeply familiar are rarely questioned. Without some major shift, teachers tend to teach in similar ways to how they were taught and according to their own lived experience. Palmer (1998) suggests teaching “emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse” (p.2). With that point in mind, Howard (2010) asks teachers to consider if their way of teaching contributes to the underachievement of their students who may be different from themselves.

Giroux (2010) states “one can reasonably argue that most of what is learned in schools takes place through a hidden curriculum in which particular forms of knowledge, culture, values

and desires are taught but never talked about or made public” (p. 373). Justice-oriented teaching questions how White cultural norms are promoted above others as a means by which to maintain the status quo. Figure 2.1 illustrates some of the dominant group categories central to this hidden curriculum.

Figure 2.1

Forms of Dominance



Hatt-Echeverria and Jo (2005) offer a case study of a charter school and make the argument that within some of the proposed best practices of conformity, democracy, and citizenship, there was a "new" racist discourse. Topics covered in this article include White privilege and racism as it relates to power. The charter school’s mantra was “every child can

learn,” certainly liberal in its rhetoric; however the authors’ research exposed policies of exclusion that eliminated low achieving students. One of the teachers interviewed explained:

Students who don’t make the effort, we will put them on a contract. If it [contract] doesn’t motivate them, we expel them, because they are not putting in their efforts.

Students who are here are here for learning, and if they are not [learning], there is going to be a consequence. (p. 58)

Based on such school policy, underachieving students could be pushed out of the school since they were seen as lacking motivation or having behavioral problems. Their poor performance was not attributed to a mismatch between teaching practices and learning styles, or to the privileging of White values and norms. The authors write “We especially want to focus upon how the new racist discourse as according above to Giroux (1999) relieves Whites, ‘of any semblance of social responsibility and commitment’” (p. 52). Hatt-Cheverria & Jo (2005) call for teachers, administrators, and researchers to learn from the experiences of students of color and question practices that perpetuate White hegemony. Critical theorists such as Brookfield (2005), suggest that critical thinking allows people to “learn to recognize the flow of power in their lives and communities” (p. 47) and helps analyze hegemonic, or taken-for-granted assumptions that contribute to power imbalances.

Dicker (2008) also describes third wave feminists, who having been born into an era in which women enjoy the gains made by early feminists, have become part of a generation of postmodern feminists who are concerned with gender, but also issues related to race, class, sexual orientation, and complexity of power. For feminist school leaders, this denial of a single perspective is important since every classroom decision has consequences for children (Adichie, 2009). According to Brady, Dentith, and Hammet (2006) “postmodern feminist leaders deal

honestly, candidly, and consistently with issues of diversity and difference as well as the common practices of discrimination and inequalities that are experienced every day among schoolchildren and the adults who teach them” (“Postmodern Feminist Leadership,” para. 2).

Giroux has been criticized as “dualistic,” pitting “good” revolutionaries against “evil” capitalists (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). He is also criticized for advocating from a distance, not grounding his theory with research in specific schools, and offering little in terms of concrete strategies to implement within the classroom. According to McKenzie and Scheurich, radical democratic change is a task in the hands of public school educators alone and theorists such as Giroux are out of touch with real teachers and students. For Giroux, the only solution is critical activism, but McKenzie and Scheurich found that within the field of education, dominated by what they describe as mostly White middle class teachers, simply educating well children of color and low income was a struggle, “let alone to develop their students as young critical democrats” (p. 439). Breuing (2011) notes there is still work to be done for educators to recognize that critical pedagogical praxis goes beyond a set of techniques for teaching. Further, according to McArthur (2010):

The essential point is that one cannot tell someone else how to do it. The broad ideas and ideals of critical pedagogy need to be challenged, interpreted, and reinterpreted within each context. For individual academics within the classroom, critical pedagogy should be *a way of approaching* what they do, not the detail of the particular choices made. (p. 501)

Carr (2008) offers a list of suggestions or a “starting point” for teachers “to question and disrupt educational practices that do not seek to enhance political literacy and social justice” (p. 95). From Carr’s experiences teaching required courses focusing on diversity, equity, multiculturalism, and social justice in education, he has constructed a list of applications for

inspiring critical engagement among educators. It serves as a starting point for thought and critical dialogue, rather than a prescriptive list for the inherently political process of teaching. Written in response to the criticism that critical pedagogy offers no practical solutions about how to transform the “hidden curriculum” to be more equitable, Carr makes a case for such a list since research by critical pedagogues such as Peter McLaren (2007), as well as his own experience teaching, has shown that many teachers do not wish to be political or see themselves as capable of making a difference. His list offers a set of considerations, along with an expanded description of each, serving to inspire more critical thought for educators. These include the following ideas:

- Prospective teachers need to accept that nobody knows everything and there is always room for learning
- Content cannot be separated from its context
- One must work locally, but link their work to the bigger international picture
- Media literacy is important and citizens should critique their sources of news
- History is always a construction and interpretation
- Culture is more than food and festivals
- Teachers must provide the opportunity for a dialogue problematizing war
- Humility is not disengagement or obedience
- One must not be a follower
- Teachers need to accept that they are political beings
- One must read, write, and seek out authors that are not part of the mainstream
- One must problematize the discrepancy of wealth and its indicator of worth and value
- Teachers need to believe there is hope

- Teachers need to examine their own educations
- Teachers need to affirm that they can do what they can do, but there is not a prescriptive list (Carr, 2008)

Carr's list suggests a shift in mind-set for those within education hoping to adopt or instill a more critical and culturally responsive consciousness in prospective teachers. Teaching at a university that values critical thinking, Carr notes that he finds more opposition from his students who are reluctant to change rather than those who make policy and affect course offerings. This suggests the challenge of implementing critical pedagogy within teacher education programs. The challenge for teachers then implementing critical pedagogy within the K-12 classroom is illustrated in a case study looking at novice teachers of science.

Atwater et al. (2010) describe the cultural understanding and culturally responsive teaching practices of two science teacher participants in the southeast region of the United States. Utilizing critical theory as a research lens, the authors saw their inquiry as "a form of social or cultural criticism" (p.292) to better investigate unexamined beliefs, values, and assumptions of participants and how these views impacted their teaching. The participants were interviewed three times regarding life experiences, educational experiences, and their beliefs about their responsiveness in teaching students different from themselves. Participants articulated a belief that race is not a classroom barrier and therefore accommodations are not necessary. They understood culture and ethnicity as affecting students' behaviors; however in the learning and understanding of science, believed individual effort and meritocracy indicated success. The authors state participants were "unaware that students from similar economic backgrounds, but from different races, can and do experience oppression and discrimination" (p.306). Results indicated that teachers struggle with their ideas about race and culture as well as their ability to

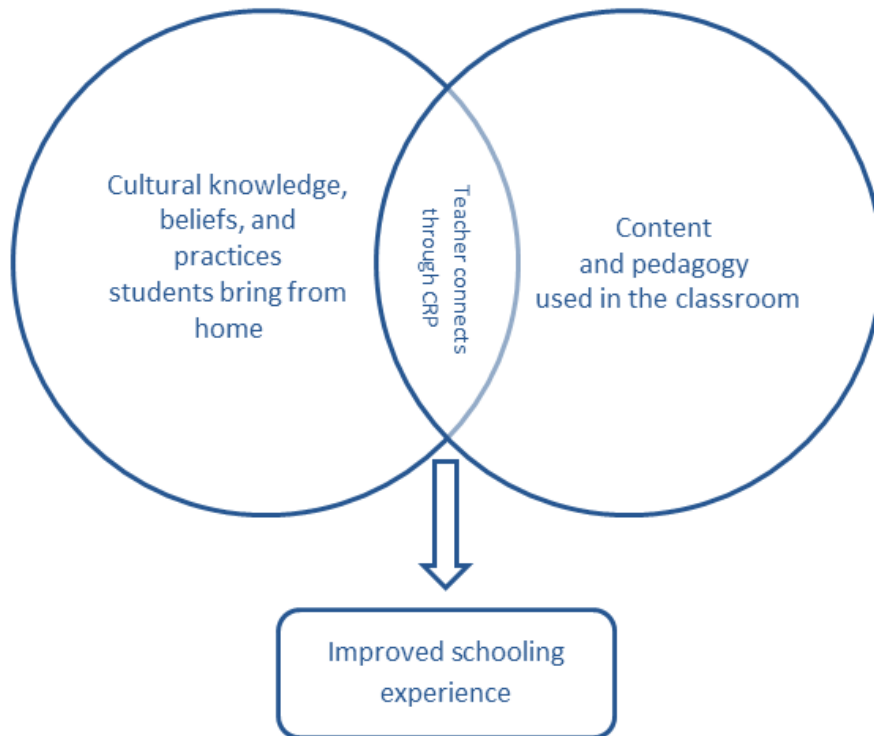
teach in culturally responsive ways. Findings implied that education students need opportunities to interact with students of color and mentor teachers who are competent in teaching diverse students. Advocating for research aligned with a transformative paradigm, Atwater et al. (2010) articulate further research regarding the preparation of teachers to work with diverse students is necessary because “the students in our classrooms deserve nothing less from us” (p.308). These implications call for teachers to experience learning opportunities that may transform their beliefs, an important first step in transforming classroom practice.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Related Approaches

Troubled by the torrent of literature regarding the “failure” of African-American students, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995) sought examples of their successful teaching and learning in her landmark research as a way to challenge deficit paradigms. Utilizing the nominations of community members within a small, predominantly African-American California school district, she selected eight teachers (five African-American and three White, with teaching experience ranging from 12-40 years) to participate in an ethnographic study utilizing interviews, observations, and a collaborative meaning-making approach to interpret their practices. Emerging from this process was an approach to teaching she termed, *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP).

Figure 2.2

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy



Ladson-Billings (1994) states:

Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p.20)

Moving beyond connecting home and school culture, Ladson-Billings positions this theory within a critical paradigm suggesting that in addition to academic achievement and cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy aims to develop students capable of critiquing social structures. She admits the challenge therein lies with teachers who themselves may lack this understanding and asserts “teacher educators have demonstrated that many prospective teachers not only lack these understandings but reject information regarding social inequity” (1995, p.477). Noting that beliefs and ideologies are difficult to change, Ladson-Billings presents three

broad and overlapping principles of this approach to teaching demonstrated by the teachers she studied.

These propositions include teachers' conception of self and others, the structure of their social relationships, and teachers' conceptions of knowledge. Teachers in the study believed in students' capabilities and Freirian (teaching as mining) notions of teaching, saw their practice as an ever-evolving art, and positioned themselves as members of the community with teaching as a way to give back. Additionally, teachers maintained relationships and connections with students, developing communities of learners who worked collaboratively and felt a sense of responsibility for one another. Teachers in the study also understood how knowledge is a construction, and since it is never static, knowledge ought to be viewed critically. Passionate about learning, teachers believed in scaffolding learning, assessing in multiple ways, and appreciating various forms of excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Suggesting further research and exemplars of this approach to teaching, Ladson-Billings (1995) calls teacher educators to foster "alternate models of pedagogy" through their recruitment strategies as well as by re-educating "the candidates we currently attract toward a more expansive view of pedagogy" (p.483). She stresses the critical nature of this work, by warning against add-on approaches to multicultural education that merely "exoticize diverse students as 'other'" and encouraging questions about the purpose of teaching within a social context.

Related to culturally relevant pedagogy are other pedagogical approaches which include social justice education, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching as well as others. Many of their tenets overlap, and these related models emphasize an activist orientation in which teachers develop a critical consciousness and commitment to social justice.

Cochran-Smith (1999) writes about learning to teach for *social justice*, proposing six principles for schools of education. Working from a transformative paradigm, she advocates tenets of critical pedagogy by embracing inquiry approaches to teacher education rather than training programs. She posits that teacher education programs should encourage pre-service teachers to hold high standards for all students, respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of all members of the classroom, utilize constructivist approaches to teaching, work with families, use diverse forms of assessment, and encourage critical thinking and activism. Cochran-Smith (1999) writes "part of teaching for social justice, then, is deliberately claiming the role of educator as well as activist based on political consciousness and on ideological commitment of diminishing the inequities of American life" (p. 116). She advocates that teachers act as agents of change within "an educational system that is fundamentally conservative" (2001, p.179) and appropriates Fullan's (1993) term "change agency," encouraging schools of education to support pre-service teachers to this end.

Banks (1989; 2002; 2006) and Nieto (1994; 1996) describe *multicultural education* as the development of reflective decision-making and social action skills along with an understanding of the history and context of ethnic privilege. These goals are consistent with the goals of critical pedagogy. In order to disrupt hegemony, Banks suggests five dimensions of multicultural education which include *content integration*, or the inclusion of multicultural examples and content within the curriculum, *knowledge construction*, or process by which students come to understand assumptions and biases within topics of study, *equity pedagogy*, or the process by which teachers adapt and differentiate their teaching to meet the learning styles of all students, *prejudice reduction*, or the work teachers do to help students develop positive attitudes about

different groups, and lastly, an *empowering school culture*, which promotes equity among all students.

The first dimension of multicultural education, content integration, is achieved in different ways and Banks (1989; 2002) describes four ways this may be integrated in classrooms and schools. These approaches include: (a) the contributions approach, (b) the additive approach, (c) the transformative approach, and (d) the social action approach. The contributions approach may be described as a celebration of “heroes and holidays” and may only be included during times such as Black history month. While relatively easy to incorporate into the curriculum, this approach is superficial, may reinforce stereotypes essentializing racial and ethnic groups, and while reductive in nature, ultimately multicultural choices are made based on mainstream criteria. The additive approach does not do much more to change the existing curriculum structure but in this approach books and units may be utilized to add ethnic content (Banks, 2002). Nieto (1994) describes this further:

The most common understanding of multicultural education is that it consists largely of additive content rather than of structural changes in content and process. It is not unusual, then, to hear teachers say that they are “doing” multicultural education this year, or, as in one case that I heard, that they could not “do it” in the Spring because they had too many other things to “do.” (p.1)

The problems with additive approaches to integration are that these reinforce a Eurocentric view of ethnic groups and fail to help students view ethnic histories and cultures as connected and integral to the mainstream culture of the United States. In the transformation approach the basic core and structure of the curriculum is focused on diverse and multiple concepts and perspectives. Historical units of study may include an examination of how racial and ethnic

groups participated in forming United States culture, rather than just those of the mainstream culture. Giving a more balanced treatment, transformative content integration allows students to see multiple perspectives represented, reduces stereotypes, and helps empower groups who have historically been subjugated. Challenges implementing this approach to content integration may include ongoing curriculum revision and staff development for institutionalization. The social action approach is similar to the transformation approach but goes beyond, including cultural critique and encouraging students to inquire into social problems and establish plans of action. For example, a class may investigate examples of prejudice within publications or their own school and take some collective action such as writing a letter to community leaders about how the issue may be resolved. Problems associated with this approach include the considerable amount of time to plan for such integrated learning as well as potential backlash from school staff or community members who might consider this focus controversial (Banks, 2002).

Nieto (1994) states that “multicultural education is not separated from education; that is, all education is by its very nature multicultural” (p.7). Utilizing case studies of four schools, she illustrates four levels of how schools may embrace diversity through their policies and practices. Similar to Banks’ (1989; 2002) dimensions of content integration, she describes teaching *tolerance* as enduring, but not embracing diversity, *acceptance*, as acknowledging difference but ignoring its importance, and *respect*, as a high esteem for difference and basing school practices around such difference. The last level, *affirmation, solidarity, and critique*, is concerned with equity and social justice utilizing differences among students and their families as legitimate catalysts for learning. Rather than avoiding the inevitable conflict that arises when examining differing values, students are encouraged to work through this challenge for powerful learning to occur. Nieto (1994) underscores the importance of this kind of learning:

If we believe that young people deserve to be prepared with skills for living ethical and productive lives in an increasingly diverse and complex world, then we need to transform schools so that they not only teach what have been called “the basics,” but also provide an apprenticeship in democracy and social justice. It is unfair to expect our young people to develop an awareness and respect for democracy if they have not experienced it, and it is equally unrealistic to expect them to be able to function in a pluralistic society if all we give them are skills for a monocultural future. (p.8)

Culturally responsive teaching can be described as pedagogy that embraces the strengths of ethnically diverse students such as their cultural knowledge, frames of reference, performance style, language ability, as well as prior experiences. In valuing these attributes, learning is not only more relevant and effective, but it is culturally validating and affirming as well (Gay, 2000).

Gay (2002) further posits that ethnically diverse students "have been expected to divorce themselves from their cultures and learn according to European American cultural norms. This places them in double jeopardy—having to master the academic tasks while functioning under cultural conditions unnatural...to them" (p. 114). She suggests that removing this burden is the task of the culturally responsive teacher, but teachers must be prepared for this during their teacher education program. Such programs would help teachers gain explicit knowledge about cultural diversity and learning styles, design culturally relevant curriculum, critically address how ethnic groups are presented in popular culture, and help teachers learn how to build classroom communities. Working from a critical and emancipatory perspective, Gay argues that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences and teachers need to be culturally prepared in order to create meaningful and effective learning environments for all students. While justice-oriented teaching questions how White cultural norms are promoted above others

as a means by which to maintain the status quo, more often than not poor performance of students has not been attributed to a mismatch between teaching practices and learning styles, or to the privileging of dominant group ideologies.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) offer their vision of a more significant and integrated approach to culturally responsive teacher preparation instead of what they see as a fragmented and cursory application in most education programs. The authors describe six characteristics, or strands, that may better describe the culturally responsive teacher. These strands include, gaining sociocultural consciousness, developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change, embracing the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching, learning about students and their communities, and cultivating the practice of culturally responsive teaching.

Sociocultural consciousness. Gaining sociocultural consciousness is described as a process by which teachers develop a heightened awareness and a profound understanding of power differentials within society and become critical of the inequitable access to power based on social stratifications within the dominant group and class hierarchy measured by wealth and income (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Shaped by life experiences and one's own access to power and their position within the stratification system, this process is described on a continuum from dysconsciousness to consciousness. Operating from a position of dysconsciousness, a teacher may be unreflective and unaware of differences in power, or how dominance is maintained through systemic discrimination. One example of this lack of awareness is the egalitarian ideal of meritocracy inherent within the United States. Many teachers have grown up socialized to believe the notion that schools equalize based on merit, or talent and effort. Rather than recognizing how schools

reproduce structural inequality, they subscribe to the purported fairness and neutrality that schools objectively identify students who deserve more benefits. Given the makeup of the teaching force, the difficulty in changing this mindset, or habit of mind, is understandable since the system most likely worked for them. Furthermore, Sleeter (2008) describes White teachers as not only dysconscious, but fearful and resistant to changing long-held beliefs. Sleeter (2001) describes research finding that “White preservice students interpret social change as meaning almost any kind of change except changing structural inequalities, and many regard programs to remedy racial discrimination as discriminatory against Whites” (p. 95). However, Howard (2010) urges “educators can ill afford to subscribe to the notion that mere coincidence explains the perpetual school failure of students of color” (p.99). For example, scholars such as Howard (2010) and Nieto and Bode (2011) describe how less than 50% of Black males graduate from high school and Latino and Black males represent the majority of individuals incarcerated “prompting some scholars to investigate the prevalence of a school-to-prison pipeline in the name of zero-tolerance policies” (Howard, 2010, p.149). Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest schools of education enlighten prospective teachers who bring little understanding of the operation of racism in schools and society, moving them toward consciousness. Research illustrating such changes in the “habits of mind” of teachers is limited and the connection to transformative learning theories represents a gap in the literature which will be elaborated upon further in this chapter.

Affirming perspectives. Villegas and Lucas (2002) describe the importance of developing an affirming attitude towards culturally diverse students as a counterpoint to the many deficit perspectives and theories in education. They underscore how teachers’ attitudes have consequences stating “teachers’ attitudes toward students significantly shape the

expectations they hold for student learning, their treatment of students, and what students ultimately learn” (p.37).

Cultural deficit theories have been conceptualized in several ways over the last century. The eugenics movement during the 1920s and 1930s offered a biological explanation of White superiority and reinforced racist views of students of color (Howard, 2010). The IQ theory of the 1960s and 1970s and its resurfacing as the Bell Curve in 1994 postulated that minority students and students of low socioeconomic status were genetically deficient and maintained a fixed intelligence (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Other deficit-based ideas point to a culture of poverty, deficient home environments, lack of motivation, and lack of parent involvement. Each of these views places the culpability of failure on students and families (Howard, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2011). Cultural difference theories shift this focus to school articulating disjuncture between home and school cultures, but often still recognize difference as inferior. Adding to the negative connotation of culturally diverse students are the many negative labels assigned them in education literature and research. These include terms such as “disadvantaged,” “semi-lingual,” “at-risk,” and “low-achieving,” among other terms. Focusing on what is lacking, teachers holding deficit perspectives view dominant culture as the legitimate and superior standard, and students who differ as needing fixing.

On the other end of the spectrum, teachers who hold affirming perspectives of students not only see validity in cultures varying from the dominant culture, but recognize the structural inequality of schooling such as the system by which property taxes contribute to segregated and poorly-funded schools, how such schools have difficulty attracting quality teachers, and how curriculum is often non-inclusive and disempowering. Affirming difference, teachers strive to add to, rather than replace students’ culture, and accept responsibility to teach them the skills to

operate within mainstream culture (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Delpit (2006) describes these skills as “gatekeeping points” or the cultural capital necessary to operate within a flawed system. She asserts “to imply to children or adults...that it doesn’t matter how you talk or how you write is to ensure their ultimate failure” (p.39) Rather than accepting this code passively, she suggests students should be encouraged to value their own language and cultural styles along with an understanding of how power operates within this country so they may be able to work to affect change.

Change agency. Beyond an awareness of the sociocultural factors at play within schools and society, Villegas and Lucas (2002) articulate teachers must work in active ways to promote greater equity. Emphasized as a responsibility of teachers, their role is defined within a moral sensibility. This view of teaching is consistent with critical pedagogy which rejects the view of teachers as technicians. Fullan (1993) also describes the concept of “change agency” as part of the moral purpose of teaching. He suggests four “core capacities” for change including “personal vision building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration” (p.12) and recognizes the importance of institutional support and development as well. However, he states that individuals and organizations must not wait for each other, but should work within their control while “looking for opportunities to make them connect” (p.12).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) place this strand on a continuum with teachers as technicians on one end and teachers as agents of change at the other end in order to emphasize how individual teachers may fall on many points of the spectrum in between these polarities. Teachers operating from the role of technician may lack understanding of the ways in which meritocracy favors certain groups of students while disenfranchising others. Uncritical of their work maintaining inequitable structures, they may passively teach skills and content reflective of

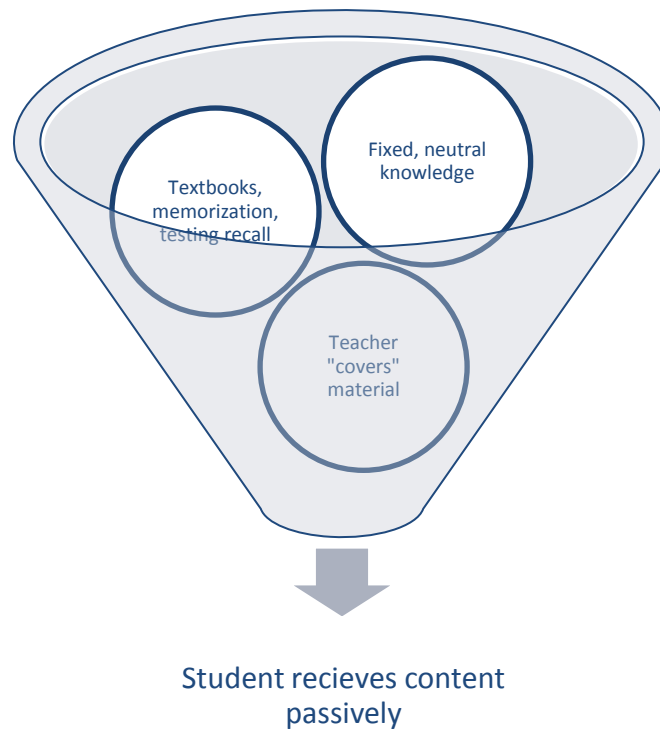
the dominant culture. Teachers who view themselves as agents of change are keenly aware of the ways in which schools are connected to society and also see them as sites for possible transformation. Teaching is more than the content of their particular field and/or grade level, but a political activity in the larger struggle for justice.

There are challenges in adopting this view of teaching. Cochran-Smith (1991) describes how in many teacher education programs technical aspects of teaching are emphasized over the epistemological, stating “the role of the teacher as agent for change is not emphasized, and students are not deliberately socialized into assuming responsibility for school reform and renewal” (p.285) and she posits, “teachers who work against the grain are in the minority” (p.283). She also notes how young teachers are often unaware of the political aspects of teaching. Villegas and Lucas (2002) cite the first years of learning to teach as a challenge. Other challenges facing teachers at all levels of experience include educational hierarchy and opposition to changes, insufficient time and opportunity to collaborate, a lack of understanding or empathy, and ultimately despair. Further, they write “most teachers who are inclined to work for change must educate themselves about the process and their role in it once they are teaching” (p.55). Villegas and Lucas argue schools of education might encourage change agency by promoting critique, but also by instilling in prospective teachers the belief change is possible evidenced by success examples.

Constructivist views of knowledge, learning, and teaching. Reflecting Western empirical traditions and behaviorist views of knowledge construction, transmission approaches to learning and teaching regard knowledge as fixed and neutral, and the teacher as the expert and conduit by which students receive this knowledge. Learning then, is passive (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) as illustrated in figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3

Transmission Approaches to Teaching



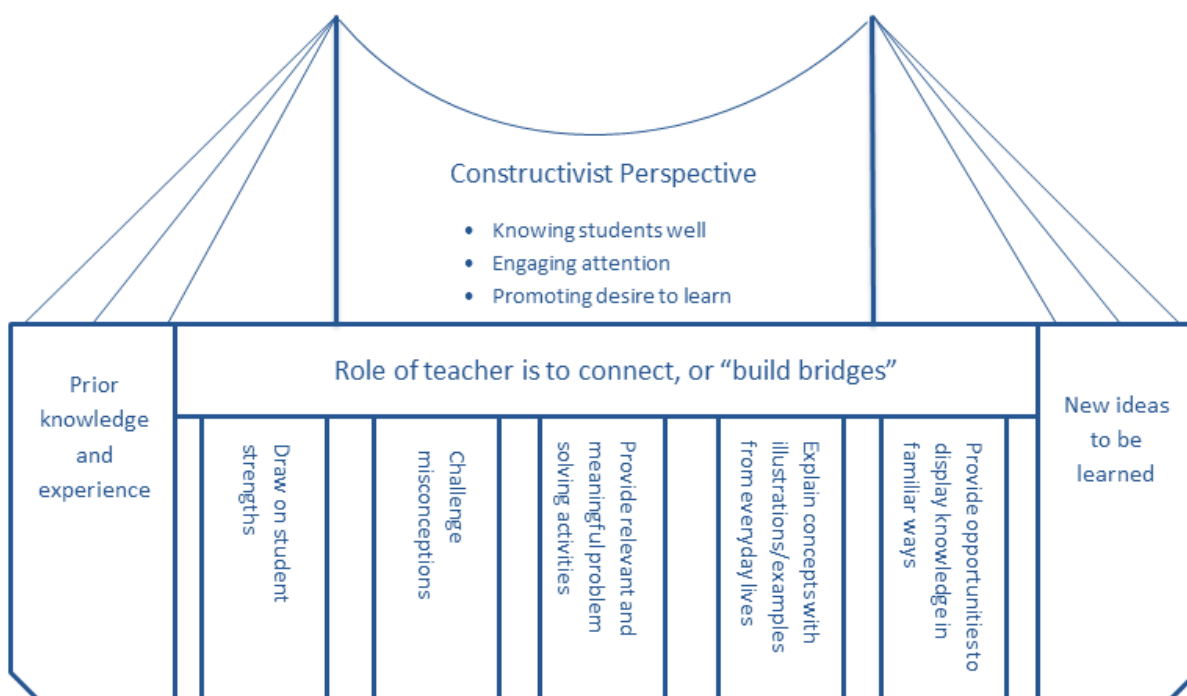
Transmission views of learning regard students as “empty receptacles” or vessels to be filled by the teacher who transmits or “covers” the content (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Freire (1970) describes this approach to teaching as a “banking” model of education in which students are viewed as empty vessels to be filled. Freire points out the oppressive nature of such teaching which reinforces myths, or aspects of the hidden curriculum, and uses rewards and punishment as motivation to learn. Instead, Freire suggests problem-posing education by which knowledge is constructed through teacher scaffolding, dialogue, and meaning-making from experience. Working from a critical and emancipatory paradigm, Freire, and other critical pedagogues view

constructivist practices as furthering students' acquisition of agency and shaping the larger social order (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; 2010; McLaren, 2014).

Constructivist views of knowledge construction, learning, and teaching view knowledge as laden with values which are influenced by frames of reference or individual perspectives. Learning is an active process by which students make meaning through social interaction. The role of the teacher is to help students develop an understanding of ideas purposely through activities which emphasize problem solving. This approach to teaching and learning is important for teachers who aim to teach in culturally relevant ways, because it recognizes differences among students as resources rather than deficiencies. Student-centered in their methods, teachers utilizing constructivist approaches continually adjust their plans through data gathering and varied assessment. Additionally, teachers must know their students well in order to “build bridges” connecting students' prior knowledge and experience and the new ideas to be learned. As illustrated in Figure 2.4, constructivist approaches to teaching engage the attention of students and promote a desire to learn (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Figure 2.4

Constructivist Approaches to Teaching



Content adapted from Villegas and Lucas, 2002, p.79

Knowledge of students, families, and communities. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that knowledge of students is not only important for building bridges to learning, but also for establishing relationships that connect them to school. This is important for students typically alienated by dominant culture since “because schools as institutions tend to devalue the ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking of these students, they send a message to the children that they are not valued by society” (p.80). Therefore, relationships with teachers who care may provide connections with school.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) describe the types of things teachers need to learn about their individual students in order to build bridges to learning. These are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

What Teachers Need to Know about Their Students to Help Them Build Bridges to Learning

Students' lives outside school:

- Family life: family makeup, immigration history, language use, mobility, educational history, child-rearing philosophy and practices, major activities, labor history, skills and knowledge used regularly.
- Social life: use of leisure time, favorite activities, language use, what students excel at, interests, hobbies, concerns.

Students' perceptions of school knowledge and belief in the potential of schooling to improve their lives in the future:

- Past experiences in school with subject matter and impressions of school knowledge derived from these experiences (e.g., interesting/boring; relevant/irrelevant; meaningful/meaningless).
- Trust that schools will improve their adult lives.

Students' relationships to subject matter:

- Experience of subject matter knowledge outside school.
- Preexisting knowledge and beliefs about specific instructional topics.
- Areas of potential conflict between students' cultural values and the cultural demands built into the various school subjects.

Community life:

- Demographic profile: economic makeup, racial/ethnic composition, linguistic makeup, patterns of language use, patterns of segregation.
- Formal and informal holders of power and influence.
- Available resources: businesses, institutions, agencies, people.
- Perceptions of school and school knowledge and participation in schools.

Source: Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.81

The authors argue that teachers need strategies to get to know their students since all prospective teachers will at some point have students who are culturally different from themselves. They argue direct experience with students' communities as key, and teachers "may find it helpful to see themselves as 'ethnographers'" (p.90). Villegas and Lucas list several strategies for learning about their students:

- Well-prepared visits to homes and interviews with parents or guardians
- Willingness to share about their own lives

- Talking with community members
- Attending community events
- Knowledge of agencies and resources available
- Volunteering in these settings
- Familiarity with local newspapers
- Familiarity with local businesses
- Learning from the students themselves about interests and concerns

Knowledge of students, their families, and the communities in which they live enables teachers to assist students in building upon concepts familiar to them and make relevant connections for learning. Villegas and Lucas argue that this might only be done authentically in the context of each of the other strands of culturally responsive teaching.

Cultivating Culturally Responsive Teaching through Transformative Learning

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) found that within the field of education, dominated by what they describe as mostly White middle class teachers, successfully educating low-income and children of color was a struggle. The first of the six strands for culturally responsive teaching Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest is worth examining more closely. They argue gaining sociocultural consciousness serves as a foundation upon which all other culturally responsive teaching ideologies may stand. Without an understanding about how social inequalities are perpetuated systematically, teachers will not be able to recognize the flawed nature of meritocracy, which works primarily for individuals already privileged. Additionally, without first examining their own sociocultural identity, Villegas and Lucas argue that teachers “will fail in their attempts to understand and respond to students who are socioculturally different from themselves, particularly when the students are from oppressed groups” (p. 23).

Given the statistics highlighting the growth in population of students of color, teachers would benefit from the development of sociocultural consciousness by first examining systematic racism. Tatum (1997) provides a look at the self-segregation that occurs within most racially mixed settings and offers a description of racial identity development. She asserts racism to be a *system* of advantage. Tatum's suggestions about ways to think and talk about race are often used for professional development courses addressing multiculturalism. Tatum provides a description of White privilege and systemic oppression illustrating the fact that prejudice and racism are often terms that are used interchangeably; however racism is actually a system of cultural messages and institutional policies that disadvantages people of color. McIntosh (1989) too, describes the nature of White privilege through the metaphor of a knapsack in her classic anti-racist text. White privilege is described as "invisible" because most White people do not have to think about or recognize the unearned privileges that they have simply because of the color of their skin. By describing 26 ways in which White privilege affects her life, McIntosh (1989) points out "conditions of daily experience which [she] once took for granted" (p. 11). Working from a critical perspective, McIntosh argues that systematic racism and White privilege must be acknowledged, or "unpacked," in order for social systems to be redesigned. Howard (2005) describes how modern forms of racism and collusion such as victim blaming, avoidance, and denial are destructive. For example, "Far too often, students from racially diverse groups have been told that race does not matter, and teachers have espoused their commitment to a colorblind ideology, which purports to render race a non-factor" (p.100).

This research is significant because it reinforces why a largely White teaching force must first address their own sociocultural consciousness and systematic advantages in order to teach in more culturally relevant and pluralistic ways (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Kegan (1994) writes that

“the powerful and the included make right and true, that which is merely familiar to them and make wrong and false that which is only strange to them” (p. 204). This statement has powerful implications for considerations of sociocultural consciousness within his developmental framework. Transformative learning theories acknowledge that the social world influences development. This is called “enculturation,” and Kegan (1994) states, “everything is evaluated in terms of how closely it reproduces the standard with which we have identified truth, reality, how life is” (p. 207). Understanding the tenets of culturally relevant and related pedagogical models and their connection to critical pedagogy theory may be a transformative process of coming to terms with socially constructed world views. Accepting that, an understanding of the developmental aspects of this type of adult learning may inform how pre-service and in-service teachers could be supported in developing sociocultural consciousness necessary for culturally relevant pedagogy.

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. Jack Mezirow’s (1978; 1995; 1997) transformative learning theory proposes that adults learn when their basic assumptions are challenged through critical reflection and communicative learning. While the goal is not transformation itself, Mezirow (1995; 1997) asserts the purpose of adult education is to foster transformative learning in order to help learners become autonomous. Mezirow’s (1978) original research studied women returning to community college after a long hiatus. He described a ten phase process of transformation common to their experience.

Mezirow (2000) asserts much of what we know is contextual. Transformative learning theory explains the process by which adults reflect on experiences, assumptions, and beliefs in order to gain new interpretations which guide future actions. Mezirow (1997; 2000) posits that adults have acquired a *frame of reference*, or a body of experiences defining their life world.

Frame of reference is comprised of two aspects, a *habit of mind* and a *point of view*. A habit of mind is a habitual way of thinking, or assumptions, such as ethnocentrism. Resulting from a habit of mind is the expressed point of view which is subject to continual change. Unless critically reflected upon, points of view can be automatic since they are situated within our frames of reference. When differing viewpoints call our frame of reference into question, this can be understood as a distortion or personal attack; however under ideal conditions, transformative learning may occur. Mezirow (2000) states, "Insofar as experience and circumstance permit, we move toward more dependable frames of reference to better understand our experience" (p. 19). Such transformations are described as "epochal," and sudden, or "incremental," comprising of several changes in point of view that eventually transform a habit of mind.

Mezirow (2000; 2009) suggests that generally transformation occurs through a series of ten phases, beginning with a *disorienting dilemma*, followed by several steps of critical reflection through rational discourse, and culminating in a plan of action for new roles. A disorienting dilemma, or the trigger for transformational change, may result from a sudden life crisis or several smaller transformations over time (Mezirow, 1995). Mezirow (1997) states, "We do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference" (p.7). Thus, a disorienting dilemma is followed by the process of critical reflection, or self-examination of assumptions. This process is suggested as an ideal purpose of adult learning. Through rational discourse, or communicative learning with others, an adult learner may reflect on their experiences and explore new interpretations. Through dialogue with others, competing interpretations are analyzed and the more dependable are appropriated. Finally, a course of action involves several steps of trying out new roles and gaining confidence

with the new perspectives. Through the process of transformative learning, learners become more autonomous thinkers, weighing evidence, and yielding better judgment (Mezirow, 2000).

Transformative learning theory suggests outcomes support goals of critical pedagogy, such as autonomous thinking for participation in democracy. Mezirow (2000) states:

Transformation theory suggests that transformative learning inherently creates understandings for participatory democracy by developing capacities of critical reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions that support contested points of view and participation in discourse that reduces fractional threats to rights and pluralism, conflict, and the use of power, and foster autonomy, self-development, and self-governance—the values that rights and freedoms presumably are designed to protect. (p.28)

On the other hand, Mezirow's theory is critiqued for suppressing the radical nature of such critical praxis. Collard and Law (1989) suggest that Mezirow fails to adequately address contextual issues in learning and the structural inequalities within education. By not emphasizing the political nature of education, the authors suggest some detachment on the part of Mezirow. Further, they raise questions about how adult educators might recognize learners' assumptions, identify greater critical awareness, and the social origins of both.

In a rejoinder to critics of transformation theory, Mezirow (1992) states that adult learning theory cannot be limited to critical reflection in regards to social oppression. Interestingly, he notes that learners may decide against changing behavior in their process of transformative learning; however “personal transformation leads to alliances with others of like mind” (p.252). Taylor (2000) describes transformative learning as an “emerging learning theory” (p.287) and queries whether or not age is a factor in transformation. Further, since most studies have been conducted retrospectively, he calls for more longitudinal studies of transformation.

Harris, Lowery-Moore, and Farrow (2008) describe a teacher preparation program at a Texas university in which specific strategies promoting transformative learning among students are utilized. One route to teacher licensure is their post-baccalaureate program in which certification candidates participate in a classroom teaching internship in conjunction with coursework and monthly seminars at the university. Modeled after Mezirow's (2000) ten step transformative learning process, teacher candidates participate in roundtable discussion under the guidance of a mentor teacher or professor. Coming to the seminar with actual classroom experience, the teachers participate in forums to self-reflect on the challenges they experience. Sharing similar stories with each other in groups, the teachers listen to each other, and collaboratively problem-solve to determine courses of action. Following group dialogue, the teacher candidate plans a course of action for dealing with their challenge and returns to the classroom to implement the plan over the next month. The authors argue that this support process fosters leadership and a commitment to teaching in schools with diverse and high poverty student populations. By utilizing specific strategies aimed at transformative andragogy such as rational discourse and critical reflection, teachers may better integrate their learning into their practice. A critique of this research may be that specific case studies were not utilized in support of the research. Had the authors followed Taylor's (2000) suggestion for longitudinal research regarding transformative learning participants could have been followed over the course of their experience better supporting findings.

Mezirow (2000) suggests individuals may learn to recognize multiple points of view and understand that experiences depend on individual perspective and the conditions under which experiences occur. However, Kegan (1994) writes "This kind of learning cannot be

accomplished through informational training, the acquisition of skills, but only through transformational education, a ‘leading out’ from an established habit of mind” (p. 232).

Kegan’s Constructive Development Theory. Robert Kegan’s (1982; 1994) constructive developmental theory proposes that adults change and evolve over the course of their lives. His theory extends upon Piaget’s stages of development into adulthood. He offers six stages or “orders of consciousness.” Change for adults is more about a change in their meaning-making structures than learning new information and skills. Kegan’s (1994) research suggests that such change is necessary for the mental demands of the twenty-first century. Transformation involves shifting that which is *subject* to *object*, from one order to the next. Subject can be understood as those unquestioned assumptions that have a hold on an individual. These are unquestioned assumptions that an individual holds true about the world. Object is “those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon” (p. 32). Kegan’s constructive developmental theory offers educational leaders a lens through which to look at how professional development is offered and how it might facilitate “transformation” of participants. Kegan’s broad theory of adult development is applicable to the field of education because professional development that is developmentally appropriate will provide teachers and other educational leaders opportunities specifically designed to meet their individual needs. Although Kegan’s stages are not to be taken hierarchically superior to each former stage, the progressive stages enable adult learners to be more reflective and interconnecting. The connection to critical pedagogy such as culturally responsive teaching is that by supporting the growth of teachers and educational leaders, professional development that honors developmental growth of its participants will encourage consideration of conflicting ideals and perspectives.

Kegan (1994) describes his theory as “constructive” because it acknowledges that people construct their realities and “developmental” because people evolve in increasingly complex ways. Kegan argues that the contradictions of modern life require “a new conception of consciousness thresholds individuals may have to reach in order to satisfy contemporary expectations of love and work” (p. 11). These new dialectical ways of thinking allow us to emerge from being “in over our heads” and acquire higher levels of consciousness in our public and private lives. Such changes in meaning making systems are an ongoing process that occurs naturally as well as in response to limitations within current meaning making systems. Development occurs when an individual is faced with a more complex way of understanding themselves in relationship with the holding environment, or social world. Successive orders become more complex and previous ways of knowing can be reflected upon (McCauley, 2006). Although, generally speaking, people do not regress, Eriksen (2006) states “some objectors indicate that people are not consistent in their meaning-making systems across life circumstances, that people may operate from different stages when in different life domains” (p. 296).

Kegan’s (1982; 1994) third through fifth orders of consciousness, or stages, focus on adult learning. In stage three, the “Interpersonal Balance” (1982), individuals are able to think about what they want, separate from themselves, and consider it among other things. This stage is marked by inferences and generalizations. Individuals operating from this way of knowing appropriate their morals and what they know to be true, from some form of reference. They have internalized the values of their culture or community and may be unsettled by conflicting ideas. Opinion is based on the opinion of others and individuals conform to judgment to help define who they are. According to Kegan (1994), most adults operate from this way of knowing within

Western culture. Stage four, the “Institutional Balance” (1982), is the “self-authoring” stage. At the third level authority was governed by the individual, but now at the fourth level the individual is not defined by others. The individual operating at this way of knowing can consider what authority says, but ultimately they are not as concerned about how others perceive them. Kegan (1994) argues that modern demands of life require people to operate from this way of knowing. However, according to Eriksen (2006), at best only 30% of adults reach this stage. Individuals operating at stage five, or the “Inter-individual Balance” (1982), hold their identity as object, but are not prisoner to their own identity. They see the complexities of life and become open to other possibilities. They do not see conflict in contradictions, but seek out contradictions as possibilities for growth and connectedness. Kegan (1994) suggests from his longitudinal work that this way of knowing rarely develops before the age of 40. Such dialectical thinking is the pinnacle of adult development. Furthermore, utilizing subject-object interviews and random sampling procedures, he states “one-half to two-thirds of the adult population appear not to have fully reached the fourth order of consciousness” (p. 191).

There have been several critiques of Kegan’s (1982) original work. Operating as part rejoinder to these criticisms, Kegan’s (1994) work recognizes feminist critiques that women are often socialized into third stage interpersonal characteristics, and men into fourth stage institutional characteristics valuing autonomy over community. Such socially constructed gender role perceptions are traditionally Western and may inadvertently place men and Western values into positions of developmental superiority.

Eriksen’s (2006) position that people operate from different stages in different circumstances suggests individuals may have a higher comfort level within in one life situation such as their field of expertise, and operate from the fourth stage; while in situations they feel

less comfortable and familiar, they may operate from an earlier stage. Additionally, new experiences or the start of a new work setting can limit an individual's level of consciousness. Stress and anxiety are also factors limiting one's order of consciousness. Such examples "counter Kegan's conceptions of a person reaching a level of meaning making that accounts for all areas of life" (Eriksen, 2006, p. 296).

Kegan's model offers a lens through which to recognize the development of an individual within a particular context or "holding environment" which may or may not support growth (McCauley et al., 2006). Kegan is interested in changes in people's meaning making systems. This change in epistemology is a transformative type of learning that expands upon, while incorporating one's previous levels of meaning making. Kegan (2000) suggests "thus genuinely transformational learning is always to some extent an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavioral repertoire or an increase in the quantity or fund of knowledge" (p. 48). This stands in opposition to the idea that learning is about filling a vessel, ideology also rejected by critical pedagogues (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010). Instead, one's meaning-making system is actively transformed while never completely leaving behind other ways of knowing.

Eberly, Rand, and O'Connor (2007) discuss how dispositions promoted by critical pedagogy may have developmental implications. The new National Board for Professional Teaching Standards requires teachers to demonstrate certain dispositions such as value and commitment; however, demonstrating these dispositions often focuses only on surface behaviors. Using Kegan's (1982; 1994) developmental theory, the authors illustrate case studies of teaching candidates reflecting on open-ended teaching cases focused on multicultural conflict. Eberly, Rand, and O'Connor (2007) posit that challenges stemming from this type of conflict provide the opportunity for transformative learning. Findings indicated students responded to the cases while

functioning at Kegan's (1982; 1994) third stage. The authors wrote "students were not focused on explaining or ameliorating the social structures that create these relationship dynamics" (p. 34). They argue that when students begin to transition to the fourth stage, they recognize systemic oppression and social justice issues emerge. An implication for this research indicates that teacher educators could potentially utilize similar case analysis in order to address the developmental stage of students. This could facilitate better preparation of learning tools that develop meaning-making systems, or the essence of suggested teacher dispositions.

Kegan (2000) states "adult students are not all automatically self-directing merely by virtue of being adults, or even easily trained to become so" (p. 67). The implication is that faculty should not expect fourth order requirements in college, but learning self-authorship should be the central purpose of higher education. Kegan's longitudinal work with a sample of graduate students found that most participants entered college operating at the third stage or in transition to the fourth, and left college operating at the transition between stages three and four or were operating at the fourth stage order of consciousness (Lahey et al., 1998).

These theories of adult learning and development provide implications for schools of education and in-service teacher professional development suggesting learning opportunities that foster transformation of participants.

Schools of Education: Implications and Challenges

Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest schools of education model culturally responsive teaching practices themselves as well as foster the development of teacher educators in the same ways as were described for teachers. Table 2.2 displays an outline of the classroom practices and field experiences they promote for educating prospective teachers.

Table 2.2

Practices Promoting the Development of Culturally Responsive Teachers

Classroom-Based Practices:

- Creating classroom communities of learners
- Developing dispositions, knowledge, and skills of culturally responsive teachers:
 - Reflective writing
 - Simulations and games
 - Exploring family histories
 - Articulating sociocultural affiliations
 - Exploring personal history and development
 - Learning about the history and current experiences of diverse groups
 - Accounts of successful teaching and learning in diverse settings
 - Teaching cases

Field Experiences:

- School and community visits
- Service learning
- Studies of students, classrooms, schools and communities
- Practica in diverse contexts with responsive teachers

Source: Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.115

Villegas and Lucas suggest these approaches while highlighting the institutional context necessary for sustaining such efforts. In addition to stated missions and goals, institutions will be committed to increasing diversity within the college or university, carefully recruit students into teacher education, including prospective teachers of color, foster culturally responsive teaching across fields within the university, collaborate with school districts, and invest in faculty development.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) collaboration with successful teachers of African-American students offers similar suggestions for the preparation of teachers:

- Recruit teacher candidates expressing a desire to work with African American students
- Provide experiences to help in-service teachers understand culture

- Provide opportunities to critique the system and choose roles as change agent or defender of the status quo
- Require prolonged immersion in African American culture
- Provide opportunities for observation of culturally relevant teachers
- Prolonged student teaching in controlled settings (pp.143-148)

While the implications for transformation and development of culturally responsive teachers have been illustrated, many challenges exist. For schools of education, simply the term “social justice” can have political implications. Holst (2010) describes the requirements of universities seeking accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the political controversy regarding use of the term “social justice” within teacher education programs. He provides a background about how NCATE’s president dropped the term “social justice” from its glossary in 2006 when it was under review by the Department of Education (DOE). After that, they were issued a five year renewal as a Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency for teacher education programs. They later went on to frame their commitment to social justice only within the terms of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act articulating, “When the education profession, the public, and policymakers demand that all children will be taught by well-prepared teachers, then no child will be left behind and social justice will be advanced” (NCATE, as cited in Holst, p. 250). Holst goes on to situate the ramifications of these seemingly trivial semantic arguments by describing how his own university felt compelled to drop the term from their mission statement, and ultimately lost their doctoral program focusing on critical pedagogy. This is a clear example of Minnich’s (2005) concept of “circular reasoning.” She says “past judgments become so

enshrined in definitions, in circular fashion, they turn around to justify continuing the old exclusions (p.108).

Such debates within the field of teacher preparation programs raise important questions about the purpose of education. Questions are important for educators who do not wish to maintain inequitable practices for themselves and their students. The education offered to teachers is a representation of the values of the school and its governing bodies. If a population of teachers who question the status-quo and employ critical thinking skills is desired, schools of education might implement these suggestions. Critical thinking must be made clear as a goal of education and be an integrated component of learning if critical pedagogy and addressing sociocultural issues within the field of education is espoused. In a quantitative study, Neumann (2010) looked at teacher preparation core requirements of 302 universities in the areas of social foundations of education and multicultural education courses. Using online course descriptions, he found that such courses are not strongly represented in pre-service education programs, which suggests that "many new teachers are beginning practice with little understanding of social, democratic purposes of education, and cultural diversity and its implications for schooling" (p. 14). This critical inquiry adds to the discourse suggesting necessary skills for "quality" teacher education and the ongoing debate about theoretical versus skill training in schools of education. A critique of this research may be that Neumann only looked at course listings and descriptions. It may be more telling to examine course syllabi, since often course descriptions are general and course content varies among individual professors. Neumann was reflective about this limitation and suggests future research including this approach.

An additional challenge described by Camp and Oesterreich (2010) is that despite good intentions beginning teachers have to teach in uncommon ways, many novice teachers succumb

to pressures to teach standardized curriculum and eventually leave the field altogether. They illustrate an idealistic case study of a new teacher teaching critical pedagogy despite the politics of conformity within her school. This article provides a background of the model teacher represented along with her educational training experience, and describes her methods in teaching uncommonly for social justice, understanding of power, democracy, and multiculturalism. The teacher describes her perceived role as an educator by stating “[Students] need to be able to identify justice and injustice and I think that is a big role as teachers is to empower students to identify justice, injustice, *and then what do we do about it*” (p. 23). Similarly, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal case study which examined the development of teacher candidate beliefs and practices during their pre-service period and first two years of teaching. This research addresses the criticisms of the social justice agenda in teacher education programs. All participants in the study attended a social justice oriented program and the transformative paradigm of the authors is made clear when they write, “social justice is an agenda that not only does not shortchange attention to students' learning but in fact makes enhancing students' learning and their life chances its core commitment” (p. 349). The authors argue that such “good and just teaching” is essential for social change and democracy. Although the authors found that it may be unrealistic to expect activism early in teachers' careers, they concluded that “addressing equity and social justice at the individual level may be an important starting point for new teachers” (p. 373).

The implications of these studies indicate that despite efforts of schools of education to instill a social justice orientation within pre-service teachers, many teachers are unable to continue such practices or articulate critical or social justice intentions. The authors argue that schools of education need to offer more authentic classroom experiences, teach about the culture

within schools their students will one day teach, and instill in future teachers the ability to teach using inquiry and constructivism. I would argue that perhaps by using adult learning theories and approaches, a sense of critical consciousness may be fostered within prospective teachers.

Professional Development: Implications and Challenges

According to Hill (2007), “when teachers enter the workforce, their education is far from complete” and “the first years of teaching are themselves powerful instructors, as teachers gain familiarity with the students, materials, and content that they teach” (p. 112). Depending on the specific state, permanent teaching certifications are no longer offered and teachers are charged with various professional development requirements to maintain a valid teaching license. Some states have a mandate in which teachers are required to earn professional development hours, points, or license renewal credits in order to obtain teaching license recertification (Torff & Sessions, 2008).

The International Technology and Engineering Educators Association (ITEEA) describe professional development as a “continuous process of lifelong learning and growth that begins early in life, continues through the undergraduate, pre-service experience and extends through service years” (ITEEA, as cited in Loveland, 2012, p.26). However, according to Hill (2007), professional development workshops are often short and these short or mini-professional development sessions have little effect on teaching and ultimately learning. Interestingly, Torff and Sessions (2008) cite a national survey in which 1027 science and math teachers reported aspects of effective professional development (PD):

PD was rated most effective when it (a) was sustained and intensive rather than short-term, (b) was focused on academic subject matter with links to standards of learning, (c) provided teachers opportunities for active learning, (d) afforded opportunities for teachers

to engage in leadership roles, (e) involved the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, and (f) was meaningfully integrated into the daily life of school.

(Garet et al., as cited in Torff and Sessions, 2008, p.124)

According to the research conducted by Torff and Sessions (2008), results indicated that teacher attitudes related to professional development could be categorized into three phases: increasing (during the first two years of teaching educators are interested in professional development), decreasing (during years three through nine of a teaching career a gradual decline occurs regarding an interest in professional development), and lastly, leveling out (occurring in teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience, an unchanging attitude toward professional development was noted). Conclusions indicated that professional development was most effective for teachers within the first four years of teaching; however why this was the case is unclear. The authors posit that as teachers gain more degrees and knowledge in the field, they may grow less responsive to professional development. This is consistent with Harwell's (2003) contention that when professional development content and strategies contradict participant beliefs, professional development ultimately fails since teachers will return to previous teaching methods. This further exemplifies a need for professional development which directly addresses teachers' experiences and assumptions early in their careers.

According to Bruch et al. (2008), "NCLB mandates that schools that fail to meet targets for student test scores implement professional development programs for their teachers" (p.1). The authors assert that this approach to school reform is a naïve attempt at utilizing "inputs" such as professional development, as a means by which to promote high achievement. Smith and Rowley (2005) describe the prevailing view of professional development as a means by which for teachers to attain minimum competency rather than gain renewal in their field. They assert

that the first approach “portrays the current teacher workforce as deficient” (p.128). However, Smith and Rowley suggest that effective professional development can improve teacher commitment and reduce turnover rates, which will ultimately ensure the success of reform efforts (p.129).

In reviewing the literature describing aspects of “best practice” in teacher professional development, many of the suggestions align closely with the tenets of constructivism. Constructivist practices include meaning-making from experience, perspective transformation, and reflective practice (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). In a study examining learner-centered principles within professional development, Polly and Hannafin (2010) state that “the primary goal of professional development is to improve student learning” (p.559) and they suggest teachers be involved in the selection of professional development content and have access to ongoing support. By involving teachers in the selection of the content of their professional development, they are better able to take ownership. Finally, Harwell (2003) describes three important components for effective professional development which include: context, content, and process. Harwell suggests professional development should be relevant to the setting by addressing a common sense of need for change, including support from administration, and identifying gaps in student achievement. Professional development should be based on strategies with a high probability of affecting student learning and should be delivered using these strategies. Additionally, professional development should deepen teachers’ knowledge of the subject, support interaction with master teachers, and extended time should be allotted for teachers to implement strategies and receive feedback.

These studies support Knowles (1997) humanistic theory of andragogy, or adult learning. He argues it is important for adults to understand the purpose of learning something since they

need to see possible applications for the learning and often have a great deal of influence over what they will learn. Adult learners need be shown how to navigate the new information and be involved in the process of designing and implementing the learning tasks. The learning topic should be connected to prior experiences since adults bring a wealth of experience to any learning situation. Since adults have influence over what they learn, motivation is important to consider with adult learners. By providing the purpose for learning and by satisfying a particular need, the incentives to learn are greater. Finally, adult learners need assistance in overcoming obstacles and transforming their unexamined beliefs about learning. Involvement in the evaluation process as well as feedback further facilitates learning.

With these components of effective professional development in mind, Kose and Lim (2010) argue that it may be beneficial to differentiate professional learning content and embed teaching for social justice within professional learning. Their quantitative research study examined teachers' beliefs about transformative professional learning across five content areas including English language learning, special education, students living in poverty, students of color, and teaching for social justice. Using a survey instrument the researchers sought to objectively examine critical and emancipatory issues within education. They found that practitioners designing professional development opportunities must intentionally promote and assess transformative beliefs and practices in order to be effective if transformative teaching is the desired outcome. Additionally, Kose and Lim suggested further research linking transformative professional learning and student outcomes.

Institutional Context Necessary for Transformation

According to Ospina and Schall (2001), "Drath argues that any group of persons involved in accomplishing something collectively face three crucial tasks: setting direction to the work,

creating and maintaining commitment to the work, and adapting to the challenges that appear on the way” (p. 12). Senge (as cited in Lunenburg, 2011) argues that schools can be revitalized when traditional and long-held assumptions about the “industrial age” (p.3) nature of schooling are confronted. This includes the traditional conceptions of leadership as well as practices within schools. By enacting the principles of a “learning organization,” school leaders may create learning opportunities that are continuous and emerge from school initiatives.

Lunenburg (2011) describes such adaptable organizations as “learning organizations” (p. 1). These learning organizations embrace the principles outlined by Senge (as cited in Lunenburg, 2011), which include systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, and mental models. In order for an organization to learn, all parts need to be recognized as connected and influential to each other. Individuals within the organization need to be committed to a shared vision for the future and pursue collective learning opportunities so new mental models, views, and behaviors may be nurtured.

These crucial tasks underscore what Seiling and Hinrichs (2005) describe as the role of leaders as “sensemanagers,” or facilitators of effective sense-making. They state “a sensemanager engages the collective creativity of the organization’s members to be mindful, make sense of the situation or issue, and be accountable to each other to construct their new future” (p. 82). Recognizing their power to enable or stymie the conditions for sense-making and constructive accountability, school leaders have the ability to promote creative problem-solving and a renewed commitment to the field of education. In the creation of disequilibrium it is important to recognizing that this work is not about accepting or rejecting changes, and does not mean everyone comes to agreement. However, through constructive forms of accountability,

reform efforts have the capacity to become meaningful to individuals within an organization sharing a vision.

A lingering question is that if teachers do not see the need for learning culturally relevant practices, they will most likely not seek this type of professional development out independently. Blummer and Tatum (1999) assert “While change can happen ‘from the bottom up,’ our experience is that these grass root efforts are very difficult to sustain without central administrative support. The impact of committed leadership at the top of the organization cannot be underestimated” (p. 266). Harwell (2003) also suggests that context is one component for effective professional development. It should be relevant to the setting by addressing a common sense of need for change, which includes support from administration as well as identified gaps in student achievement. Blummer and Tatum (1999) suggest that central to the task is the understanding that districts need to be committed to the cause. Anti-racist learning can be a developmental task. Ignorance about the impact of race on teaching and learning is evident in the literature suggesting teachers are ill-prepared to teach diverse students. Among many people, discomfort and defensiveness impede conversations about the influence of race in the classroom. Blummer and Tatum suggest that in addressing this barrier, leaders will need to make their vision clear, but allow individual districts, schools, etc. to implement changes as they see fit. Effective professional development requires substantial time and follow-up. For positive changes in professional development, there will need to be a financial commitment as well. Blummer and Tatum describe this common vision as mandating the destination while individuals choose the paths by which to get to that destination. This allows for more “buy in” to the change proposed. Leaders will also need vision to continue the effort even if it takes years to see changes.

Wood, Smith, and Hicks (2005) utilized a case study approach in their summative evaluation of the Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) professional development program in the Elk Grove, California school district. Over the course of two years, the external evaluation team conducted interviews and focus groups, observed SEED groups in action, and documented aspects of its curriculum. The resulting retrospective case study provides stories of the program's change efforts through participants' own words, and lessons for readers regarding program impacts.

Focusing on its social justice orientation, the SEED program evaluation highlights changes in teacher thoughts, classroom practice, curriculum, school culture, and student learning and school experiences. Initial evaluation reports were discussed with SEED leaders as a way of member-checking and emergent themes highlighted the transformative nature of the program. Implications for program improvement efforts included the areas of program sustainability, facilitation, participation, and impact. Through the rich data collected through interviews and observations of those involved in the program, evaluators noted that in order for SEED work to continue, more centralized support from district leaders would be necessary, and the facilitation of the individual SEED groups would need to be implemented in uniform ways. Remaining questions included a concern whether the program reaches individuals who might most benefit from SEED or whether participants are individuals already committed to issues of social justice. Finally, and most astutely, the evaluators urge for better documentation of how the SEED ideas are translated into classroom practice, underscoring the naïve assumption that teachers automatically translate learning into practice (Wood, Smith, & Hicks, 2005).

Never static, schools are faced with competing contextual factors that have the power to silence creativity or generate opportunities for more authentic types of learning. According to

Porter & McLaughlin (2006), culture and climate can be described as “the behavioral norms reflective of an organization’s culture, or the prevailing values of a given culture or climate” (p. 563). Often “historically and socially constructed,” Bloor and Dawson (1994) describe the organizational culture as “difficult to change” (“Introduction” para. 1). In an era of standardization and high stakes testing, an atmosphere emphasizing rote methods of instruction may prevail. Although the pursuit of high test scores is difficult to question, the approach for achieving such excellence may be narrowly defined, assuming such excellence may only be achieved through sameness. Minnich (2005) reflects that “equality, one of the basic political principles and promises of the United States, has long been confused with sameness” (p. 179). Equality of teaching methods is a mystified concept and the possibilities for equitable instruction are limited with this narrow definition equating high expectations with standardization. Seiling and Hinrichs (2005) suggest “effective sense-making and responding appropriately to external demands is foundational to the sustainability of an organization” (p. 82). Demands placed on school leaders such as managing, overseeing operations, as well as improving teaching and learning are developmentally advanced tasks. Kegan and Lahey (2001) suggest that professional development for leaders should address the contradictions between leaders’ intended goals and their behaviors. Through Kegan and Lahey’s “Immunity to Change” model, school leaders may be supported in their psychological growth. Kegan and Lahey describe how competing commitments and big assumptions stand in the way. They write:

Resistance to change does not reflect opposition, nor is it merely a result of inertia.

Instead, even as they hold a sincere commitment to change, many people are unwittingly applying productive energy toward a competing commitment. The resulting dynamic

equilibrium stalls the effort in what looks like resistance but is in fact a kind of personal immunity to change. (p. 119)

Opportunities for growth and a common sense of purpose may assist schools in becoming a “learning organization” (Lunenburg, 2011) and thereby overcoming the immunity to change.

Within such “learning organizations,” a common sense of purpose and the opportunity for individuals to step up and assume leadership roles may facilitate or inhibit change. Ospina and Schall (2001) describe relational dialogue, which can be understood as the socially constructed vision of leadership. Rather than an individual leader or group gaining influence from personal traits or by virtue of their role, leadership happens via collaboration and a sense of common purpose while maintaining diverse perspectives. This view of leadership echoes Northouse’s (2012) democratic leadership style and Western’s (2008) description of a new discourse calling for dispersed leadership, or what he refers to as eco-leadership. Rather than an individual or group gaining influence through power, leadership is collaborative and emerges from a shared purpose.

Instead of thinking of leadership as an individual, Lichtenstein et al. (2006) describes leadership *events*. The authors describe “complexity leadership theory” or “the role of leadership in expediting those processes in organizations through which interdependent actions among many individuals combine into a collective venture” (p. 2). Recognizing the complex nature of social interactions, leadership is understood as an event rather than an individual. People may step up to be a leader or a follower depending on the situation and more formal leaders may create the conditions for this process to occur. This perspective expands creative possibilities and the potential for positive organizational change, while at the same time recognizing the diversity and complexity of social environments. When such democratic conditions facilitate the direction

of teachers' work, a commitment to more equitable teaching may be supported by schools at the organizational level.

Cultural proficiency within organizations. Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) have developed a framework or continuum that many individual school districts have adopted as way to understand changes towards cultural proficiency both individually and within organizations. The authors describe “cultural proficiency is an approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity” (p.3).

While not a prescriptive list, it serves as a model for changing an organization based on some of the same principles associated with culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching such as sociocultural consciousness and affirming perspectives. The continuum, illustrated in Table 2.3, describes changes mandated for tolerance which include destruction, incapacity, and blindness, and changes chosen for transformation which include precompetence, competence, and proficiency.

Table 2.3

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Destruction	Incapacity	Blindness	Precompetence	Competence	Proficiency
<i>Eliminate differences.</i>	<i>Demean differences.</i>	<i>Dismiss differences.</i>	<i>Respond inadequately to the dynamics of difference.</i>	<i>Engage with differences using the essential elements as standards.</i>	<i>Esteem and learn from differences as a lifelong practice.</i>
The elimination of other people's cultures	Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture	Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures	Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups	Using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and organizational practices	Knowing how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments; advocating for others

Source: Nuri-Robins et al., 2012, p.7

Their essential elements for competence and proficiency include assessing the cultures present within the organization, valuing such diversity, managing the dynamics of difference such as conflicts and issues, adapting to diversity by adopting policies that support inclusion, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. While cultural “competence” may be met using these elements, the goal is to move beyond being simply competent and towards proficiency. Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) describe this process as “esteeming and learning from differences as a lifelong practice” (p.5). The recognition that personal and organizational work in this area is an ongoing process is discussed in the health care and social work literature as well, and scholars (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Ortega & Coulborn-Faller, 2011) have begun to problematize the term “competence” offering “cultural humility” as a more appropriate end goal. Cultural humility is described as a lifelong process by which individuals (in these cases physicians and social workers) commit to ongoing self-evaluation, work to redress inequalities, and advocate for the populations with whom they work. The reflective nature of this learning is emphasized as part of the growth process in a study looking at the cultural immersion experience of a group of social work graduate students (Shuldberg et al., 2012). A cultural humility approach to learning has the potential to support teachers in their work as allies. Remaining open to the reevaluation of ideologies that have been produced and conditioned through their socialization, teachers view their work as an ally as ongoing.

Beyond Awareness: Towards Sustaining and Equitable Pedagogies

Scholarship in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy is ever evolving and most recently Paris (2012) and Paris and Alim (2014) have suggested “culturally sustaining pedagogy” which “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as

part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p.95). This ideology respectfully builds upon the work of predecessors such as Ladson-Billings’ (1994;1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, by suggesting that students’ cultures “should be creatively foregrounded rather than merely viewed as resources to take students from where they are to some presumably ‘better’ place” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p.87). Ladson-Billings (2014) supports such critique and reworking of her theory as a process of growth. She suggests this is particularly valuable in light of the often superficial interpretations of her work “dulling its critical edge” (p.77).

Paris and Alim (2014) see this approach as important and timely given recent educational policies such as Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB2281) also referred to as the “Ethnic Studies Ban.” They describe such legislation as “assimilationist and antidemocratic” policy (p.88). The law targets the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) and Cammarota (2014) suggests this policy is “the adoption of a colorblind ideology” limiting forms of knowledge deemed acceptable within schools (p.80). Colorblind practices are argued to be a new form of racism and collusion because they castigate racialized terminology, ignore or deem irrelevant the experiences of racialized groups, and perpetuate inequality by maintaining “Whiteness” as the normative criterion (Cammarota, 2014). In his study examining counter-narratives of students within the TUSD’s MAS program, Cammarota (2014) argues that since segregation has been eliminated in legal terms, individuals holding colorblind ideologies believe racism to be eliminated as well. However, policies such as HB2281, driven by such colorblind approaches, render Latina/os “even if they are U.S. born...illegitimate or un-American” and alienated simply for “speaking Spanish or identifying with their culture and history” (p.84).

Gorski (2014) suggests that beyond cultural competency, or even proficiency, educators must strive for “equity literacy,” pondering whether we have lost sight of inequities such as racism which underscore gaps in educational opportunity. Equity literacy is a term coined by Katy Swalwell (2011) advocating that students have an understanding of what she calls “facts of strife” (para. 13) or inequities present in American society, such as wealth distribution by race. Gorski (2013) defines equity literacy “as the skills and dispositions that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers and, in doing so, sustain equitable learning environments for all students and families” (p. 19). Additionally, educators are charged with creating and sustaining equity in schools. Part of this task is advocating for change and teaching critical thinking around issues of race as well as other forms of oppression.

Such calls to educators to actively counter practices of deculturalization and other hegemonic operations, suggest individuals and organizations move beyond awareness and towards action and ally-ship. Love (2000) suggests this role as “liberation worker,” central to the development of a liberatory consciousness. Similar to the development of sociocultural consciousness described by Villegas and Lucas (2002), the end goal, accountability and ally-ship enables one to “practice intentionality about changing the systems of oppression” (p.471). The movement from awareness to ally-ship can be understood as a continuum of understanding and action towards working for social justice. This process is illustrated within a cultural proficiency framework in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5

Action Continuum within a Cultural Proficiency Framework



Adapted from the works of Love, 2000; McClintock, 1990; Nuri-Robins et al., 2012;

Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997

Necessitating such action are the changing demographics of the population of the United States. Teachers who recognize a plurality of valid modes of existing and learning empower their students' capacity and membership in a rapidly changing and diverse society. Furthermore, Paris and Alim (2014) state:

To offer youth full access to power, then, we must understand that power is now based in part on one's ability to communicate effectively to more than 'standard' English monolinguals/monoculturals, who are becoming a shrinking share of the U.S. population. (p.89)

To take a neutral stance is to make a choice to operate against educational justice and work against equity.

Chapter Summary

While there are mixed opinions regarding the political nature of schooling, critical pedagogy recognizes that oppression exists within the field of education. McKenzie & Scheurich (2010) articulate Giroux's belief that "because of the corporate onslaught, schools are, or are increasingly, *no longer* public spheres where democracy is taught, learned, and enacted, the implication being that in the past schools fulfilled this critical social role" (p. 433). The history of public education in the United States is stained with inequity. So while some may argue the historical naivety of critical pedagogues, the gap in educational opportunity persists. In some of the literature (Gay, 2000; 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995; Nieto, 1994; 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), teachers have been charged with embracing a culturally responsive approach to addressing this gap. However, the theorists and studies discussed in this review of the literature indicate the developmental challenges inherent to changing personal belief systems, let alone in transforming classroom practices. Jack Mezirow (2000) states, "The broader purpose, the goal, of adult education is to help adults realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous learners—that is, to make more informed choices by becoming more critically reflective as 'dialogic thinkers'" (p.30). Additionally, Kegan's (1982; 1994) developmental theory offers teacher educators a lens through which they might tailor their curriculum to facilitate such goals. If more than half of the adult population is "in over their heads" (Kegan, 1994), then professional development facilitating developmentally appropriate growth opportunities may foster changes in belief systems regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. This literature review provides a context for understanding how the process of

learning to teach in culturally responsive ways is not simply the acquisition of new skills, but an ongoing process of changing one's ways of thinking and critically examining the common educational practices that privilege the dominant group in society. A remaining area of inquiry involves examining how experiences, education, and professional development have influenced individual teachers' perceptions of this approach to teaching. The next chapter will outline the research methodology utilized in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”

- John Dewey, 1929

Chapter Overview

This research sought to examine elementary teachers’ perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching. A collective case study was designed to explore how teachers’ experiences, education, and professional development affect their perceptions. Data gathered included two semi-structured interviews with each participant, artifacts and documents, discussion of a teaching case, and a written reflection. The following research questions were explored utilizing the research design:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers’ experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions?

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study and includes the following: a) rationale and description of the research approach; b) description of the research setting and participants; c) overview of the methodology; d) procedures for data analysis; e) trustworthiness criteria; f) ethical considerations; and g) limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Rationale for Constructivist Research Design

According to Mertens (2010) constructivist researchers believe “that reality is socially constructed” (p. 16) and there can be multiple mental constructions, which at times may be in

conflict with one another. Growing out of the philosophy of *hermeneutics* (study of interpretive meaning and understanding), the constructivist researcher's goal is to understand the multiple, socially constructed meanings of knowledge. They attempt to understand the world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. However, more researchers are beginning to focus on an examination of how these varied constructions may generate more critical questions examining assumptions and empowering the least powerful. According to Patton (2002) constructivism is rooted in sociology and its central questions include "How have the people in the setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, 'truths,' explanations, beliefs, and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?" (p.132). Consistent with constructivist research methodology, this study relied on the participants' point of view by asking them to respond to questions in interview and written formats and share artifacts they deemed important to their practice. Data quality and ethical considerations for the constructivist researcher include maintaining research rigor, trustworthiness and authenticity, and a balanced representation of the multiple stakeholders. Additionally, researchers working within this paradigm express their own position in the research since they "acknowledge that their own background shapes their interpretation" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9). While quantitative methods are valued for their generalizability, qualitative methods are useful for "depth and richness of description" (Duenkel, 2004) as well as the human face they bring to claims of knowledge. This depth of understanding usually involves a much smaller sample and therefore reduces the generalizability.

Case Study Methodology

Case study research focuses on developing an in-depth description and analysis of one or more cases within a *bounded system*, such as a setting or context, over time. There are three

types of case studies (Creswell, 2007). The first type is called *instrumental case study*. The focus is on an issue or concern, and the researcher uses one case to represent the issue. The second type is called *collective case study*. The focus is also on an issue or concern, but the researcher uses multiple cases to represent the issue. The idea is that maximum variation is best to represent diverse cases and multiple perspectives. The third type of case study is called *intrinsic*, and the focus is on the case itself (Creswell, 2007). This study may be considered a collective case study since eight teachers were described and analyzed within one school district in order to better understand their perceptions of the need for culturally responsive teaching.

Drawing from the disciplines of psychology, law, political science, and medicine, case studies aim to provide an in-depth understanding of a case. In this type of research, an event, program, activity, or one or more individuals may be researched (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) posits “well-constructed case studies are holistic and context sensitive” (p.447). In other words, researchers collecting qualitative data should strive to analyze the phenomenon as a whole taking into account the social context. It may be hard to generalize from one case to another since contexts will vary. Thick description and considerable detail is provided so that the reader can determine the extent to which the findings from one case may be applicable in their own context. However, Stake (1995) suggests “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Case study researchers collect multiple and extensive forms of data which may include interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts.

In case study research data is analyzed through the case description and themes which emerge from the case, as well as the themes across cases. Themes may be *holistic* (about the entire case) or *embedded* (about a specific aspect of the case). The written report is a detailed

analysis of one or more cases. These might report the meaning of the issue of the case or the case as an unusual situation, and typically utilize narrative, tables, and figures in the presentation (Creswell, 2007).

Advantages and Limitations of Case Study Research

There are several limitations to case study research. Using this approach a researcher must identify the case and choose the bounded system. This may be challenging if there are several possibilities. Another challenge may be the choice to study a single case or multiple cases. The analysis of only one case might diminish validity in the eyes of some consumers of research. While on the other hand, the analysis of multiple cases might give the perception of “generalizability,” but may not allow for as in-depth a study (Creswell, 2007). However, Stake (1995) considers this “a distinction between what knowledge to shoot for” suggesting that while quantitative researchers may be searching for explanation, qualitative researchers search for “understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (p. 37). Findings may develop in unexpected ways and therefore the interpretations of the researcher are central. These “assertions” as Stake puts it, are personal and come forth through the interactions between the researcher and participant within a constructivist epistemology.

Description of the Research Setting

The setting for this research study is Algonquian Public Schools (APS), a large, suburban public school district located in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. One of the largest districts in the nation, the student population is comprised of 183,269 students. There are 196 schools overseen by the district and 38 are classified as Title 1 schools receiving federal funding based on the percentage of low-income students in attendance. The student population is diverse with a student makeup of 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 19.5% Asian, 10.3%

Black/African American, 23.6% Hispanic/Latino, 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 4.9% Two or More Races, and 41.4% White (APS, 2014b). There are translations of district documents available in several languages including Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. There are 49,295 students receiving free and reduced meals (26.8%), 29,723 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students (16.2%), and 25,425 students receiving Special Education Services (13.8%) (APS, 2013a).

Having no personal or professional contacts within APS, I sought permission to conduct research by applying to the district's Internal Review Board. Valuing research, the district grants permission to researchers pursuing topics related to district beliefs, mission, and vision. These include, but are not limited to: (a) instruction and learning, (b) closing the achievement gap, and (c) meeting the needs of special student populations such as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and "at-risk" students (APS, n.d.). Additional conditions for conducting research included providing reciprocity to the district through a summary of the research findings as well as updating an assigned district sponsor of my ongoing progress. This contact served as a *gate-keeper* (someone with power within the organization to help gain access) as I sought entry to specific schools inviting teachers to participate in the process (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Of the 139 elementary schools in the district, 14 school principals were contacted via e-mail requesting permission to attend faculty meetings to briefly solicit teachers for participation (see Appendices B and C). Of the principals contacted, ten declined to participate or did not respond to my initial e-mail request. Given the volume of requests principals receive as well as the workload of staff and teachers, the response rate of four out of 14 was not surprising. Mertens (2010) also describes the difficulty in negotiating entry to a research site since administrators may be wary of research that has the potential to reflect badly on their school. After some initial

difficulty gaining entry to schools, the district advisor I was assigned offered assistance, by introducing my request to several principals. Additionally, I explained that my research was being sponsored by the Office of Language Acquisition and Title 1 within the e-mail to principals and simply asked principals to forward the attached letter of invitation (see Appendix D) on to teachers so I might take as little of their time as possible.

In choosing schools to invite for participation, I sought elementary schools across geographic areas within APS, aiming to include a range of schools with differing socioeconomic and racial populations as well as a range of performance outcomes and goals. Of the four schools that accepted my request and were included in this research, two are Title 1 funded schools and one is also a Priority School, or a school receiving “additional support in order to meet their benchmarks for student achievement” (APS, 2013c). The following table provides an overview of the student demographics and supplemental programs of each school included in this study.

Table 3.1

School Demographics

School Pseudonym	% Asian	% Black (Not of Hispanic Origin)	% Hispanic	% White (Not of Hispanic Origin)	% Other	% Limited English Proficient (LEP)	% Free/Reduced-Priced Meals	Title One
Jaime Escalante Elementary	10.91	27.92	46.88	10.78	3.51	56.75	71.17	Yes
Emma Hart Willard Elementary	31.64	8.4	14.73	39.32	5.91	23.55	22.72	No
Temple Grandin Elementary	18.25	23.84	19.55	31.84	6.52	32.77	40.78	No
W.E.B. DuBois Elementary	6.80	32.45	42.72	15.12	2.91	38.83	65.19	Yes “Priority School”

Adapted from “Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs” (APS, 2013d).

Description of the Research Participants

The criteria for selection of participants included teachers currently working in an elementary school setting. Although participants were all “highly qualified” teachers, differences among them included age, race, length of teaching experience, grade level, level of education, and professional development completed. A sample of volunteers were recruited and selected within the guidelines for participation. Eight teachers across four different elementary schools within the same district were selected for participation. Letters of invitation were forwarded on to elementary staff members by their principals. Nine prospective participants contacted me directly via e-mail to set up a brief telephone screening interview. All participants were informed of the study aims and criteria for participation. Initial interviews were arranged during the screening call if participants met the criteria and agreed to participate. One prospective participant was not included since she contacted me after the participant recruitment period had ended. All sixteen interviews were conducted between December, 2013 and April, 2014.

Table 3.2

Participant Demographics and Professional Information

Participant Pseudonym	Sex	Age Range	Race	Degree	Current level teaching	Years Taught
Danica	F	25-29	White	M.Ed.	Pre-k	3
Courtney	F	25-29	White	M.Ed.	Lower elementary	6
Josephine	F	40-49	White	Bachelors	Lower elementary	23
Matilda	F	40-49	White	M.Ed.	Upper elementary	5

Peyton	F	25-29	White	M.Ed.	Special Education	2
Noelle	F	25-29	Black-Haitian	M.Ed.	Lower elementary	3
Leigh	F	25-29	White	M.Ed.	Upper elementary	3
Alex	F	Under 25	White	M.Ed.	Lower elementary	1

The selection of participant volunteers presents a limitation which is elaborated upon here and noted later in the study limitations. Given that the entire sample was self-selected, all participants were female, most were early in their career, and all but one was White, a discussion of how representative they are compared to elementary teachers across the country is warranted.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES, 2009), 84.8% of elementary teachers are female, while only 15.2% are male. Approximately 50% of elementary teachers are in their thirties and forties, about 30% are fifty or older, while only 18.4% are under the age of thirty. All participants in this study were female, and six out of eight participants were under the age of thirty, while only two participants fell into the age category most representative of elementary teachers across the United States. This research sample is less representative in the category of years teaching experience as well. While about 42% of teachers in the United States have less than ten years teaching experience, seven out of eight participants fell into this category. And as discussed in chapter one, 82% of teachers within the United States are White while only 18.6% are teachers of color. Seven out of eight of participants were White, while only one was Black.

Overview of the Methodology and Research Process

This collective case study focused on eight elementary school teachers from four schools within one large suburban public school district in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. Seeking to understand teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching, two research questions were explored to gather the data needed for the study. This data fell into four categories: (a) experiences, (b) education, (c) professional development, and (d) culturally responsive teaching. This data included:

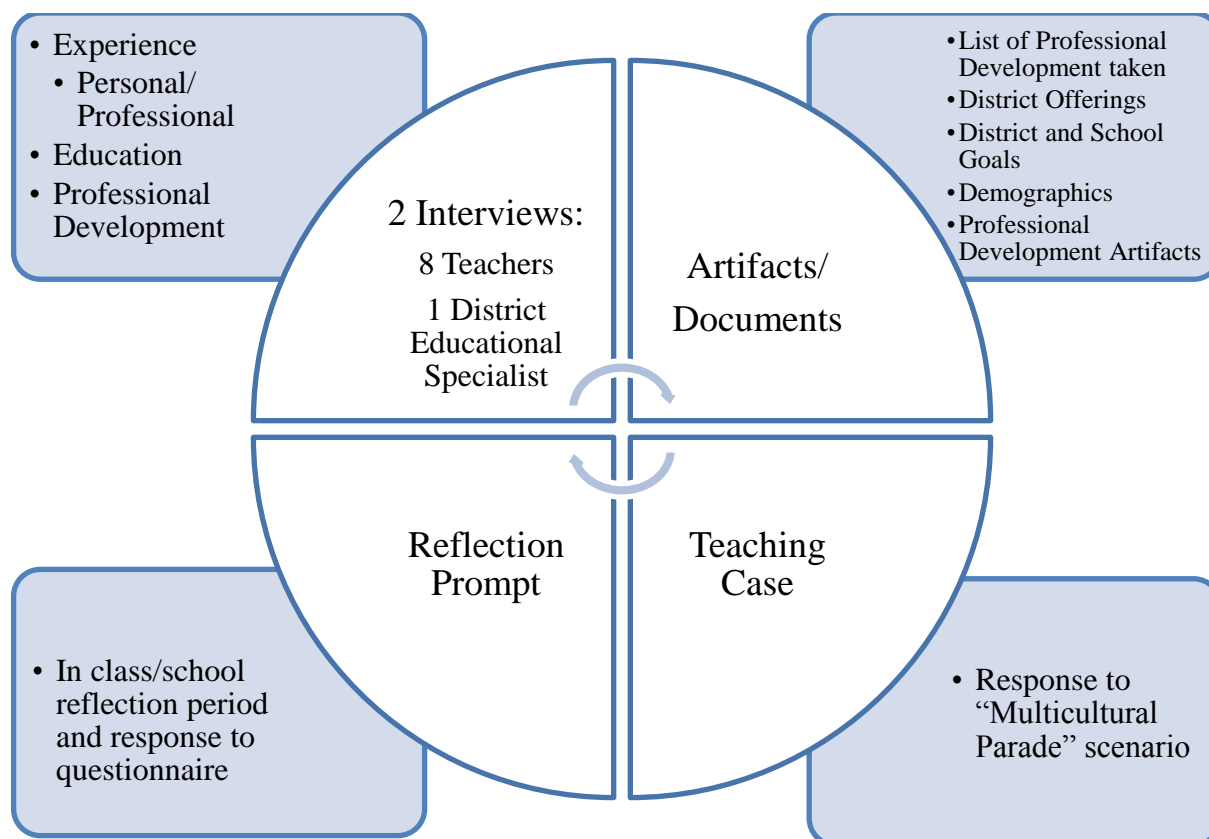
1. Interviews
2. Artifacts/Documents
3. Teaching Case
4. Reflection Prompt

Data were collected in four phases to triangulate sources and gain a fuller understanding of the concepts studied. Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was pilot tested, adapted, and expanded for this study. Following their feedback on the interviews, the same pilot participants were asked to participate in testing subsequent data collection tools including the case scenario and written reflection prompt in order to further refine all data collection instruments.

The following figure provides a summation of the data collection process.

Figure 3.1

Overview of Data Collected



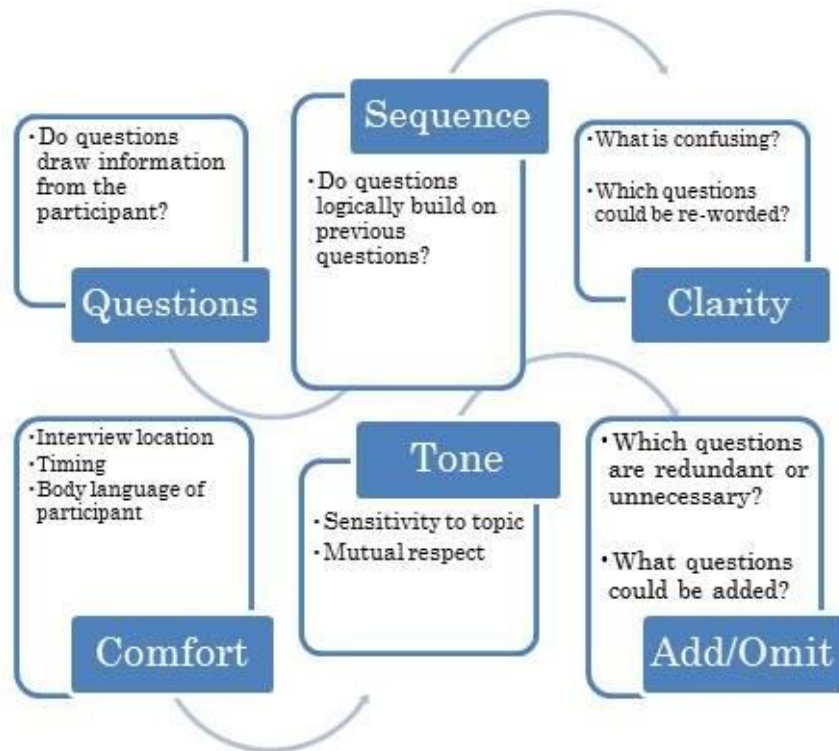
Data collection phase 1: Interviews. According to Patton (2002) interviewing allows “us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341). The assumption that researchers might find meaning by gathering the perspectives of others is consistent with the qualitative constructivist approach to research made explicit in this study. Patton (2002) asserts that the quality of interview data is determined greatly by the interviewer. Advantages to this approach include greater detail in the responses and interviewer control over types of information discussed through the ability to ask specific questions. Limitations of the interview approach include the fact that information is filtered through interviewer's summary of interviewee's views, or as Charmaz (2000) states, “data remain reconstructions” (p.514). Additionally, participants may have varying levels of comfort affecting how articulate or forthright their response, and often inexperienced interviewers find conducting interviews difficult (Creswell, 2008).

Pilot study interview. The interview utilized in this study was piloted in February, 2013 with the intent of refining the protocol and soliciting feedback regarding participants' interview experience. Given my geographic location as well as the time limitations of the pilot study, a convenience sample was utilized in the selection of four participants. The initial two participants were former professional contacts and acquaintances, and were solicited for participation via e-mail and social networking formats. This sampling allowed for participant selection across two different school contexts, public and charter, within one urban district in the western region of the United States. In order to recruit two more participants, a snowball sampling strategy was employed. The initial two participants were asked to refer other teachers with whom they worked. The criteria for selection of participants included teachers currently working in an elementary school setting. Although pilot participants were all female elementary school teachers, differences among them included length of teaching experience, grade level, and school context. Two participants were in their twenties and early career teachers, while the other two were in their forties and had at least ten years teaching experience. Since participants were asked to provide insight about how to improve the interview tool, member-checking throughout was utilized. Additionally, reciprocity was provided with the presentation of a gift card for the purchase of classroom supplies at the end of the interview and participants were offered a summary of the findings. The interview ranged from two to three hours with each participant, were conducted in person, and recorded electronically with the consent of the participant.

Along with the research questions, I utilized the following framework to test the usefulness of the interview tool.

Figure 3.2

Framework for Pilot Interview Analysis



The interview data was analyzed and refined resulting in five summary categories which help explain teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching along with how teachers' beliefs, education, and school climate might affect those perceptions. Their perceptions fell into one or more of the following categories: (a) responsibility to students, (b) support and leadership, (c) experience and transformation, (d) critical mass of supporters, and (e) White privilege. Additionally, several findings related to the effectiveness of the interview protocol emerged. The interview questions drew ample information from participants and it was determined to be best suited for two meetings. Several specific questions and terms needed to be clarified, such as autonomy, social justice, and equity. Further, additional probes were added to the final protocol.

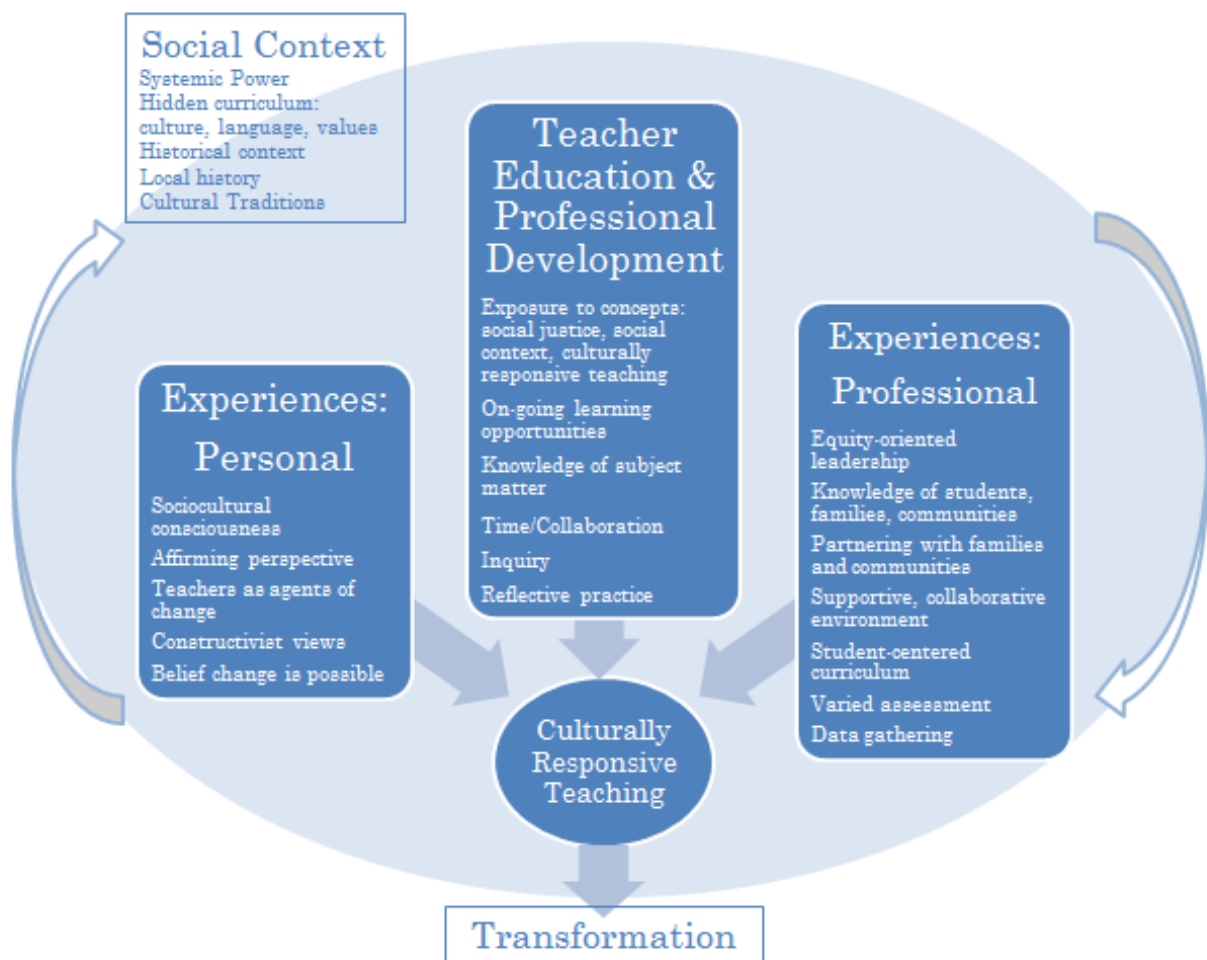
Dissertation interview. With the guidance of my adviser and doctoral committee, I used the categories developed from the conceptual framework to further refine the interview protocol I utilized in the pilot study (see Appendix F). Interviews were arranged to accommodate participant schedules and were conducted in public settings of the participants' choosing such as their classroom or a local coffee shop. All interviews ranged from approximately 90 to 120 minutes, were conducted in person, after school hours, and were recorded electronically with the consent of the participant. Participants were interviewed twice since the pilot interview was determined to be too long for one interaction, and subsequently more questions were added to both interview protocols to garner more dialogue regarding issues of race and class. The first interview addressed teacher beliefs, education, professional development, and school context. This first interview allowed me to develop a rapport, getting to know the participants, and their perceptions of teaching, their class, and their school setting, before moving to the second interview that delved into perceivably more sensitive topics including race and class. The second interview specifically addressed culturally responsive teaching and included a teaching case scenario that teachers were asked to reflect upon during the first part of the interview. Developing rapport initially was important to address one of the limitations of interviewing, the forthrightness of responses. As Patton (2002) suggests, "Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment" (p. 366).

Each interview was semi-structured, since the interview guide was intended to cover specific topics and included potential probes that may have been useful as the interview progressed. However, the sequence and specific wording of questions remained flexible as the conversation dictated. This approach provided the flexibility to respond to logical gaps as they arose (Patton, 2002).

Specific questions were designed to encompass the four categories of inquiry according to the research questions and conceptual framework illustrated in figure 3.3. These included (a) teachers' experiences, both personal and professional, (b) teacher education, (c) professional development, and (d) culturally responsive teaching.

Figure 3.3

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework



While most questions were generated from the conceptual framework developed from the review of culturally responsive teaching literature, a final question was included at the end of all interviews asking if participants would like to add anything or if the interview had them thinking

about anything they would like to discuss. Patton (2002) describes this technique as “in the spirit of emergent interviewing” and states that interview data may be richer with such an approach allowing participants to have the final word (p.379).

In addition to the 16 participant interviews, my district sponsor, an educational specialist, was interviewed via telephone. Questions were asked in regards to the professional development offered in the district, initiatives related to culturally responsive teaching, and the inception of a new professional development course then in its pilot phase, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the context of the research.

Data collection phase 2: Artifact/Document Review. Several types of private artifacts and public documents were included in the analysis of cases. These included artifacts selected by participants that related to their teacher education and/or professional development completed. Prior to the initial interview, participants were asked to bring an artifact related to a professional development they had completed that had a lasting impact on them personally or professionally. Participants chose artifacts that reflected “good” professional development or what they considered to be most useful and relevant to their teaching. Prior to the second interview, participants were asked to bring an artifact specifically related to diversity, whether from their teacher education program, professional development, or school and teaching context. Examples included books, handouts, flyers, staff notes, pictures, professional development curricula, and lessons created by participants.

Other documents collected included a comprehensive list of professional development completed by each participant, published district course offerings dating back one year, and published documentation of district and school goals, initiatives, and participant demographic

data (See Appendix G). A document summary form was created to uniformly collect information about all artifacts for review and analysis (See Appendix H).

According to Creswell (2009) there are several advantages and limitations to documents. While they may represent data in the participant's own language or represent something significant to participants, "not all people are equally articulate and perceptive" (p. 180). Convenient for researchers since they can be accessed any time, document materials may not always be complete or authentic, and at times protected information may be difficult to access. Participants in this study shared a range of useful artifacts and documents that allowed me to gain more insight about the education and professional development experiences they described as "best."

Data collection phase 3: Teaching Case. A teaching case may also be thought of as a case study. In the context of this research, a narrative was utilized during the second interview to facilitate discussion around a real world classroom situation. Often case studies are used in programs of learning to facilitate discussion-based learning. By using this same technique during interviewing, I was able to elicit participants' wisdom as they reached their own conclusions about a challenging situation faced by the teacher in the case (Husock, 2000).

Prior to submitting the research proposal for IRB reviews, Paul C. Gorski, a professor at George Mason University, and his co-author, Seema G. Pothini, were contacted to request permission to utilize a teaching case from their text, then in press, entitled *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice* (2014). Permission was granted and I was offered several examples that were most applicable to the elementary setting. A case entitled, "Multicultural Day Parade" (p. 52) was chosen for participants to read and respond to at the onset of the second interview (See Appendix F).

The case describes a dilemma faced by veteran teacher, Ms. Morrison, during a multicultural event involving the entire school. Students were instructed to bring in ethnic clothing, or what she called “costumes,” they may have had at home so they could showcase these as they participated in a cultural parade through the school. Ms. Morrison brought in a kilt to share with her class as an example, however on the day of the event, two girls, Emily and Keisha, brought in a soccer uniform and a favorite sweat shirt and jeans. Despite their protestation that those clothes represented their culture, Ms. Morrison did not allow them to participate in the parade telling the girls that their clothes were “everyday clothing.” Later, she questioned her decision, but worried what other teachers and students might think if she allowed the girls to participate. Issues related to the case include socially constructed concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture, how diversity is often integrated in superficial or trivial ways, concepts of alienation and inequity, as well as student identity (Gorski & Pothini, 2014).

After reading through the teaching case, teachers were asked to give their initial thoughts about the scenario. Many participants were able to immediately identify problems they saw, however many were also thoughtful about how there was ambiguity in the case in terms of what was right or wrong. Gorski and Pothini (2014) suggest this is the point, “rather to muddle through the gray areas by considering all that makes them gray” (p. 7). The subsequent conversation with participants included looking at the various perspectives, considering the challenges and possible alternatives. This process allowed me to better understand their perceptions of the concepts central to this case in a way that went beyond merely a general interview question. While I had considered conducting classroom observations in the early stages of planning the methodology, many colleagues suggested the limitations of that given my topic of study such as inauthenticity, since participants would know they are being observed. Rather

than seeking to judge participants' application of culturally responsive teaching, I am seeking to discover their perceptions or attitudes and what shapes these. The use of this teaching case allowed me to gain understanding of these in an unobtrusive way (Creswell, 2009). With that being said, there are still limitations to this approach. Again, participants may have been inauthentic in their responses if they thought there was indeed a correct answer. Additionally, when removed from the situation, what teachers propose as alternatives may not be what they actually do in practice.

Data collection phase 4: Reflection Prompt. Yin (2014) states “specific information that may become relevant to a case study is not readily predictable. As you collect case study evidence, you must quickly review the evidence and continually ask yourself why events or perceptions appear as they do...judgments may lead to the immediate need to search for additional evidence” (p. 73). It became clear during the piloting of the interview protocol that the process of participating in the interview led participants to think more about the concepts we discussed. Several articulated how they felt affirmed or inspired to understand the concepts better. In developing the interview protocol further, the following reflection prompt (See Appendix F) was added to the end of the second interview for participants to complete over the two to three weeks concluding the interview:

Describe an example of when you were able to teach or respond to a situation in a culturally responsive way over the last two weeks in your own classroom or school setting. Your examples may be broad, including anything from lesson planning to your interactions with students, parents, or colleagues. If you do not have an example, that's okay, but why do you think there were no examples during this period? What were the challenges you experienced? (Interview 2)

The prompt asked them to reflect for a period of two weeks and then respond to me in writing. The data collected from this task allowed me to better understand their various definitions of culturally responsive teaching as it applied to their teaching and school setting. Once all reflections were collected, they were analyzed individually and collectively to understand the varied and common themes. These findings were shared with participants to build consensus and probe their thinking further.

Patton (2002) states “Interviews are interventions” and describes them as a “reflective process” that “can be change inducing...or not” (p. 405). While not the primary intention of the research, this change inducing process may be considered an ethical challenge. On the other hand, researchers operating within a constructivist paradigm argue that research is the co-construction of knowledge. Mertens (2010) describes it as an interactive process with both the researcher and participant influencing each other. Furthermore, she posits the constructivist writings on ethics are moving closer in line with the transformative paradigm, borrowing from feminist theories and addressing social justice between the inquirer and their participants as well as from the research. With this in mind, in my member checks with participants I included the following questions:

- *As a result of participating in this study, has anything has changed in your teaching?*
- *As a result of participating in this study, what has triggered further reflection?*

Procedures for Data Analysis

This dissertation research aimed to address the following research questions utilizing a general inductive approach to analysis:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching?

2. How do teachers' experiences, education, and professional development affect their perceptions?

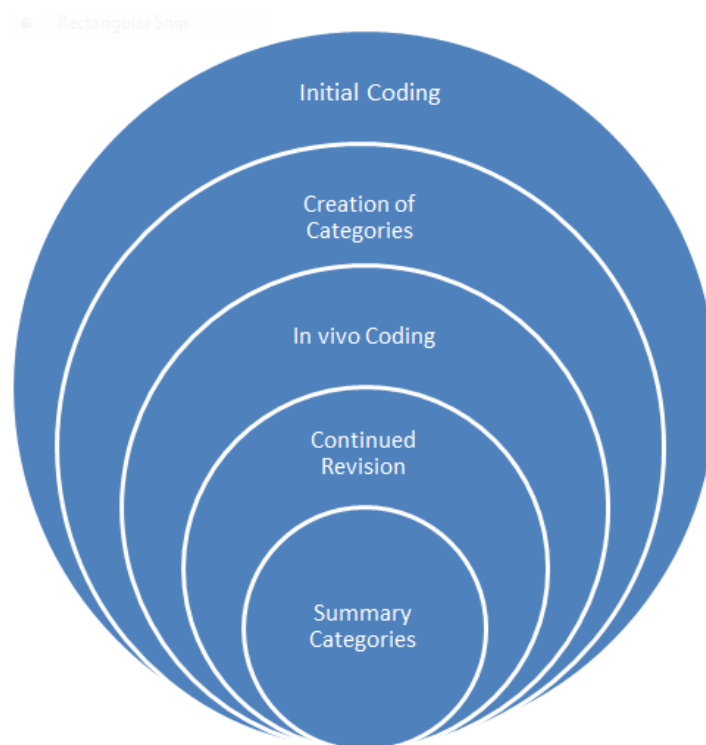
General Inductive Analysis

According to Charmaz (2000), “the rigor of grounded theory approaches offers qualitative researchers a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts” (p. 510). Often the approaches to such forms of qualitative data analyses are not given specific labels, but may be otherwise categorized by what Thomas (2003) calls a “general inductive approach” (p. 2). Utilizing such an approach to data analysis allows “research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p.2).

Figure 3.4 provides an overview of the inductive coding process.

Figure 3.4

Overview of General Inductive Analysis Approach



Immediately following interviews with participants, field notes were drawn up, recordings were listened to multiple times, and data were transcribed and formatted uniformly. Given the small sample size and various sources of data, I chose to analyze each by hand. I made this decision since the data were manageable and this process would allow me to remain close to the data (Creswell, 2008). I used color coding, cutting, and pasting to divide the text into parts during analysis.

During the initial coding phase, interview transcripts were read several times to develop a general understanding of each case. Creswell (2008) describes this as “preliminary exploratory analysis” (p. 250). I was able to get a general sense of the data as a whole, add thoughts to my field notes and research journal, as well as memo ideas in the margins of the transcripts, documents, and artifacts. Saldana (2013) describes this option for a first step in analysis as “Initial Coding.” He suggests no specific formula, but rather describes this as a starting approach by which you “reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of your data and begin taking ownership of them” (p.100). While some tentative codes may be proposed during this phase, it is the interpretation and analytic memos that are most critical.

Next, categories were created using the research aims and conceptual framework as a guide. This type of “structural coding” (Saldana, 2013) “applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question” (p.84). Best suited for semi-structured interviews, this process of coding also organizes and categorizes segments of data to be compared for similarities and differences. While deductive in nature, this step comparing interview data to an existing framework, allowed me to categorize my data for further analysis.

“In Vivo Coding” was the next step in analysis. Saldana (2013) describes this form of inductive coding as appropriate for studies honoring the voices of participants. The phrase “in vivo” itself means “in that which is alive” (p. 91) and is appropriate for a process which uses meaning and phrases derived from the actual interview text to offer new insights. When reading through interview transcripts and reflection prompts, this process allowed me to be attuned to salient words and phrases that seemed to best describe participants’ views and meanings. I revised data further by looking for contradictions and combining similar categories. Ultimately, my intent was to create three to eight summary categories assessed to be the most important (Thomas, 2003; Creswell, 2008). Saldana (2013) describes this as the process by which the researcher winnows down the many codes, or makes interpretations of participant meanings. This organized presentation of essential meanings is then elaborated upon through “rich written description” (p. 176).

The general inductive analysis yielded the identification of five summary categories or overarching findings. These findings are illustrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Findings

Finding	Description
1	Opportunities for critical reflection increased teachers’ awareness of the need for culturally relevant pedagogy.
2	In general, teachers did not recognize a political nature to their work, limiting transformative or social action approaches to content integration and contributing to their deficit perspectives.
3	Action or inaction, in terms of culturally responsive teaching, was motivated by teachers’ emotions, such as responsibility, empathy, and fear.
4	Transformative experiences influenced teachers’ perceptions of the need for equitable teaching.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 5 | Institutional supports influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for equitable teaching and advocacy for English language learners and students living in poverty. |
|---|---|

Standards for Judging the Quality of Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2007) “Some writers argue that authors who continue to use positivist terminology facilitate the acceptance of qualitative research in a quantitative world” (p.202). Quantitative research has traditionally been judged utilizing positivist terminology such as validity, reliability, and objectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1989) developed criteria for qualitative research emphasizing *trustworthiness* as the standard for naturalistic inquiry. More consistent with a qualitative mindset, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the criteria proposed for judging trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Credibility can be understood as representing adequately the multiple constructions, or realities of participants. This may be achieved methodologically through triangulation and member-checking. *Transferability* has to do with the degree of similarity between the research context and the applied context. Herein, “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298). However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide thick description for the reader to make such decisions. In qualitative research there is an understanding that cases are not identical but may be applicable to similar situations. *Dependability* refers to whether the findings are consistent with the data collected. Inconsistencies are understood to be part of naturalist inquiry, however the research may be deemed dependable through documenting procedures utilized such as process notes and instrument development information. Lastly, *confirmability* is the ethical obligation of the person conducting research to identify and uncover

the trail of decisions in the research. In other words, researchers should be reflexive about their process and position in the research. This may be achieved through an audit trail, and can also be used by the reader to understand researcher decisions and rationale (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

With these criteria in mind, I utilized several techniques to ensure trustworthiness throughout the process of conducting this dissertation research:

- *Prolonged engagement* by speaking with a range of people and developing rapport
- *Triangulation* of sources, methods, and analysis for rich description
- *Peer debriefing*, or feedback from advisers, doctoral peers, and pilot participants to refine the interview protocol and reflection prompt and to eliminate any potential biases and/or leading questions
- *Member checks* were conducted with all dissertation participants through a review of findings summaries in order to maintain accuracy in reporting
- *Thick description*, or the inclusion of the widest possible range of information regarding cases was used in reporting findings
- *An audit trail* documenting the sequence of decisions made throughout data collection and analysis through process notes and instrument development
- *Reflexivity* was maintained through the use of a research journal reflecting personal biases and decisions made, as well as the reasons for them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Axiology/Ethical Considerations

Israel and Hay (2006) suggest that assuring trust is an important reason for social scientists to care about ethics, and the authors implore “acting in ways that are not harmful and are just” so that “we continue to have the freedom to conduct such work” (p. 3). Before any data

were collected, the research proposal was submitted to the Lesley University Internal Review Board (IRB) and approved. Thereafter, the district utilized as the research setting was contacted by following their required IRB procedures in order to gain permission to conduct research.

Researcher-participant relationship. According to Mertens (2010), researchers working from a constructivist paradigm adhere to the principles of *The Belmont Report* (The National Commission, 1979), which include beneficence, respect, and justice, but do not take the morally neutral perspective of their post-positivistic counterparts. Ethical practices for constructivists include issues of trustworthiness such as representing balanced views, making respondents aware of their constructions, and educating others about the experiences of stakeholders. Constructivists believe that there are additional tensions in the researcher-participant relationship since, as researchers, they are in a privileged position. They strive for reflexivity about their role in research, aim to establish rapport with participants, and provide *reciprocity*, or give back to the individuals who participated in the knowledge construction. Individuals involved in the research process are called “participants”, rather than “subjects” since the research relationship is considered interactive (Mertens, 2010).

Participants in this study may be considered co-researchers since the data collected reflects their personal experiences and education. Member-checking of findings summaries was offered to ensure accuracy in reporting data. In order to build rapport with participants, I shared the purpose of the study and a brief background regarding my interest in the topic. Interviews were conducted in public settings selected by the participants. Reciprocity was provided with the presentation of a gift card for the purchase of classroom supplies at the end of the two interviews and upon receipt of the written reflection. Additionally, participants were offered a summary of the final report.

Protection and confidentiality. All participants described in this study have been assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Additionally, the district name and individual school names as well as those of unique programs have been changed. These measures help to prevent any identifiers or individual responses from being linked back to participants or their schools.

Informed consent. This study employed several safeguards to ensure participant protection and respect for their rights as participants in research. First, participants were provided with an introductory letter describing the purpose of the study, methods, demands, possible outcomes, how they would be protected from potential harm, and information regarding the voluntary nature of this study. A consent form (See Appendix E) was obtained gaining permission for their participation and for the recording of interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to discontinue use of the recording device and speak off the record if they desired at any time over the course of interviewing. Interview transcripts and demographic materials were stored in a locked filing cabinet and electronic forms of data were stored on a password-protected computer. Responses remained confidential and were not disclosed individually to anyone. Names were not connected to any responses as participants and schools have been identified by pseudonyms. Findings summaries were provided for participant review in order to report accurate information. Additionally, by reviewing summaries any potential harm in responses were able to be identified by the participants themselves. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. Finally, they were provided with my personal contact information, contact information for the faculty supervisor of this project, and co-chair of Lesley's IRB in case of questions and to inquire about their rights as participants.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations intrinsic to this research study detailed as follows:

1. While generalizability is not the aim of case study, the small sample of eight elementary teachers within one large district limits the range of experiences and perceptions highlighted.
2. All participants currently teach in the elementary setting only. Had more teachers across grade levels been included, findings may have yielded a broader range of perspectives.
3. As the majority of elementary teachers are, all participants are female, and all but one White. Additionally, all but one has taught six years or less. Difficulty in attracting participants led to this selection; however, the inclusion of a male teacher, more teachers of color, and more mid-career and veteran teachers may have impacted outcomes.
4. A mixed-methods research approach including a district-wide survey along with the case studies may have resulted in a broader understanding of the context.
5. Given the sensitive topics intrinsic to this research such as race and class, participants may have disclosed what they perceived I wanted to hear and withheld ideas they thought may not have been taken favorably.
6. The sample of volunteers may have attracted teachers with a predisposition to the topic being researched.
7. While participants shared many stories of their practice, there remains the possibility of disconnect between what they articulate and their actual practice since they were not observed at length.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research study's methodology. A qualitative research design utilizing collective case study methodology was employed to explore eight elementary teachers' perceptions of the need for culturally responsive teaching as it relates to their experiences, education, and professional development. Data were collected in four phases and included semi-structured interviews, artifact and document review, discussion of a teaching case, and a written reflection, in order to construct meaning from the cases. Using a general inductive approach to analysis, these data were analyzed resulting in five findings which are further elaborated upon in chapter five. Issues of trustworthiness were addressed through the use of prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, thick description, an audit trail, and reflexivity. It is anticipated the findings of this research will add to the culturally responsive education discourse and provide insight for teacher education and professional development initiatives. The following chapter provides a detailed description of each teacher participant included in this study.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE CASES

“The fact that we are here and that we speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”

-Audre Lorde, 1977

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore with a sample of elementary teachers their perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching and how their experiences, education, and professional development informed their perceptions. With data drawn from interviews, artifacts collected by participants, discussion of a teaching case, written reflections, and member-checks, following is a description of each participant case organized by their respective school. Thick description and considerable detail is provided so that the reader can determine the extent to which the findings from one case may be applicable in their own context.

Case Profiles by School

Algonquian Public Schools (APS) is a large, suburban public school district located in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. With a student population of 183,269, there is a diverse representation of learners ranging in their racial and ethnic identity, English language proficiency, and socioeconomic status. In choosing schools to invite for participation, I sought elementary schools across geographic areas within APS, aiming to include this range of socioeconomic and racial populations as well as a range of school performance outcomes and goals. Of the four schools that accepted my request and were included in this research, two are Title 1 funded schools and one is also a Priority School, or a school receiving “additional support

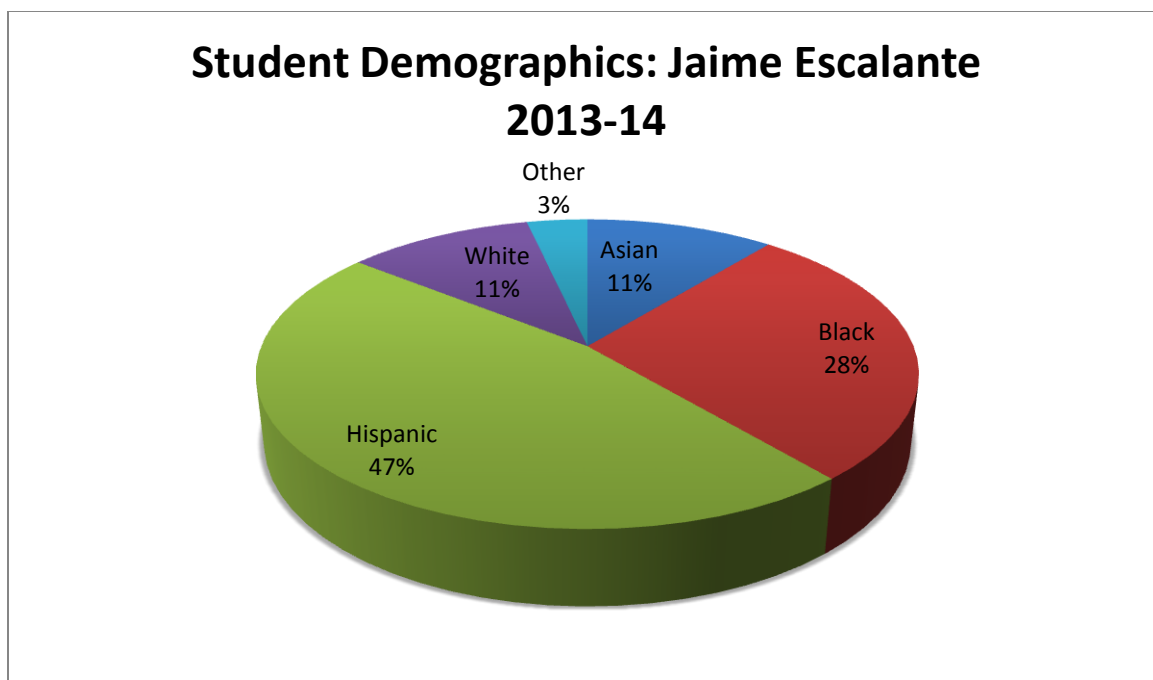
in order to meet their benchmarks for student achievement” (APS, 2013c). Given the multifariousness of the district, its mission and vision reflect a commitment to preparing all students with the knowledge and skills necessary for college and future employment regardless of race, socioeconomic status, language ability, and special education status. The commitment to high academic expectations for all students is reflected in the district’s many programs including an Advanced Learners Model (pseudonym) which focuses “on culturally responsive measures of a child's ability to think, reason, and problem-solve that cross cultural, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries” (APS, 2014c) in order to identify and include students historically underrepresented in gifted and talented programs.

Following is a description of each school along with profiles of each teacher participant included in this study. Utilizing participants’ own language, analyzed and constructed from 564 pages of raw interview and reflection data, teachers’ pedagogical perceptions will be featured along with descriptions of their experiences, education, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, their reflections and advice about culturally relevant pedagogy will be illuminated through their examples.

Jaime Escalante Elementary. Jaime Escalante Elementary is a pre-kindergarten to grade six elementary school located in a diverse neighborhood within APS. With a mission of fostering citizenship, passionate learning, and equitable opportunities, Escalante Elementary includes several reading program initiatives, a Responsive Classroom social learning approach, and a Spanish two-way immersion program. Figure 4.1 illustrates the racial demographics of the student population at Escalante Elementary.

Figure 4.1

Jaime Escalante Student Demographics



Adapted from “Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs” (APS, 2013d).

Additionally, 56.75% of the student population is Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 71.17% of students receive free or reduced price meals. Based on the percentage of low-income students within the school, Escalante Elementary qualifies for Title 1 funding which is used “for positions and resources to meet the needs of their students” (APS, 2013e) in the areas of language arts, mathematics, professional development, family engagement, and accountability for meeting the standards expected for students under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001.

The following two cases describe teachers working at Jaime Escalante Elementary School during the 2013-2014 academic year. Danica and Courtney, both single White females in their middle to late twenties were interviewed in December, 2013.

Danica. Danica was in her third year of teaching at the pre-kindergarten level at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place at coffee shops near her home within the same district in which she works. Throughout each interview I sensed a confidence in Danica’s

perception of her abilities within the classroom, and although she came across quite comfortable during our meeting, there remained some distance, requiring me to utilize many probes to elicit further detail in her responses.

Danica taught a pre-kindergarten program housed within Jaime Escalante Elementary. Within APS principals could opt to include Danica's program based on student need. Parents of preschoolers had the choice to enroll their children if they qualified based on income. Funded by two entities at the federal and state levels, children enrolled in the pre-kindergarten program came from families whose incomes fell below the federal poverty line. (According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014) poverty guidelines for a family of four living in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia were an annual income of \$23,850 in 2014.) Need in this area of APS was so high that there was a waiting list of approximately 20 students which warranted a second class; however, the school did not have space for another class to be offered.

In describing her school and class, Danica called it "diverse" noting that there were many Hispanic families in this area of APS. Having previously taught a lower elementary grade level in a different school within the same district, Danica recognized many differences in her teaching experiences at each school. She stated "it's more diverse than the last school where I taught at which I thought was diverse. I am White and I have no White kids in my class. My class is predominantly Hispanic, whereas my last school was predominantly Asian." Danica added that everything she sent home had to be translated into Spanish, which was challenging since she did not speak much Spanish. Instead, she relied on Google Translate or translators funded by the district when she had time to schedule them in advance.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Danica saw her role as a teacher in line with the goal of her program which was to ready students for kindergarten and school. Danica stated:

I guess I just set the stage for the rest of their schooling, being ready to learn. I guess we have taken care of their emotional struggles and their social, anything that they have going on, so that they'll be able to focus on learning in kindergarten.

Danica believed her program met its social and emotional goals and the purpose of a K-12 education was then to prepare children to function in the real world socially as well as equip them with the skills to work. When probed about what shaped her understanding of that purpose, Danica had difficulty pinpointing her pedagogical influences, but was able to elaborate upon more constructivist beliefs. She stated:

I can definitely see the way I teach is more [about] problem solving and critical and the higher order thinking. Because I think if you teach a child to think for themselves and to come up with their own strategies, that is how they'll live their life. If you teach them or tell them facts and do a lot of explicit teaching they will be more dependent on other people for getting answers and problem-solving and things like that.

Danica reflected upon her own upbringing and discoveries she made as she began teaching which have contributed to her beliefs. She realized:

A lot of the families aren't brought up the same way, so you have to teach them, really to meet them, where they are. Their schema might be different than mine when I was little because maybe they haven't had all the enrichment experiences that I had. Just being sensitive...

For Danica, teaching the pre-kindergarten program made her more aware of how families are affected by poverty. She noted how many families were limited by access to transportation. For

example, some of her students were not able to go to the park because their families did not have cars. Building this knowledge base when teaching concepts such as modes of transportation, may be something that is taken for granted by teachers in other areas. When teaching her lessons, Danica felt she had to think more about what her students have not experienced and what background knowledge may need scaffolding.

Reflecting on her personal definitions of social justice and culturally responsive teaching, Danica noted that she was unfamiliar with the term “culturally responsive teaching,” but understood it to mean “sensitivities to the cultures in your classroom.” Describing social justice in education, Danica stated, “I think of the word equity and just everybody having equal access to curriculum and instruction and that it's accessible no matter what your language or culture is.” She drew this meaning from course work focused on constructivist teaching and her teaching experiences. While Danica could not recall examples of these approaches to teaching from her own schooling experience she noted was “all White,” she was optimistic about its implementation and said “I think in general people, teachers, try to respect the diversity of their kids and get to know their families and their communities.” Her role as a pre-kindergarten teacher required her to take steps to get to know families in ways that she had not previously considered. For example:

We are expected to go to [student] homes and do an hour-long home visit. So you really get a sense of their, like you can see who lives in the home, how their home is decorated, what they are eating, their demeanors. That actually was very helpful for when the kids came in, to understand why they had certain behaviors or learning styles, you can definitely—it makes sense seeing their home and seeing their families.

Danica believed that diversity or a lack of diversity among students and teachers could impact equitable teaching since people bring cultural biases with them into the classroom. She expressed how her former teaching assistant was Guatemalan, so she was able to bring a lot of perspective when there were behavioral issues with Hispanic students.

Given her more limited understanding of culturally responsive teaching, I asked Danica to describe the extent to which she felt she was able to use teaching practices described in the definition provided. She admitted “I don't think I know enough about it to say it's really embedded in my practices.” But she was able to discuss multicultural units included in her curriculum such as one centered on holidays. She elaborated:

We taught about Christmas and Eid and Diwali and Ramadan, Kwanzaa, and even though the kids in my class only either celebrate Christmas or Eid, I think it was good for them to know there are other cultures and other holidays.

While Danica saw value in teaching children to recognize multiple perspectives, she gave examples of how even additive approaches to multicultural content integration could be challenging to implement. When she taught kindergarten at another school within APS, she also did a unit about holidays around the world. Since there were six teachers on her team, they decided each would pick one holiday to teach and students would rotate classes. Danica recalled:

I just remember one of my teammates went on a rant for ten minutes about how it's silly that we have to teach all of these holidays when everybody either celebrates Christmas or Eid. [She said] “Why do we have to do this now, we never had to do this twenty years ago.”

Danica could empathize with how change might be hard for a veteran teacher, but stated, “I can see change is scary; however you can look at our classrooms and see that there are Asian kids who probably do celebrate Chinese New Year. Not everybody celebrates Christmas anymore.” Further, Danica could see the challenge in changing the belief systems of someone who does not see the value in such learning:

So if you haven't been trained I'm sure it's just someone telling you, you have to do this. With anything, [if] someone just tells me I have to do something, I really have to understand why it's important and how I can do it. So if she hasn't had any of that I'm sure that's another reason she didn't understand why it was so important.

During that same time Danica experienced a parent who wished to have his daughter pulled out of the holiday lessons, except for Christmas, and did not want her participating in units related to Black history and President Barack Obama, admitting to teachers that he did not like Black people and did not approve of the other traditions that were going to be taught. After meeting with the principal, it was agreed that the standards would need to be combed through to determine what she needed to know and for which topics she could sit out. She elaborated:

So depending on how you read the standard, she has to know that there's a president and what the president does, but she doesn't have to know who the current president is. If we talked about the duties of the president she could be in class, but if we talked about Barack Obama and his family, she couldn't be in there that day.

Challenges such as these awakened Danica to some of the political aspects of teaching.

When asked about this political nature, she asserted:

Um ... I guess I can't be a 100% politically neutral when schools are federally funded. Especially [my program], which is federally funded and you have to meet their

requirements in order to get their money. They have to approve our curriculum. So I don't think it can ever be a 100% separated.

On the other hand, Danica was not able to recognize ways in which schools reproduce social structures or reinforce structural oppression. Almost laughing at the suggestion, Danica said, "I think everyone's pretty equal and has access to the same education. It doesn't matter what their culture or social areas of economic status is; I think everybody has an equal opportunity at our school." She could recognize how biased state testing could be a problem, but saw that as an issue of the past stating "I know when I was in school there were a lot of complaints about our standardized testing being culturally biased. I know that the state agencies say that they have worked really hard to eliminate that from the tests." When asked to explain how she knew this to be true, Danica suggested that the impetus fell mainly on teachers to meet students where they are academically without regard for their culture or socio-economic status. Despite this more colorblind approach, Danica described intolerant perspectives about teaching English language learners:

Or you know, when people hear that when I, at the beginning of the year, only had four kids that spoke English, they were like, "How do you teach them? Shouldn't they know English before they come to school? Shouldn't..." and then it gets back to "Shouldn't people know English before they come to America?"

She saw pedagogical approaches such as culturally responsive teaching as opportunities to create awareness of differences and "celebrate" them:

I think that it teaches kids to be aware of differences but also to accept them and be sensitive to them. I think although we do it through academics, I think that the underlying theme would be to teach them to respect all different cultures and all different beliefs.

Integrating it into academics in the curriculum and then also things like the big school community sing-a-long and things like that is just to bring everybody together to celebrate the differences. We all are different, we all celebrate a different winter holiday, but we all celebrate a winter holiday. We can come together and we can celebrate together.

Asking Danica to dig deeper for examples of more equitable teaching in her own classroom and school, initially she described a school assembly with a winter theme led by the music teacher including Christmas, Kwanza, and Hanukkah songs. Challenged by this question, I asked her to think of examples beyond the arts. Danica described a lesson she did with her class during her Black history unit:

I did talk about slavery which is a hard concept for them to understand... The first lesson that I always do for that unit is I bring M&M's or something and I give them to only the girls. I'm like, "I'm only going to give these to girls because I like girls. I'm a girl. Boys can't have candy." Then they obviously get upset and talk about why that's fair, why that's not fair, what's wrong with what I just did. It brings up the concepts of fairness and things like that. Not necessarily tying it to race or slavery at all, but you can teach the concept of that and then relate it to [the] curricula.

Other examples she described related to the curriculum she is given as part of her pre-kindergarten program. Themes included *Me, Myself and I*, *Family*, *Community*, and *The World*. Danica suggested that learning about how we are part of a community and the similarities and differences among people sets the stage for social justice learning.

While Danica had difficulty recognizing structural forms of oppression, gaps in educational achievement were made clear to her from her two different teaching experiences. She described the differences from her first school to her second:

My first few years...it was always "Keep up the good work. Our kids are at 98%" then I came to the meeting at [Jaime Escalante] and I was like appalled because it was like "We are at a 50% pass rate" and in my mind, I'm like "that is not acceptable. That's really bad." And then the principal was like "Think about it, think about our population and let's compare our scores to schools with populations like ours." Then when we did that, they were all pretty similar. Still not good scores, but we were at least similar to schools with our population. Which made me think, is it the quality of teaching at these schools with kids of this population? Or is it parent involvement? It made me wonder. From my personal experience there's a difference at least with test scores between schools with differences with culture and poverty.

Danica's growing awareness of gaps in achievement led her to ask questions about teacher quality and disparities among students within the school. She pondered:

My first thought was quality of teacher because every kid has the same ability to learn, in my mind. And yes, a lot of the kids at our school have social disadvantages and different cultures with different priorities. However, when they're at school, they're at school, and if they're getting high quality instruction, there's no reason that it should be a 99% and a 50% pass rate.

Danica began to describe some of the challenges children had coming to Jaime Escalante. For example, students for whom English was not their primary language may have language and social barriers. Students who had parents that work in the evenings may not have the opportunity

to have their parents read to them. She saw that as a big difference between her two school experiences, noting that in her previous, more affluent, school parents were much more involved. Additionally, she noted that cultural values may be different. Danica described her efforts to instill school independence and teach routines. She stated:

Again I don't know if that's because they're not White... from my experience with the families... some of the Muslim families don't... they don't talk to [their children]. Only the moms would talk to the kid and it's not about anything academic or about building their independence. So when we get those kids in preschool or kindergarten, we have to, instead of starting where we would start with another kid academically, we have to start with teaching them school behaviors—how to be confident, how to be independent, how to participate in a routine—rather than jumping in and teaching them curriculum.

Because they are disadvantaged maybe in that way, coming in and not knowing a routine... maybe parents of our culture would be getting kids ready, getting them independent, where as some of the other cultures may not be.

Danica believed that contributing to gaps in achievement was what she perceived to be a lack of parental involvement. She described parental involvement in her class as “terrible” despite attempts to entice participation in school events. She described a monthly meeting in which a social worker attended to provide free medicines, measuring spoons, thermometers, and books for recognizing symptoms in sick children. During other meetings, food was provided for parents, yet many still did not attend. She recognized that some may be working or lack transportation, but for others she concluded that they had no interest.

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Danica’s perceptions regarding differences in student achievement were influenced mainly by her professional experiences teaching at two

very different schools. She perceived Jaime Escalante to be much more relaxed than her previous school and she felt she had access to fewer resources. She noted:

I've found that at [Jaime Escalante] our principal chooses to spend [money] on human resources, like bringing coaches to teachers instead of actual materials. Whereas at [Danica's former school] it was very material driven and we had a lot of manipulatives and we had a lot of books and things.

Noting that at her previous school teachers put in long hours and experienced a lot of stress to excel, Danica thought the administration at Jaime Escalante were more relaxed, with fewer expectations and fewer people checking in on teachers. She described differences in the caliber of teachers at each school ranging from higher expectations for classroom noise levels and hallway behavior to the professionalism of teacher attire. She saw a connection between the environment being more casual and the instruction not being as strong. She stated "They don't build this pressure to be giving 110% in the instruction since the whole atmosphere of the entire school is just so relaxed and laid back." This change in atmosphere was difficult for Danica who asserted if she were teaching a higher grade level she would prefer to be at her former school with higher expectations. She described challenges in her new setting related to the lack of materials as well as difficulty communicating with parents. She explained, "The language thing is really... it's awkward to have to talk and then have a translator and then they talk... especially if it's on the phone. It's really weird to have a translator for a phone conversation." She conceded that this awkwardness may be experienced by the parent as well and described one of her home visits at the beginning of the school year:

At one of my home visits, there's one of my girls who couldn't speak English and the mom speaks no English. The translator didn't show up. I mean, I was trying to talk to her

and she... I mean, she had no idea what I was saying and she had questions for me but she... you could just tell that we were both trying but both clearly not understanding each other. That's hard.

While Danica had a range of student teaching experiences, she felt challenged in her new role working with people of many different cultures.

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Danica received her education from a small, suburban, public university in the southern region of the United States. She described her education program as very good in terms of field experiences. She had practicums at every elementary grade level and student taught in two grades. Danica felt these experiences prepared her well for teaching.

She appreciated the knowledge she gained from her methods courses noting "being instructed on how to teach was so different than how I was taught." She found this particularly true in mathematics, since learning to teach it allowed her to understand concepts in deeper ways. This motivated Danica to teach in ways differently than she was taught, so that students had more understanding of the topics.

Danica described a course about teaching English language learners in which she learned about the importance of developing one's native language and that students should be encouraged to speak their own languages. She also learned that just because students do not know the language does not mean they do not understand, but they may have difficulty expressing concepts in English. Therefore it was important for teachers to maintain high expectations and use strategies such as rephrasing. Other than the course focusing on English language learners and a course about constructivist teaching practices, Danica did not experience topics related to social justice or diversity in her teacher education program. She noted:

Part of that class talked about prior experience but I don't think we had... nothing about social class, definitely not social justice. I guess we did a little bit with performance style when you learn about the multiple intelligences. One of the things you talk about is how you can let kids choose kind of their... I guess we look at it more, how are we going to assess them? Are we going to let them perform through writing or dramatic, you know? Something. So a little bit of that. Not a lot.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Danica completed 23 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions or courses required for her position, a few were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Danica described APS as having a lot to offer in terms of professional development. Many of the required trainings related to the new teacher evaluation program and took the form of online module training. While these trainings were not preferable to Danica, she saw them as something that could be completed while doing other tasks. She said, “If it’s something complicated and like possibly confusing, I would rather do the face to face thing. But things like Anaphylaxis Training, like I can look at the PowerPoint and be okay with that.”

Danica described several literacy courses as being useful to her teaching. These included a course on how to utilize Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) which took place over the course of a school year and a course entitled “Strategically Using Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI).” She considered this class most beneficial to improving her practice since it was relevant to her population of students. Focusing on struggling readers and English language learners who are behind in their language proficiency, the course provided a structured approach to teaching. Another favorite professional development course was a class entitled “Designing Classrooms

for Literacy.” Sharing the course book as an artifact for “best” professional development, Danica expressed its usefulness in setting up her own classroom and developing literacy stations.

Danica expressed how professional development for her new role teaching the pre-kindergarten program influenced her understanding of issues related to culturally responsive teaching. Meeting monthly, she and other teachers in her same position, came together to discuss issues related to diversity, English language learners, and poverty. Describing the impact, Danica said, “That’s where I learned all about the poverty things and like changed my perceptions on everything.” In terms of influencing her teaching, Danica suggested the course made her think more about how she taught and stated, “In my lesson plans I now plan for the language that I want the kids to use.” She related this to a lesson in which students shared about the kinds of shoes they were wearing. She described how she utilized pictures of several types of footwear and modeled her expectations for her students noting that with fluent speakers a teacher would not have to be as direct and do as much pre-teaching.

Reflection. In Danica’s written reflection to me she continued to express her growing awareness of concepts she gave little thought to during her previous teaching position. For example, she wrote about a lesson from her unit on families:

We had been talking about families and reading books about how families can look different. One of our books was called *Families Are Special*...I read this book because I knew that some of my students live in single-parent homes, some live in two-parent homes, and some split time between two different homes. I also knew of a few families that had grandparents [or] other relatives living in the home. After reading the story I asked the children to draw a picture of their family...One of the kids asked how to know who is in their family. I thought about the different cultures in my classroom... Then I

told the kids, “Family members usually live in your home with you. But they don’t have to live with you. Sometimes mommy or daddy lives in a different house.” Boy did that get me some interesting family drawings! After the kids drew their pictures I had them tell me who they drew so I could label the family members... one student drew “Mommy, brother, me, friend.” I was really intrigued by this so the next day I looked in her file and saw that she and her single mom live in an apartment with one of Mom’s friends and the friend’s daughter. I talked to my student about her picture, again, and determined that she said “brother” but meant “sister.” She confused gender pronouns, like most English Language Learners do. And although this girl is not her biological sister, they live in the same home and refer to each other as sisters. So after all the planning I did to accommodate different cultures... I forgot to plan for the culture of poverty! I didn’t know that when I said, “Family members live in your home,” I would have students who lived with non-family members. I also didn’t realize that the non-family members would be considered family to these students. It opened my eyes to something I hadn’t thought about!

This excerpt illustrated Danica’s growing awareness of where her students were coming from, but also exhibited a common deficit perspective regarding a “culture of poverty” that was difficult to escape given her more limited understanding of sociocultural issues. Despite some of her contradictions, Danica understood the importance of teaching with the needs of her specific student population in mind. She stated:

It wouldn't be fair to teach with the bias that we come in with and that our goal is to teach every kid. Every kid is ready to learn, the same way every other child is and that in order for that to happen, we need to be culturally sensitive.

She saw sensitivity as a first step for teachers who have a diverse student population. Her advice for school leaders included:

Then hopefully give us the training on it. Because like I told you, I don't really know a whole bunch about it. Knowing about it and giving ideas to us on how to implement it throughout the curriculum would be helpful. I think showing somebody why something's important is always going to be better than just telling them.

Courtney. Courtney was in her sixth year of teaching a lower elementary grade level at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place after school in Courtney's classroom which reflected a sense of energy from the display of activities students had been engaged in throughout the year. Courtney expressed that she always wanted to be a teacher and appreciated teachers who created a sense of community and engagement when she was a student.

Courtney suggested that her class was a bit more challenging than previous years since ten of her 20 students had Individual Education Plans (IEP) which kept Courtney and her teaching assistant very busy. She described Jaime Escalante Elementary as "diverse" and noted that 27 countries were represented among the student population. She elaborated that after fourth grade the population of students changed greatly since many students then transferred to another school for the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program offered by the district. She stated the school had a large representation of Black and Latino students after fourth grade, with many of the White and Middle-Eastern children feeding into the GATE program.

As a Title 1 school Jaime Escalante had many resources. Courtney noted that this classification meant the district provided the school with a lot, including technology resources such as SMART boards, iPads, and lap tops for teachers. Additionally, she had access to a large

guided reading library and many professional books her principal was continuously updating. Courtney spent time writing grants for other materials to defer her out-of-pocket costs.

Courtney believed the administrators were really good at building community among grade level teams. She felt included in the hiring processes, sitting on interview panels, and having a say in what they looked for in potential new teachers. She believed this was important since grade level teams collaborated often, and she noted, “Sometimes when teachers get set in their ways, I believe that they don’t always want to collaborate. Here it’s something that’s fostered from the start.” Meeting twice weekly for one hour, grade levels looked at assessment results in language arts and mathematics, created common assessments, and decided what they would cover and how they would teach based on the standards. She stated, “Generally, in all six of the first grade classrooms you should see very similar things going on.” Fostering respect, responsibility, and readiness to learn, goals were based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Courtney explained that teachers at Jaime Escalante expected all students to make at least one year’s reading growth, and expected at least 50% of students in each grade to make one and a half year’s reading growth.

Encouraging parental involvement, Courtney described events she held such as publishing parties, holiday luncheons, and coffees. She noted that lunch was a good time to invite parents who worked, since they were able to visit the school during their breaks. Courtney experienced a larger turnout of parents for curriculum evenings if she made personal calls to invite families. The district supported fostering more parental involvement by providing translators for such events. Using microphones, they translated in real time for parents wearing headphones. Courtney found this support beneficial since these evenings provided opportunities to share what she was teaching and to tell parents how they could help their children throughout

the year. This was important since some of her students' parents had not finished school themselves and were not able to read notices that were sent home, even if translated into their own language.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Courtney believed her role as a teacher was to foster lifelong learning among her students. She hoped they would become inquisitive and independent learners who questioned things and had the tools to seek answers to their questions, rather than relying on adults to tell them. She hoped her students would someday want to attend college and encouraged their curiosity. She said, "I'm constantly telling the kids that they should write down questions that they have even if they are off topic, and we can go back to them." Some of the challenges Courtney expressed, given these beliefs, was the amount of time teachers had to fit in the required curriculum. She noted that it was often a challenge to revisit concepts which her students needed more practice. However, she appreciated new initiatives such as guided mathematics since she was able to not only meet with small groups of her struggling students daily, but also push her more advanced students beyond the expectations.

Noting strong classroom management as an essential skill for effective teaching, Courtney cited the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching as a strong influence on her pedagogical perspectives. She stated:

We do something called Responsive Classroom here and I feel like—my first 3 years of teaching, I did not have that background—I felt like my life became so much easier once I learned more about it because it does work for the majority of the children in the class. Courtney viewed morning meeting, academic choice, and the community-building aspects of a Responsive Classroom as "powerful" for bringing children out of their shells. After a few months she saw her quieter students unafraid to sing, dance, answer questions, and contribute

without embarrassment or the fear of being wrong. In addition to building confidence, Courtney saw Responsive Classroom as a way to develop empathy and connect with students, which was important because “they realize that you care about them, you want them to do well in school, and then they are willing to try a little bit harder when you build that relationship.” She described an example of her students’ empathy towards a little boy with anger issues:

They’re very caring towards him or they show a lot of... they’re very kind and help him so that he can feel comfortable again. They know how to help him feel part of the class and comfortable so that he can join in on regular activities.

Reflecting on her personal definitions of culturally responsive teaching, Courtney noted that she had not heard the term before, but suggested, “You would be responding and appreciating and embracing all cultures.” Courtney’s master’s program focusing on literacy was centered on this perspective. She described how it emphasized learning about different cultures and the importance of teaching in more inclusive ways. Courtney elaborated, “...to me this is just what people are supposed to do. As teachers we’re supposed to be always embracing all children, and as well their families, and making parent teacher connections and things like that.” She saw examples of this approach in her own school and classroom and described how teachers at Jaime Escalante made home visits to get to know students and their families. She suggested that cultural aspects of students’ lives came up during share time during morning meeting and stated, “I open that to letting that child teach the rest of the kids about their traditions.” Courtney believed teachers have a choice to teach in culturally responsive ways, but with such a diverse student population “you’re pushed that way a little bit, just because you feel as if that’s what you should be doing. It’s what’s right.” Despite this apparent need, she recognized challenges in implementing more inclusive teaching.

Courtney described an example of a challenge to her own attempts to present a more inclusive understanding of family. Having a gay family member, Courtney was inspired to confront negative stereotypes of same-sex families by including *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell (2005) in her class library. Based on a true story, this picture book describes two male penguins living at the Central Park zoo and nesting together. They are given an adopted egg to care for and Tango, their hatchling, becomes the first chick to have two fathers. Published in 2005, this book has raised questions about what makes a family and the age-appropriateness of such material. The book was on the American Library Association's list of top ten challenged books for five years. Courtney described her principal's discomfort when he overheard her telling another teacher about reading the book:

...I don't remember exactly what he said, but you could just tell by his facial expression that it made him uncomfortable. "I'm not going to tell you, you can't read that book, but I really don't want you reading that book."

Courtney defended her decision by suggesting the book represented families in America and that it taught children to be accepting of everyone. She stated, "I think that's probably one fault of most teachers, is they don't always think to represent certain cultures that aren't present in your classroom." She said that most teachers probably do not include same-sex families out of fear of upsetting parents. She hoped after reading the book that her students understood a family does not only mean a nuclear family. Courtney suggested that most of her students understood that immediately since many of them lived with extended family. While she admitted she probably would not use this book when being observed by her principal, she described her conviction to include this book:

It's not hard to get them to open their minds to different types of families. I don't think I'll ever stop reading it. I feel like hopefully with time, there will be less negativity towards books like that. One can only hope.

Courtney was inspired to purchase this book, along with many other multicultural books, after a master's course about negotiating curriculum. Writing a grant to fund her purchases, she created a "So you think you're different?" book box in her classroom with books representing many different kinds of people, including books about autism which she described was difficult to teach children about. A major point of learning from the negotiating curriculum class was that Courtney could meet the standards while finding more inclusive materials to do so. She stated:

There's nothing saying what kind of books I have to read. It [the standard] was asking and answering questions from a fictional story, so that's what I did. Whether what kind of questions children come up with, I can't stop that and that would go against my beliefs and what our school embraces. We're expected to embrace all children no matter what... You should never shut a child down and say, "No, you're wrong," or "No, we can't talk about that."

Courtney admitted that this took a bit of courage, being able to talk about these topics and allowing conversations to happen, since it could come back to her in negative ways.

By making a conscientious choice to include books deemed controversial while still teaching the standards, some might suggest Courtney was making a political choice in her teaching. However, when asked about the political nature of schooling, she had some difficulty recognizing concepts such as a hidden curriculum or recognizing how schools reproduce structural oppression. She stated:

...our main goal is to create a loving and caring environment where children can feel safe and be able to learn. That's going to happen no matter what's going on in the outside society. I'm trying to think of some sort of example... I'm a little stuck.

Courtney had difficulty recognizing alienating practices in schools, suggesting that cultural clubs helped students feel connected to others. When pressed about whether all teachers held similar inclusive beliefs, Courtney conceded:

No, not all teachers. I'd like to believe that most teachers try to. I think it's probably more of a younger generation thing. Just because schools are changing a lot from 50 years ago, so maybe teachers who have been teaching for 30 years might not be embracing that as much. Because when they started teaching differentiation did not exist, small group instruction didn't exist. I guess their beliefs might be shaped a little...it's something they've been doing for so long it's hard to change.

Courtney viewed younger teachers as able to equalize stereotypes generated by an older generation who had more exposure to racialized points of view. She elaborated:

I would say that, for the most part teachers of a younger age never were... some teachers would be taught to have certain stereotypes growing up. However, when I was growing up there wasn't a lot of—I guess any sort of tensions—racial tensions or any sort of cultural.

By not understanding the broader sociocultural issues connected to schooling, Courtney had difficulty placing her pedagogical decisions within a political framework and saw her choices connected to empathy and a “celebration” of diversity.

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Courtney described her two teaching experiences as having an impact on her perceived role as an advocate for her students. While

some of her friends taught in more affluent areas within the district and urged her to switch schools, Courtney stated she liked working in a community with a lower socioeconomic makeup, and felt she worked harder, but had more available resources.

Courtney had previous experience teaching in a large urban district in the Northeast, but she described the district as a “failing education system.” She described her previous principal as concerned mainly with testing and how the school was reflected on paper. Very schedule-driven, Courtney lacked autonomy to carry lessons longer or shorter as she deemed fit. She elaborated:

As teachers, sometimes things go over or something is going really well and you’re not going to stop because you want to keep going that route to further their learning. If they’re still asking questions you keep going, unless it’s something that could be stopped and continued the next day.

Courtney did not feel her previous district was student-centered and was happy she made the move to APS where she believed “students are the most important part of the school.” In her previous district Courtney did not feel heard when she brought concerns about students to the attention of school leaders. Describing the frustration she experienced, Courtney suggested, “When you’re in a classroom by yourself, sometimes you need someone to help you, talk about the needs of your kids, and when there’s no support system you feel very isolated.” Courtney felt this was a problem in many areas of the country and part of the reason there is high burn-out within the profession. While she noted the many challenges working in APS, from students entering school without prerequisite skills or mastery of English, to a lack of support at home, Courtney recognized the strengths of her particular students. She stated:

...it also needs to be embraced the fact that they are bilingual children, because that’s a skill that most Americans don’t have but would love to be able to speak multiple

languages. I think it's important for them to practice their language, even in the classroom speaking with other children in Spanish or whatever language they speak in. Courtney saw her English language learners as having something to add to the classroom community and encouraged them to speak their primary languages to help each other with learning throughout the day and to foster a positive sense of identity.

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Courtney received her education from a small, rural, public university in the northern region of the United States. Contributing to her efforts to embrace the cultures and languages of students, Courtney cited her master's program as having a strong influence. She described the program as "liberal" since it connected literacy education to students' lived experience. Courtney was encouraged to tap into students' lives by "embracing their family history and allowing them to bring their self to the classroom, and if they're able to open up about something... it's valuable." Courtney gave examples of this "risk-taking" in the classroom. She described a partnership with her university and local students intended to promote literacy. Courtney described how building relationships with these students supported their literacy development. Rather than shutting down controversial topics that came up in class, students were encouraged to write about their lived experiences, and many wrote about emotional experiences such as their parents' drug use or being sent to jail. Utilizing comic strips and music in addition to traditional language arts materials, Courtney described the importance of confronting these issues and stated, "If you tell them they can't share their writing piece because it's about something 'inappropriate,' it's saying what they're writing about is not meaningful and your culture, what you represent, doesn't matter in our classroom." Describing this as merely "good teaching" Courtney suggested that teachers do not intentionally try to

alienate students, but often do not recognize the power of home visits and connecting with students and families.

Courtney shared an influential book from her master's program entitled *Many Families, Many Literacies* (Taylor, 1997). She described how reading this book enlightened her about the biases teachers hold regarding parents. She stated:

...lots of teachers, you send home notices for parent teacher conferences and then the parents that don't show up, some teachers just say, "They don't care about their child's education." Any parent would probably be destroyed by that comment... and how by making a phone call or a visit and learning more about them as a person can really benefit their child's education, because all parents want their children to be successful in school. Some parents just don't have... they might be struggling with certain issues. They might be going through a divorce; they might be working three jobs and being a single parent. Finding out that kind of information can be very beneficial to you as a teacher and it will help you guide your instruction working with their child.

Courtney described how by the end of her masters' program she noticed minds had shifted in the views of families and students. She cited her professors as great examples of culturally responsive teachers since they had been teachers themselves, working to promote inclusive teaching approaches in their own classrooms.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Courtney completed 20 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions or courses required for her position, three were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Courtney described her preference for professional development focused on literacy since

that was what she most enjoyed teaching. She described professional development as beneficial for reinforcing concepts introduced in teacher education since teachers were able to apply learning immediately to the classroom.

Most impactful to her teaching was a course entitled “Reaching Readers Who Need Additional Support.” The course text, *Catching Readers before They Fall: Supporting Readers who Struggle* (Johnson & Keier, 2010), was a book Courtney often referenced. Taught by one of the authors, Courtney learned strategies to reach students for whom English was not their first language. Courtney noted that she was taught to incorporate language throughout the school day, such as during shared reading and other activities, to reach English language learners who may be struggling.

Connecting their learning to classroom practice, Courtney described how the class helped her to focus on one student to determine why she was struggling with reading:

We had to think about what they could do on their own, what was within their reach, and what was out of their reach; really think about our instructions and how making sure that we were doing things that were within their reach and things that they could actually do independently. It really helped me reach a child that I wasn’t able to move with reading levels when they came in like midway through the year, below grade level, and I was really having a hard time helping her develop the skills that she needed to move on within her reading.

Learning how to better incorporate running records and analyze miscues during guided reading helped Courtney to make better text choices within students’ zone of proximal development. She believed courses such as this had a social justice focus since they were intended for teachers to pay more attention to “disadvantaged” students. Courtney emphasized that meeting the needs of

struggling learners was important so they do not continue to fall further and further behind in their learning.

Reflection. Courtney suggested that building classroom community and being reflective about teaching were two important tasks for teachers. She believed students need to feel safe and teachers need to continuously ask themselves how they can better meet the needs of their students, rather than place blame on parents or the life circumstances of families. Contributing to her beliefs about teaching was her master's program which she felt had planted a seed for culturally responsive teaching.

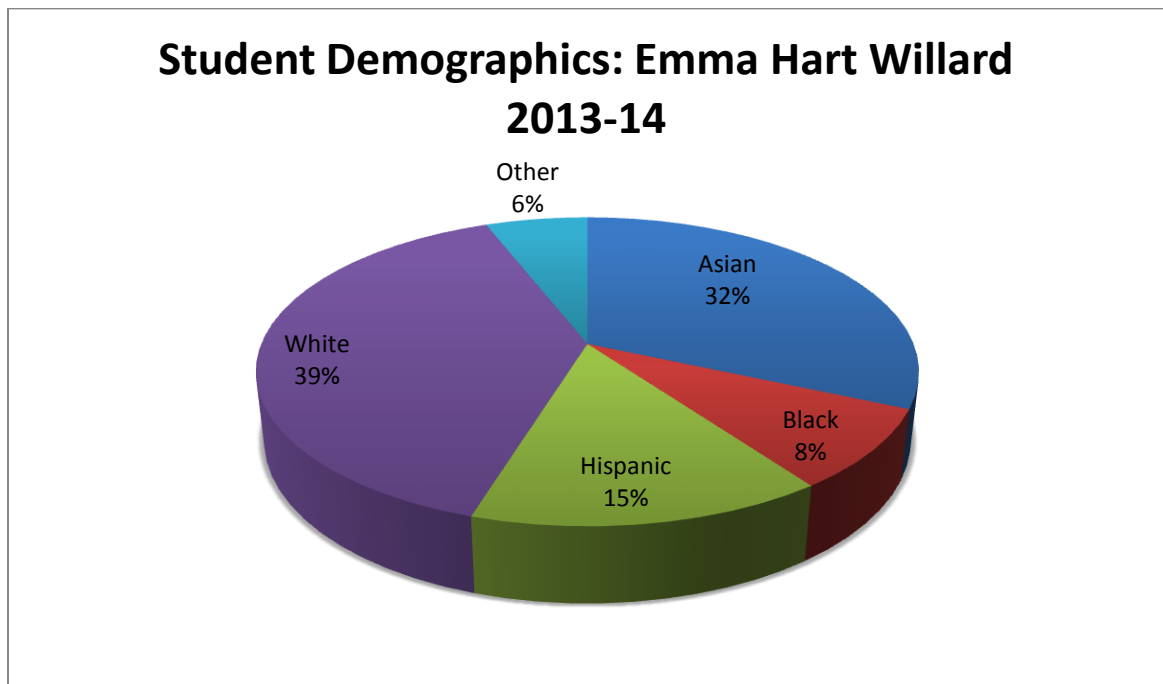
Courtney stated that she was inspired to participate in this research project given its topic, which reminded her of her master's program and the literacy course through APS. When asked if there was anything she would like to add, Courtney stated that the interview had her thinking about ways to better embrace all of the children in her classroom. She hoped to find ways to incorporate projects and more equitable practices when planning future lessons and stated she wanted to "push it further." However, checking back in with Courtney at the start of the following school year, she mentioned she switched schools and had to be "more mindful" about the books she chose to read with her new class. She believed since the population at her new school was less diverse and more affluent, they were also more conservative in their beliefs, so she had to be "sensitive" and "cautious" about the topics and cultures she discussed.

Emma Hart Willard Elementary. Emma Hart Willard Elementary is a kindergarten to grade six elementary school located in an affluent area within APS. With a mission of fostering caring, enthusiastic, and successful students, Willard Elementary prides itself on its professional learning communities (PLC) and arts integration initiatives. The school showcases a multitude of special programs ranging from initiatives focused on academic and life skills, to citizenship and

care for the environment. Figure 4.2 illustrates the racial demographics of the student population at Willard Elementary.

Figure 4.2

Emma Hart Willard Student Demographics



Adapted from "Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs" (APS, 2013d).

Additionally, 23.55% of the student population is Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 22.72% of students receive free or reduced price meals.

The following two cases describe teachers working at Emma Hart Willard Elementary school during the 2013-2014 academic year. Josephine and Matilda, both White females in their forties, were married with their own families, and were interviewed in December, 2013. Interestingly, both teachers had little to say about their educational experiences impacting their perceptions of teaching, which may be due in part to the many years removed from their teacher education programs.

Josephine. Josephine was in her twenty-third year of teaching a lower elementary grade level at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place at a coffee shop near her home within the same district in which she works. Very gregarious and easy to talk to, throughout each interview I sensed a humble confidence in Josephine's perceptions of her role as a teacher and leader within her school community. Although a veteran of her profession, Josephine expressed an ongoing desire to improve her practice. The ease I experienced interviewing Josephine made our time together quite conversational and we frequently moved back and forth between topics as examples and anecdotes dictated.

Josephine described Emma Hart Willard Elementary as "a wonderful community" comprised of many different ethnic backgrounds including Korean, Hispanic, Pakistani, and Indian. With a large population of English language learners and many working parents, she viewed her class as "diverse" and emphasized that she had very engaged parents who often e-mailed and inquired as to how they could support their children at home. With many resources, Josephine suggested that the school was well-supported with a large guided reading library, technology such as SMART boards and laptops in each classroom, and a lab with problem-solving games. Additionally, the school had access to counselors and liaisons to facilitate communication with parents and recognize other areas of student need, providing school supplies or support outside of academics.

Josephine praised her principal for many of the positive changes at Emma Hart Willard. She was proud to share that scores had grown along with the school's reputation for being successful. She gave credit to her principal for bringing professional learning communities (PLC) to the staff and mentioned that this helped her to grow as a teacher. Moving away from discussions of field trips and parties, teachers collaborated to look at data and plan their teaching.

Focused on how to better support students, teachers followed pacing guides and created common assessments. Along with initiatives for arts integration and many professional development opportunities, Josephine suggested that her principal was willing to provide teachers with many resources and noted, “Anything we need as teachers is available to us at our school, but [the principal] expects a lot from his teachers. He asks a lot.”

Pedagogical Perceptions. Josephine expressed a strong desire to help others and recognized an emotional aspect of teaching. She thought that many people go into the field of education thinking that teaching will be easy, but she emphasized that the job is not over when the students leave at the end of the day. With over 23 years of experience in the classroom, Josephine noted that she was better about making time for herself too, mainly since her own children had become her priority. Finding other times to plan such as during specials, Josephine realized that improving her practice was a continuous process. She stated, “You have to change with the time. You have to change with the children.” Working as an instructional coach for several years, she noted her frustration with many teachers who were unwilling to change. Ultimately, she returned to the classroom because she felt, “If I can’t make an impact with these teachers, I am going to make an impact with the 24 or 26 [students] that I’m going to have.”

Josephine viewed her role as a teacher as “huge” since in addition to educating students, she felt like their “protector.” She saw it her job to seek out many types of resources for families, particularly her non-English speaking families, since she felt they often did not know what was available to them. She recognized that many of the Hispanic families at Willard did not have a lot and were appreciative for her support. Josephine described how many teachers did not take advantage of resources such as the liaison to facilitate communication with parents. She stated, “I don’t think they care enough to take that extra step, or life takes over, or they get busy and they

don't. They forget. There is no follow up.” Josephine suggested that education has become hard, noting the many demands facing teachers. She articulated, “When I first started teaching it was hard because it was new. It still continues to be hard.”

Josephine believed the purpose of a K-12 education was to build a strong literacy foundation and instill a love of learning among students. She saw this as critical for students to then make the choice to complete their high school education and continue on to college. Shaping this understanding was the direction she viewed Willard to be taking as a school community. Led by a principal whom she considered to be strong, teachers at Willard were working to build home and school partnerships and focus on student need. She stated, “Our culture at Willard [is] we can't blame the kid. ‘Well, that kid doesn't have any support at home?’ It is, ‘what do we do in school?’” Teachers at Willard participated in a “Welcome Walk” at the beginning of each school year, which gave them an opportunity to see where students live. While initially some teachers complained about having to do this, she believed it allowed them to better understand where some of their students came from. Developing over the years, the home visits became more organized and were a much anticipated event for students to meet their new teachers. The PTA supported teachers in their effort by feeding them dinner and providing transportation to neighborhoods on the day of the visits. In addition to building home and school partnerships, Josephine noted that instruction had become more data-driven. She stated, “We are not spending weeks and weeks teaching pumpkins and apples,” and instead teachers were focused on standards, utilizing a pacing guide and assessments to plan instruction. Josephine suggested this approach was effective but had limitations for teacher creativity. She also feared that many teachers were teaching to the test and setting the bar lower out of fear of not meeting benchmarks. She elaborated:

The accountability on a teacher, it's huge. You are looking at data and your name's attached... You have your name plus your teammate's, and your scores are the lowest... What does that mean? Does that mean that you have to change your practice? Does that mean you have to seek out resources? I know. I think as a teacher the accountability is huge.

With such data informing school plans, Josephine saw accountability as a good thing, but recognized the stress teachers experienced. She stated, "I think it's good. I think it puts more accountability on teachers. Now I say that. I am 23 years teaching. I'm a veteran. I have got lots of stuff." She worried for new teachers, who may not be as secure in their practice, getting caught up in the pacing and connection between scores and their evaluations. Seeing beyond this pressure Josephine stated, "I have learned to just do what is right. I get to the end just like everybody else though. My kids are ready for the test, but I don't like rushing them."

Reflecting on her personal definition of culturally responsive teaching, Josephine noted that the term was not familiar to her. She did have an idea of what it might mean, and suggested culturally responsive teaching was an awareness of the backgrounds and differences among students. With our shared definition in mind, Josephine was able to give examples of how she saw her own teaching within those terms. Thinking about her English language learners in particular, Josephine viewed building up students' background knowledge as an example of culturally responsive teaching. She stated:

There's so much frontloading that I have to do in my teaching... exposing kids to vocabulary, exposing kids to visuals of things before we even talk about it. I think that our kids, our population, we naturally do a lot of these things. I can say that for sure because when we look at our kids that are at risk and those kids who are not making those

benchmarks, one of the things that continually comes up is the lack of the background knowledge, the lack of support at home because of working parents, because of the different... the language. You hear that.

Despite the challenges beyond her control, Josephine suggested that teachers had a responsibility to support students in ways they could control. She asserted, “There’s awareness that there are things we cannot fix, but we can at least help.” Josephine suggested that teachers ought to seek out ESOL teachers and their library of resources more regularly. Additionally, she viewed morning meeting as an important opportunity for students to connect with each other and build a sense of classroom community.

Josephine recognized that an awareness of the need for such practices was critical. She suggested some teachers did not take the time to seek out resources to support English language learners because they did not view the extra time it took to do so as a responsibility. Josephine proposed that Willard was attempting to change this perception through activities such as progress monitoring for individual students. During meetings to discuss challenges teachers face with identified students, a team of teachers offered possible solutions to help the teachers meet their particular student’s needs. Josephine discussed:

For example, last year, a big one was frontloading vocabulary. A lot of teachers took that on. Now we’re hearing them... it’s become part of our culture. This year, we changed it, and they walked away with different goals. They have to monitor those kids for six weeks under this goal. Then we come together and we say, “Okay, is it working? Is it not working? What’s going on? What can we do now?”

Josephine viewed interventions such as this as a way the school attempted to bridge gaps in achievement among students. However, she observed there was still work to be done to address

diversity on other levels. She pointed out that it was interesting how assemblies were chosen at Willard. While entertaining and informative, with presentations about Benjamin Franklin, the planets, or magic, Josephine recognized that these events were chosen by the PTA, which did not have representatives from a diverse group of parents. Describing events such as these as “very American,” she wished for more. Recognizing the lack of attendance of White families at Willard’s International Night, she proposed, “Wouldn’t it be great to have an assembly about diversity right before the International Night? Then kids would be like, ‘Oh, I’d like to know more about that.’ Guess who’s going to come to international night?”

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Josephine believed that her personal background and experiences as an instructional coach helped her become a better teacher and shaped her perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. The daughter of European immigrants, Josephine felt like an outsider growing up in her school and community, which she described as “very White.” While Josephine’s family ethnicity was not considered to be among historically excluded groups, she described difficulties she had growing up and stated, “We were the foreign kids and we weren’t accepted because we looked different, we smelled different, we acted different.” She recalled how her own parents also felt excluded from the culture of school through their interactions with Josephine’s teachers. She remembered a story her mother told of how she felt belittled at a teacher conference because she did not have mastery of the English language and was not able to help Josephine with academics due to her own limited education. Josephine emphasized:

Not only that she [Josephine’s teacher] was mean to my mom, but how my mom must have felt. That, one, she knows that she can’t help us. She doesn’t have the language. She

doesn't have the education. Here is this woman, rude to her... Don't you think my mom would have done that if she could have?

Her mother's story has remained close to her heart, guiding her work with families in her own classroom.

Recognizing the political nature of affirming perspectives of English language learners and families, Josephine suggested that many people lack awareness or acceptance of others particularly in regards to language. She stated, ““Okay, you're in America. Speak English.’ There's still a lot of that... There is a lot of that mentality of, ‘Why do I need to hear it in Spanish?’” Josephine believed that growing up with a love for America, but also pride in her ethnic heritage developed her awareness and acceptance of many of the families in her school community. She viewed holding affirming perspectives of students and advocating for them as a responsibility. She recalled her efforts to enroll a Hispanic student in the GATE program. While she had some initial skepticism about whether he would be successful, she thought she may be denying him an opportunity to excel. Connecting his mother with school liaisons, ultimately he was able to benefit from this experience. She stated, “If I don't make effort to do that for these kids, what happens? These kids get under the table.”

Josephine's perspectives also developed over her many years working with English language learners and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. She admitted that when she first began teaching at Emma Hart Willard she was intimidated to have so many students not speaking English and taking time in the morning to eat breakfast in the classroom. However, she stated at some point she realized she needed to “get over herself,” recognizing their individual needs had to be met in order for them to be successful in school. She reflected on her growth and admitted, “I'm so blessed that I got to be in [Willard] because of that. I always think

back...What if I just stayed on the same track?” While making sure students reach benchmarks could be a challenge, Josephine lamented at the lower expectations of some teachers. She described how another teacher tried to tell her not to “kill herself” when she began working at Willard because it was understood that their population of students would not meet benchmarks, given the many other things impacting their learning. She urged:

To me that was, “So what?” We’ve still got to try to get them to those benchmarks... I don’t connect with them. I have a hard time with teachers that perceive or lower, we call it dumb down, their curriculum, because that’s not right. I think if you go up here, they’re going to come up here, and I’ve seen it done. I’ve seen it done with this population...

Josephine recognized quickly that it was teachers who needed to change the way they did things in the classroom.

Additionally, the skills Josephine developed as an instructional coach helped her to improve her teaching practice when she returned to the classroom. She had many opportunities for professional development as a coach, learning how to analyze data, how to facilitate collaborative team meetings, how to work with principals, and helping teachers improve their work with students. During her time as an instructional coach, a big challenge for Josephine was developing a rapport and trust with teachers so they viewed her as a resource rather than an administrator sent to “fix” them. While Josephine recognized that there was always room to learn, she noticed that some teachers were unwilling to change their practices. She stated, “One of the things that my old colleague had taught me was you have to build relationships. Do not focus on the work, until you build [relationships].” Utilizing a servant leadership technique (Northouse, 2013), Josephine approached teachers early in the year to ask them how she could help. Putting their needs first, she was able to win their trust. Ultimately, missing her work with

children, Josephine decided to return to the classroom after a couple years working as a coach, but took a lot of new skills back with her. She stated, “I changed the whole way I talked. Building engagement in children through Kagan, setting up structures in the room that I learned as a coach, being able to understand what data looks like...” Josephine perceived that her time working as an instructional coach was instrumental for improving her abilities in the classroom, and viewed this hiatus from teaching as “God’s way to get me to look at children differently.”

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Josephine received her undergraduate teacher education from a large, suburban, public university in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. Josephine admitted that she did not consider her teacher education to have had a large impact on her pedagogical perceptions. Far removed from her initial teacher education, Josephine suggested that her last ten years of experiences were more influential in shaping her ideas about education. Given her experiences, she suggested that schools of education ought to focus on guided reading, strategies for teaching English language learners, and expose pre-service teachers to special education practices. She recalled learning a lot from one of her student teachers, who majored in special education, and described her work as “phenomenal” in the general education classroom.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Josephine completed 167 professional development courses and trainings during her tenure working at APS, as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While some were short, mandatory training sessions, many courses were extended and required for her position as an instructional coach, including some in which she earned graduate credit. Josephine described two courses that stood out among the rest as most applicable to her teaching.

Josephine suggested a course entitled “Supporting Young Readers who Struggle” was pivotal for improving her guided reading instruction. One of the authors of *Catching Readers before They Fall: Supporting Readers who Struggle* (Johnson & Keier, 2010) taught the course, and Josephine shared this text as her artifact reflecting “best” professional development. With a sustained format, the class was structured over a period of time so teachers could implement learned strategies and return to class with questions. Josephine described the instructor as “personable” and “hands-on,” helping her to organize her guided reading schedule. A major take-away from the course was this structure. Josephine elaborated:

She helped me organize my guided reading schedule, where I was meeting with my most needy kids all time, but authentically. I wasn’t just bringing them over; I knew what to do with them... She helps you not only to meet with struggling readers, but meet with those independent learners...

Josephine also learned strategies to reach students for whom English was not their first language. She noted that building background knowledge was an important first step for introducing books during guided reading. Rather than jumping into a book, Josephine learned more effective ways to preview books with English language learners. She described this as providing “stepping stones” to bring struggling readers to a similar starting place as other students. Armed with new strategies, Josephine found herself incorporating language throughout the school day, in other subjects as well.

Another course Josephine attributed to better success in the classroom was a course entitled “Kagan Cooperative Learning.” She stated:

It changed the way that I approached teaching. The Kagan trainings provide different structures to get kids in that... Remember, I mean as a teacher you always hear

“cooperative learning,” but I didn’t understand how to implement a lot of that.

Incorporating bodily-kinesthetic learning activities, this approach allowed Josephine to build classroom community as well. She explained how working together to problem-solve through games, allowed her students to “build that goofiness in there, so that when they go to academics they have already had that practice of listening and talking and cooperating together, [and] those behaviors are now in the academic piece.” Josephine viewed this way of teaching as giving a voice to many students who might not otherwise contribute during more traditional class activities.

Reflection. Reflecting on our discussion of equitable approaches to teaching, Josephine suggested, “I think it would help us as a society if we’re doing this in our buildings, that our children come out of these buildings more aware and more accepting of each other.” However, Josephine emphasized the complexity of this task, suggesting that teachers may not have the background or training to understand these pedagogical approaches. Josephine could not recall issues of social justice being directly addressed in professional development. While she believed her background contributed to her own awareness, she suggested that most teachers most likely need opportunities to address these issues directly. Describing this as important for teacher “professionals,” she saw an immediate need for this, and not an initiative to implement “down the road.”

Matilda. Matilda was in her fifth year of teaching an upper elementary grade level at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place at a coffee shop near her home within the same district in which she works. Matilda was an eager participant in the interview process. She often

expressed her intrigue of the topics we discussed and showed a passion for learning more about ideas for which she believed she should have more knowledge.

Matilda described Emma Hart Willard as “a model school” since they had many visitors from across the district. She described these visits as opportunities for other school communities to learn best practices from Willard staff. Matilda credited her principal for bringing together a group of teachers willing to continuously learn and develop their practices. Describing Willard as rich in resources, she suggested that if a teacher asked for something there was a high likelihood it would be purchased. With a diverse student population, Matilda stated that school notices were translated into Korean, Arabic, and Spanish, and the school had counselors in the building who were fluent in all three of those languages. Suggesting a welcoming atmosphere at the school, Matilda wondered if, culturally, they were as inclusive as they needed to be, since some parents seemed hesitant to participate in school events.

When asked about the racial makeup of her classroom, Matilda admitted she did not look at that much and was surprised with herself for not knowing. She promptly researched this information and sent me a spreadsheet with exact numbers after the interview. With 25 students in her class, Matilda had eight Asian students, four Black students, and 13 white students. Nine students spoke languages other than English or came from homes where another language was spoken. These languages included Italian, Korean, Malayalam, Mandingo, Telugu, and Urdu. Additionally, ten students were classified as qualifying for special education services.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Matilda used the metaphor of leading a horse to water to describe her perception of the goals of K-12 education. She posited:

We have to give them as many paths to the water. It's up to them if they're going to drink it. At whatever point in their life they're going to drink it. If we just take one path, that

might not be the path for that kid, so maybe that's why we have twelve years of it. Some teacher, someday, is going to find the path for that kid.

She suggested that “water” was a “zeal for learning” and noted this zeal applied to teachers as well as students, since content and approaches to teaching were always changing. Analytical and ever humorous, Matilda described one of her tee-shirts that read, “In my day there were nine planets.” She also stated, with more seriousness, that teachers are training students for jobs that do not yet exist. Adding to that pressure was what Matilda called the “game of numbers” she used to refer to testing. Wanting to do well, she viewed students as facing pressure along with their teachers. She described the current barometer for success and failure as “broken” and believed portfolio assessments would be ideal; however she recognized the time it took to create her own teacher evaluation portfolio, and wondered if such a measure would be possible.

Reflecting on her personal definition of culturally responsive teaching, Matilda recognized, with some surprise, that she was not familiar with the term. After reading our shared definition, I sensed her excitement as she connected with the inclusive nature of this teaching approach. Matilda posed that these ideas were practices teachers should be continuously implementing. She stated:

If you're not doing these things—I've never heard it called this before—I think you're missing the big part of, as teachers we're supposed to be bridges, to get kids from this point of understanding to this point of understanding.

Matilda viewed knowledge of where students are coming from, or their frames of reference, as important for creating equity in the classroom. She described how she hoped to be fair rather than equal and taught this concept to her students through a morning meeting activity early in the school year. She detailed:

Their morning work is to come up with some sort of disaster that's happened and I said, "It can be anywhere from a paper cut to shark attack. I don't care. I want details and I want adjectives." They describe it and, "Oh, that's unfortunate. Here's a Band-Aid to fix everything." They just keep going around, "Oh, that's awful. Here's a Band-Aid. Oh, this will fix it. It's a Band-Aid," so that they can see very clearly that they're equal. I have given you all a Band-Aid, but your paper cut, actually the Band-Aid's not going to help that, and the fact that your arm has just been ripped off by the shark, your Band-Aid's not going to help that. What I will do is offer you whatever I have in my toolbox to help fix whatever your maladies are. That's fair... I like everyone to have a fair shake. I will offer you whatever I can to give everyone that fair shake.

Matilda viewed this approach to teaching as “socially just.” She saw her role in creating equity for students extending beyond the classroom as well. Matilda described extra steps she took to look out for a student from a difficult living situation, ensuring he was able to attend field trips by driving to his house to get permission slips signed by his caretaker, as well as providing transportation for him to such events.

Matilda suggested the benefits of equitable teaching were inclusivity and the reciprocal gains between students and teachers. She hoped for her classroom to be a “refuge” for students and added that teachers should love the kids that they work with, since teaching is about learning together. With a somewhat idealistic view of public education she believed through differentiation, schools leveled the playing field for students. She stated:

I don't think you can effectively teach if you don't [differentiate], because nobody learns in a cookie cutter world. The 1950s are over... In school, it kind of equalizes. When you go home, that's where the disparity, I think, starts. Do you have the support from mom

and dad to do the homework? Do you have Internet access to do the homework? Do you have electricity to do the homework? I do have one student that that's the problem. Do you have food at home so you... to fuel your body to do the homework? Do you have stresses at home? That mom and dad are working too much, that kind of thing. That's the only aspect that I think... I think in school, we equalize, outside of school, not as much.

Matilda gave several examples of her equitable practices in the classroom. She noted morning meeting as a time for community building, which allowed students to share about their lives and learn from each other. She utilized performances, having students demonstrate their math and science knowledge in an alternative way. She discussed these performances, called "tableaus," at length, and stated, "We just did Tableau Day Thursday with our big successful, 'Yay, we did it!' It was in science and we gave them all task cards and they created a performance to represent what their word meant..." Sharing videos of these performances she had saved on her phone, Matilda excitedly displayed her students' acting out compounds, elements, and molecules. She also shared how students were able to make their bodies into angles to demonstrate what they learned in geometry. In addition to alternative forms of assessment, Matilda suggested it was important to be mindful of details on traditional worksheets too. She described how she used names familiar to her particular students as well as concepts with which they have had exposure. For example, she said:

...instead of saying the farmer with his pigs and cows, it's saying the pencils and erasers, because those children may never have been to a farm and it's not in their schema, but they all know what a pencil and an eraser are because they've all been to school.

Matilda also explained how many of the materials hung in her classroom were created by her students. Emphasizing the value of seeing their own work, she detailed the rounding posters they created:

...they came up with some really clever ideas. "One to four, stay on the floor, five to nine, climb the line." They made a poster for that. There was a roller coaster and a house. They come up with some really clever things.

While committed to student-centered teaching approaches, Matilda recognized the challenges associated with this type of teaching. She saw standards of learning and testing as "looming," and while not the end-all, be-all, she lamented, "But it sure seems like it." She found alternative forms of assessment more difficult to document than generic paper-and-pencil tests, making evidence of learning more difficult to share with parents, whom she noted were also looking for concrete work examples.

Matilda was able to recognize examples of gaps in educational opportunity, or what some call the achievement gap, in APS, and noted measures aimed at redressing such disparities. She described specific goals related to closing the gap in their school improvement plan, but admitted teachers did not pay attention to disparities among groups of particular students when planning instruction collaboratively. She observed the GATE program had a majority of White and Asian students, but shared about a district program designed to specifically target and recommend students historically underrepresented in gifted programs.

Connecting public schools with the funding they receive, Matilda suggested that schools could not be politically neutral. She viewed the success Willard had achieved to become a "model" school as related to the classroom practices encouraged by her principal. She noted that teachers who were unwilling to adapt to more student-centered approaches were making the

choice to leave the school. While she was enthusiastic about the direction she saw the school taking, she noted that if she was not working with like-minded people she would “buck the system” and noted, “I think I wouldn’t be there for long.” She recalled a question on her application to work for APS which asked if she would always do what she was told. She expressed:

I said no. I didn't know if that was right or wrong and I told my husband. I said, "I said no." He said, "Oh my God. Of course you should've checked yes." I said, "I don't want to say yes. If you're telling me to do something that I know is not going to be conducive to this student, I'm not doing it." That's what I think of as being political—like I'm going to say yes?! I'm going to—that's not how I want to be.

Matilda detailed several ways she addressed activism with her students. Defining activism as “we give back to the community,” she recalled how her class collected box tops for school funding to enrich student learning. Additionally, she described how Willard collected and donated food daily for area shelters and participated in fundraising walks for the homeless. Led by a school “green team,” initiatives were growing, which included a school garden, recycling, and upcycling projects. Concerning topics related to social justice, Matilda noted contributions approaches (Banks, 1989; 2002) such as class discussions about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Nelson Mandela during morning meeting, but did not believe these ideas were embedded in the curriculum. Instead, she noted topics related to eco-justice, or concern for the environment, as part of her curriculum. She stated:

I mean social justice in that we have sanitation systems and safeguards. We talk about oil spills in our oceans unit. Like we're not creating, we're destroying nature, that kind of

social justice. But other than ecological like that, I honestly can't think of anything. We write letters to the soldiers. We talk about the big players... Coretta Scott King... slavery. In regards to including the cultures of her students within the curriculum, Matilda suggested the International Night held annually at Willard accomplished this, as well as her attempts to tie student culture in with read-aloud. She stated:

The first one was *A Long Walk to Water*, which is African. We did *Kite Fighters*, which is Korean. Right now we're doing *Peak*, [about] climbing in Nepal and China. Our read-aloud, I want them to come from lots of different places across the globe, not just in America.

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Matilda suggested that her experiences working for APS, and particularly Emma Hart Willard, have shaped her perception of strong teaching as a continuous process of learning and adapting to students' needs. She was appreciative to have begun her career in a more liberal area of the county that valued equitable teaching practices. Through progress monitoring, she believed teachers at Willard worked collaboratively to discuss strategies to make education "fair." She furthered:

We talk about what strategies we are going to be able to employ with the fidelity to try to boost them [struggling learners]. That is tracked form year to year. We can say, "Well, this did work. This didn't work. This worked for this kid. Maybe we could try it for this kid." That equity part is—I think that [the principal] giving us the time to devote to that is huge because those kids are already facing adversity and whatever we can do to...tailor their instruction. Not equal, but... fair. Try to make it so that they are able to access the same content that everybody else does.

Matilda described her school as “majority-minority *great*” and viewed events at Willard such as International Night as a way to embrace its “melting pot” community. While she noted that some families were more hesitant to participate in school events, she believed Willard had a strong sense of community, which was created through events like International Night and the steps teachers took such as greeting students outside their classrooms each morning.

Matilda shared how over her first several years teaching she learned about the need to show humility learning about diverse perspectives. For example, when making class lists at the end of the school year, a Black colleague noticed a problem Matilda had not considered. She stated the problem was that her Black student population was not balanced. Her colleague believed that it was important students were not isolated and had at least one other Black student in the class. Not understanding why this mattered, she stated:

I'm talking to her and this person was interesting. It does matter, because I am a majority person and I don't know [the experience of being] different. Even when I was in Germany, I [looked] the same as everybody else there... I can imagine not feeling like the norm [but] I don't know what it feels like to be different...

Matilda learned how important it was for students to feel safe in their environment prior to learning any content.

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Matilda received her pre-service teacher education from a small, suburban, private Catholic university in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. She did not enter the field of education immediately and took time to raise a family before entering the classroom as an instructional aide and then as a teacher. While quite a number of years removed from her teacher education, she expressed with some amazement, that most of her pedagogical perceptions developed since she started working in

APS. She recalled that during her teacher education program, she learned about performance styles and ways to differentiate instruction, but stated, “I don’t think that that kind of touches on the heart of it,” emphasizing her dismay that many of topics related to social justice were not introduced during initial teacher education. Instead, she spoke favorably of her teaching and professional development experiences as having shaped her perceptions of the purposes of education.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Matilda completed 85 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While some were short, mandatory training sessions, required for her position, many were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Matilda described a conference entitled “Accelerating Leaders” as a professional development opportunity that stood out among the rest. Additionally, she described an ongoing initiative led by her principal to educate staff about enriching the lives of students of poverty which utilized Eric Jensen’s videos and books.

Matilda described “Accelerating Leaders” as a beneficial conference which specifically addressed concepts related to race, ethnicity, and culture. Including presentations from a diverse group of parents, Matilda felt their discussions enabled her to better understand or empathize with perspectives she might have otherwise overlooked. She shared two artifacts from this professional development opportunity which included her personal notes and a book entitled *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom* (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Her notes had several quotes scrawled across them including, “As diversity grows, so must we,” as well as outlines of some of the major concepts covered at the conference. She had a list she labeled as different forms of “group-ness” which included race, ethnicity, age, gender, faith, geography,

language, shared history, occupation and job title, sexual orientation, ancestry, and family role.

These concepts helped her to understand ways in which people have been oppressed.

Additionally, she included somewhat of a “to-do” list:

1. Build trust
2. Engage personal culture
3. Confront issues of social injustice
4. Transform instructional practices
5. Engage entire school community

Next to this list she noted, “Confront 2 before 3,” emphasizing the personal work that may need to be done around one’s own culture prior to attempts to redress injustice. Related to this,

Matilda flagged an excerpt she believed elaborated upon this point in her text by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010). It read:

The challenge of reaching out to a broader pool of students... I think is really multifaceted. We don’t, in education, have a very big pool of teachers beyond white middle class teachers. And that makes it hard for people like me to understand, for example, what it’s like to be a Spanish speaking child in America, or what it’s like to be an African American kid or a Native child in America. It makes it hard for me to understand what goes on in a house where there’s tremendous economic tension and stress all the time. So I think on the things that we really have to do is put ourselves, as teachers of gifted kids, in places where we start to work with students who are different than the kinds of students that we’ve worked with at least in some ways, so we enter their world. I don’t think it’s particularly useful to continue to wait for them to enter ours, because that doesn’t seem like a very inviting prospect. So think learning about other

cultures and being with kids of other cultures, really owning those students and accepting them as ours. (Reaching Out to Students, para. 1)

The section of text Matilda flagged went on to describe the importance of building “bridges of trust” and developing more affirming perspectives regarding which students ought to be included in gifted and talented programs. Additionally, Tomlinson and Imbeau urged teachers to “teach forward to the talent and backwards to the deficits at the same time.” Matilda suggested that this conference and text developed her empathy and affirming perspectives when working with English language learners and their families.

Matilda described her ongoing exposure to Eric Jensen (2010) research as influential to her understanding of social justice for students living in poverty. After attending a course about enriching the lives of students living in poverty, Matilda’s principal brought videos and reading materials back to share with Willard staff. While teachers had the option to attend, he offered sessions to learn more about ideas from the course every Tuesday and Thursday. Matilda shared a binder of materials he gave to teachers. While she had not yet completed all of the reading, Matilda described several ideas she had gained. She elaborated:

It was talking about the equalizer of school and how, when we can start everybody’s day with equality, that when you’re here, everyone is the same. But then when they go home again, the stress of not having food and not having electricity really plays upon them... and those first five years are huge. The brain is just absorbing everything. If it's absorbing negative, it takes a long time to undo negative... It talks about how the brain can and does change.

Matilda detailed the impact of these professional development opportunities as influential to her belief for teacher autonomy. She stated, “This [the classroom] is my four walls. I control my four walls... what goes on inside, and I can effect change in all these ways.”

Reflection. Reflecting on how equitable teaching may be advocated, Matilda suggested that educators themselves should be better educated, and topics like race ought to be discussed more openly so the current population of teachers may have more empathy for their students. She stated:

As a profession, we tend to be White, middle-class women. That's not the majority of our world and if you're telling me that the only way I can teach to someone is if I am their same skin color or their same gender, then I got problems, because I'm really not going to have a lot of connections with a lot of my students.

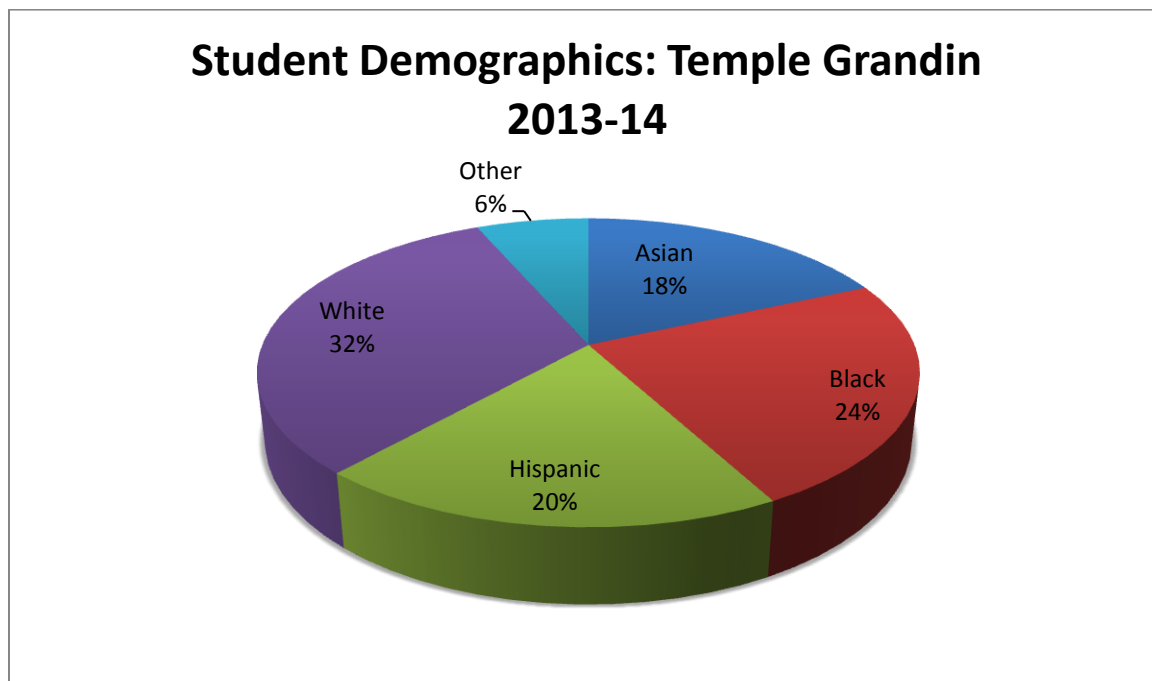
Instead, Matilda suggested giving the current population of teachers more opportunities for authentic learning. She related this suggestion to how she introduced a unit on democracy. Hoping to help students better understand Greek democracy, she began her lesson by only engaging with the boys in her class, since in ancient Greece only some men were allowed to vote. As the girls slowly recognized Matilda ignoring them, they were angered and better able to understand this inequality. Matilda suggested opportunities that made teachers uncomfortable and question ideas may be a good start for growing their awareness of diverse perspectives.

Temple Grandin Elementary. Temple Grandin Elementary is a kindergarten to grade six elementary school located in a rural neighborhood within APS. With a mission of fostering critical thinking and child-centered learning opportunities for high levels of achievement, Grandin Elementary prides itself on its diversity and community partnerships. Special programs include mentoring and tutoring opportunities for students with adults throughout the community,

student leadership within the school, and technology initiatives such as “Bring Your Own Device,” which gives students the option to utilize personal devices including iPads in their classes. Figure 4.3 illustrates the racial demographics of the student population at Grandin Elementary.

Figure 4.3

Temple Grandin Student Demographics



Adapted from “Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs” (APS, 2013d).

Additionally, 32.77% of the student population is Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 40.78% of students receive free or reduced price meals.

The following case describes one teacher working at Temple Grandin Elementary during the 2013-2014 academic year. Peyton was a single, White female in her middle to late twenties and was interviewed in early spring of 2014.

Peyton. Peyton was in her second year of teaching special education to multiple elementary grade levels at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place at a coffee shop

near her home within the same district in which she worked. Peyton possessed a caring and thoughtful demeanor which came through in her responses and anecdotes.

Peyton taught seven students in a self-contained classroom. All of her students had a diagnosis of autism and several of her verbal students spoke a language other than English in their homes. These included Vietnamese, Hindi, Amharic, Spanish, and Korean. Peyton often collaborated with another grade level inclusion teacher, since one of her students spent part of the day in that general education classroom. Peyton's class was diverse socioeconomically as well, with two students qualifying for free and reduced meals and two students from affluent backgrounds whose parents could afford additional private therapies. Peyton described working with a diverse group of students as "fun" since she had always been attracted to working with children with special needs.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Peyton viewed her role as a teacher as multifaceted. As a special education teacher, she believed she knew her students exceptionally well, since she worked with them for two years. She described her students' parents as "extended family" because she needed to be a confidant to them since they did not have many people to talk to about their children. While focused mainly on behavior among her group of students, Peyton believed the purpose of education was to prepare them with the functional and independence skills to attain jobs and be successful in the world. While most of her students were on standards of learning tracks, Peyton felt responsible for giving them instruction related to the standards, which was challenging given their language and social challenges. She noted that most parents hoped for their children to join the general education classroom, so she focused on teaching them independence skills to get them ready.

Challenges related to Peyton's role included balancing her many responsibilities. She described teaching as being like a politician since she had to be many things to many different people. She recognized that she had to make concepts understandable to her students, break down goals for parents in terms they could understand, test and interpret data, and continue to learn to improve her practice. Peyton felt that teachers are held to higher standards than other professionals but often do not receive the respect they deserve. She described the pressure she felt to raise the bar for students who were behind two grade levels and wondered if these lofty goals were realistic. Peyton longed for professional development to improve her academic teaching skills since she was usually required to attend sessions related to behavior training. She stated, "I feel like that's a problem because I feel like I have less knowledge about teaching. The focus for me is on behavior and data." Peyton also worried about her ability to continue to put in the hours to be an effective teacher once she had a family of her own. She recalled putting in 13 hour days and recognized, "There are teachers who've been teaching 20 plus years with me."

Reflecting on her personal definition of culturally responsive teaching, Peyton suggested it meant "keeping in mind always that there are different cultures in your classroom and making sure you don't present something in a way that it would only make sense to one culture." She described the benefits to her students as important in terms of providing examples and images that looked like them. Because they were very visual and literal, it was important to see familiar representations in books and pictures in order to make connections to content they learned. Peyton described how when showing examples of families, she used pictures showing multiple representations and strived to include characters that were not just White. She noted that inclusive approaches to teaching should be integrated, so students see a truer and more multifaceted depiction of the world.

While Peyton claimed not to recognize the political nature of schooling, she was aware of the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education and disciplinary actions. She recognized that often teachers may not realize how they are contributing to inequitable systems. For example, she described how she and her father differed in their political beliefs. Teaching for thirty years, Peyton's dad worked in a diverse school, but found it difficult to hold affirming perspectives of multicultural students. She suggested that having no exposure to classes focusing on culture, he lacked familiarity. She stated, "I think that's a big problem. I love my dad. I think he's a great teacher, but if you don't have trainings like this, you just don't think about it. It doesn't make sense to you." Recalling past conversations, Peyton described his lack of patience and quickness to remove students from his class for disruptive behaviors. While Peyton had more empathy for students, recognizing that behaviors may be manifestations of larger social issues, she urged her dad to provide consequences *and* also follow up with students to show that he cared. Peyton viewed this as a way to break punitive cycles rather than reinforce the notion that adults do not care. While she and her father did not see eye to eye, Peyton described her father as willing to listen to her ideas, but she wished she had more of an impact. She stated:

He'll listen. I'm his daughter. He'll listen to me, but it's not like it's changing him. I don't know. Things that are very moving to me, he's like, "Great, Peyton, that wouldn't really work." He doesn't believe in it. I wish there was something that I could do that would make him believe in it.

Peyton believed as a special education teacher she had a bit more autonomy in her classroom since she created Individual Education Plans (IEP) and established goals for her students. In terms of integrating content related to activism or inequity, Peyton suggested that these abstract concepts were difficult for her students to comprehend, but she tried to embed

equitable teaching practices in all of her work. She discussed programs the school promoted including one that brought male figures into the school so students would see examples of strong male role models, translation services provided by the district, and a community garden project in which the school participated. With her particular students, Peyton tried to emphasize that equal did not always mean fair. She described how this became obvious to students in the special education classroom since they each had different accommodations. Peyton elaborated “I feel like that's a very real world application. They need this. You don't need this. You're okay. The kids are really good about understanding that now, but it was something in September where they're like, ‘Oh.’”

In her interactions with parents, Peyton also tried to be sensitive to the range of cultures and languages noting that “sometimes, being the majority culture, sometimes people can look at you as you don't get it, when I'm trying to get it.” Peyton made attempts to understand the families in her room better by sending home surveys throughout the year to learn more about them, including their preferences for communication style. She described how she learned from an early mistake:

My first year of teaching, when I was just getting to know the parents, six out of my seven kids were [ELL], and one parent got very offended that I asked if she wanted a translator. I was very respectful about it. Speaking to her, she doesn't speak English fluently. It's a little bit broken, not that I would say that to her. Any of the students, I always put it out there, “Would you like a translator to come?” It's a [district] requirement. She actually did get very offended. We talked about it later, and everything is fine now. She was like, “I've been in this country for years, and I understand.” That

was an eye-opener for me, just to be very careful, even when you are very careful to be more careful.

Peyton's pedagogical perceptions were also influenced by changes her principal was making within the school. Describing her principal as "blunt," she appreciated that she was able to lead teachers in a direction to improve their practices. While some of her colleagues found change uncomfortable, Peyton saw the changes as working towards more equitable practices. Requiring teachers to use guided reading daily, improving the condition of the book room, and making greater attempts to involve parents were just a few of the changes Peyton noticed. While many teachers did not enjoy being asked to stay at school in the evenings for events with parents, Peyton recognized these as opportunities to invite greater parental involvement and educate them about the new standards and ways to work with their children.

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Peyton showed an interest in helping others early on, leading a tutoring organization in high school and working in group homes for people with severe disabilities, so the decision to become a special education teacher was an easy choice. Influencing her understanding of pluralistic views of learning and teaching was her involvement in a women's leadership program during college. Through a partnership between this international program and her university, Peyton served as a mentor to a middle school girl, with the purpose of making a connection and empowering her during her early teen years. Part of a larger research initiative, the program inquired into the impact of such one-on-one mentoring experiences on the self-esteem and school performance of adolescent girls.

Meeting weekly, activities with her mentee ranged in focus from discussions of specific issues related to her age, to homework help, and social activities. As part of her involvement, Peyton engaged in course work at the university relevant to her role, which addressed social

barriers facing girls and people of color. She learned to be mindful of gaps in opportunity and her contributions impacting the larger social order. She recalled one activity in particular that awakened her understanding of how race and culture impact people:

It was this activity where you took a step forward or you stayed in place. They would ask you a whole variety of statements. We all started on the same place. Then they'd say things like, "Have you ever been the only person of your race in a class? Take a step forward." That question really stuck out to me, because I remember almost every African-American girl took a step forward, and I've never had a situation like that, being the only one of my race in the class. I've never even thought about that, but that is interesting and how you would feel if you're the only person... Standing there as the majority culture, it was very eye-opening to me, and I thought about things in a different way. I'm used to going to class, and of course there's people who look like me and have similar backgrounds, but sometimes it's hard to think about the person who doesn't have that and just how you might feel.

Peyton described other questions they were asked related to poverty and things that people would not have been able to recognize just from looking at someone. She wondered if the activity may have embarrassed some, but hoped that instead it was as empowering for her peers as it was for her, forcing her to reflect on things she had not yet considered. She described the impact of this activity on her teaching:

Having my own class of kids and just thinking about it. I have seven kids, and six out of the seven are [English language learners], and they all are different cultures, all different languages. It's really interesting to think about, how different their backgrounds at home

are. It's funny. We're trying to teach them the same curriculum, but it's so interesting because they have so many other factors playing in.

Another opportunity Peyton had to reflect on different perspectives was during an elective course focused on sustained dialogue, designed to challenge participant thinking. With a purposeful mix of racially diverse people, the group engaged around topics that forced them to confront issues related to race. Hearing some of her peers' stories about their experiences led Peyton to develop empathy for people of color and an understanding of racial identity development. Peyton believed developing a better understanding of multiple perspectives was important and stated otherwise "you just find yourself in that comfortable circle and you don't challenge yourself." She suggested, "I would never have met those people that I met in that class, probably." Peyton admitted that it could be uncomfortable at times and understood, "I did feel uncomfortable, especially when some of the minorities were talking about these things that happened. Oh my gosh, and then I'm like, 'Am I somehow serving into that without even thinking about it?'" While Peyton chose to participate in this type of learning because she saw its connection to the students she would one day teach, she noted that mandating such learning may be difficult since "there's always going to be a couple of people who somehow that doesn't impact them, whereas it impacted me a lot." Peyton perceived the impact of this learning on her teaching was an engrained sense of inclusion and she referenced the "Multicultural Day Parade" teaching case we discussed. She stated:

...it's not like I'm going to default to something that might be discriminatory or alienating. I try not to at least. It's really good to have that automatic as a teacher, not have something like the Multicultural Day Parade happen. You're always thinking about things.

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Peyton received her education from a very highly ranked, large, urban, public university in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. With several practicums in both general education and special education settings, Peyton felt well prepared for her role teaching at Temple Grandin Elementary. She believed that her extra-curricular experiences in the women's leadership program and its related courses helped her become culturally sensitive.

Impacting her work with children with special needs, Peyton felt compelled to advocate for them. She stated, "Maybe a lot of people think that kids with autism might not be as smart or something and that's definitely not true, and I try to break that stereotype." She noted the misconceptions other teachers had about her students' intellectual abilities. She recognized that their social limitations led other teachers to assume they could not participate in higher level thinking activities. Peyton wished to interrupt these unconscious assumptions and raise expectations. She recalled a famous experiment regarding assumptions that she learned about in a psychology course:

They had a group of kids and the teachers were told—it's a famous experiment—some of the students were the gifted, smart learners, and these [other] kids were not going to learn well. Really, there was no difference at all. By the end of the year, those kids who were the "super learners" had done much better than these other kids.

Peyton described the impact of such teacher expectations stating, "It's the power of thinking a certain way, which is really interesting and scary."

Thinking of other ways in which she hoped to advocate for her students and parents, Peyton suggested the school ought to think about ways in which some families were excluded from school events. She realized that a lack of transportation or inconvenient timing could be

factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement. Additionally, Peyton recognized that the parents of her own students felt alienated from school events since they did not seem “autism friendly.” Peyton hoped to ameliorate that during an upcoming health and wellness event by connecting with the physical education teacher to bring a representative from an autism organization to the event in order to educate families.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Peyton completed 50 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions or courses required for her position, four were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Peyton described her desire to seek out professional development with more of an academic or cultural focus, but felt limited to behavioral courses related to her position. She stated, “No one really coaches me academically. That scares me.”

Peyton was excited for an upcoming guided reading professional development day since she had been spending time learning about it on her own, informally. Having had specialized reading content courses in her education program, Peyton was grateful when her principal offered opportunities to learn more about guided reading, since during district-wide professional development days she was forced to attend Applied Behavior Analysis trainings.

Peyton believed professional development was “best” when it was relevant and useful. Part of her decision to work in APS was the opportunity to participate in “Great Beginnings,” a course designed for new teachers. She was pleased to have support early-on. Additionally, she appreciated the peer learning fostered by her school. She described how her principal and two other teachers brought their insights from a two-day Jensen conference focused on poverty, back to the entire school. Peyton’s biggest take-away from their presentation was the reminder about

holding high expectations and that teachers should not use poverty as an excuse. She connected this to her own class and stated:

...this one little girl, I'm like, "She's not making progress because I know she has no support at home." Then I'm like, "Wait a minute. No, she can still make progress. She's a very smart girl." Just making sure those stereotypes are out of my head I feel like are very important. She's made a whole lot of progress this year.

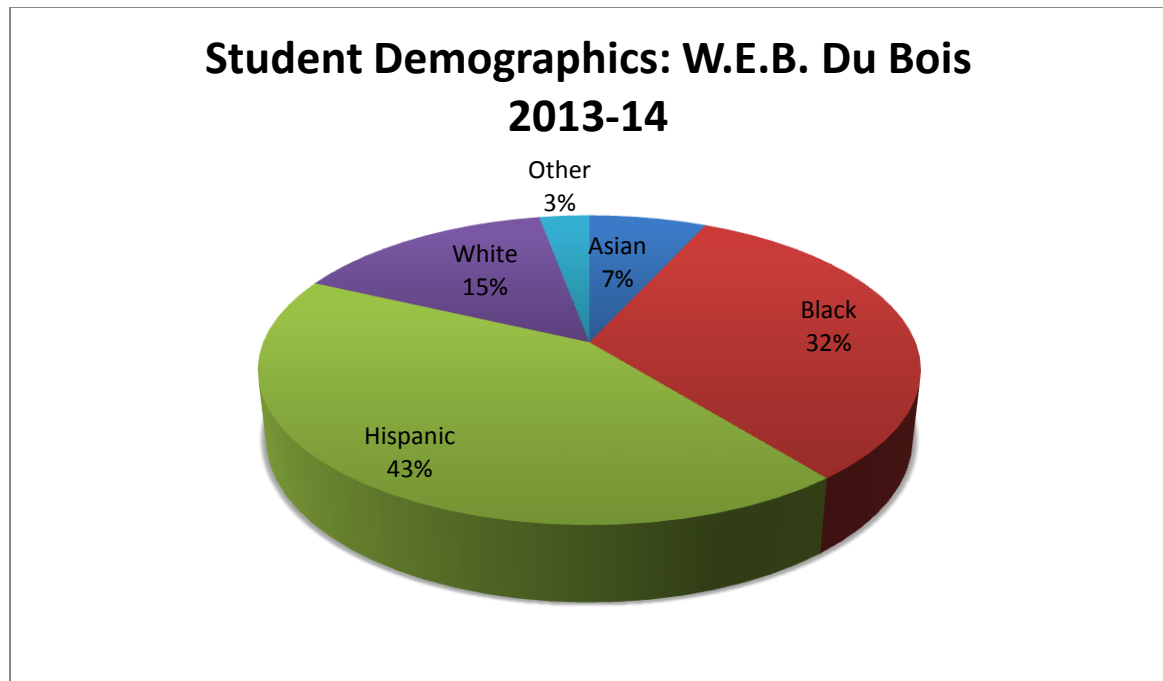
Reflection. Reflecting on ways to foster a deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching among teachers, Peyton suggested that teachers with a predisposition to cultural sensitivity should be specifically recruited and hired by school districts. She felt this would be a way in which districts could set direction to their work and teachers could be supported by each other. Thinking about her father, Peyton suggested that professional development focused on diversity may be most effective early in teachers' careers before pedagogical perspectives are "engrained." Reflecting on the interviews, Peyton stated that she hoped to continue to be "mindful" regarding issues of culture, so she might avoid insensitivities such as those we discussed in the "Multicultural Day Parade" case. She noted that this is something that can be easily overlooked, but she hoped to make a conscious effort to use inclusive activities and examples in the classroom, as well as engage sensitively with parents.

W. E. B. DuBois Elementary. W. E. B. DuBois Elementary is a pre-kindergarten to grade six elementary school located in an historical neighborhood within APS. With a mission of fostering high levels of academic and social achievement to encourage students to contribute to the global community, DuBois Elementary believes in "celebrating" its rich cultural and economic diversity. Special programs include the Responsive Classroom approach to social learning, several extracurricular reading initiatives, and a partnership with a local university.

Additionally, DuBois Elementary houses a GATE Center for students throughout APS identified as requiring a differentiated curriculum for exceptional performance capabilities. Figure 4.4 illustrates the racial demographics of the student population at DuBois Elementary.

Figure 4.4

W. E. B. DuBois Student Demographics



Adapted from “Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs” (APS, 2013d).

Additionally, 38.83% of the student population is Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 65.19% of students receive free or reduced price meals. Based on the percentage of low-income students within the school, DuBois Elementary qualifies for Title 1 funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001. Additionally, DuBois Elementary is one of the 29 elementary and middle schools identified by APS as a PSI-2, or “Priority School.” Schools with a PSI-2 designation are identified by the state Department of Education “as a result of not making adequate yearly progress as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)” (APS, 2013c) or by the School Support Composite Index (SSCI) ranking, which is

based on gaps in achievement among White and Asian subgroups and Black and Hispanic subgroups. Schools with this designation receive additional funding for instructional coaches, extended teacher contracts, additional teacher professional learning opportunities, and other services such as federally and state funded preschool programs for low-income families.

The following three cases describe teachers working at W. E. B. DuBois Elementary school during the 2013-2014 academic year. Noelle, Leigh, and Alex were interviewed in the early spring of 2014.

Noelle. Noelle was a single Black female of Haitian descent in her mid to late twenties. She was in her third year of teaching a lower elementary grade level at the time of the interviews. Noelle was a grade level team leader and was part of the school improvement plan committee, which was charged with creating school goals. The interviews took place at a coffee shop near her home in a city neighboring the district in which she worked. Throughout each interview Noelle's responses revealed her commitment to knowing her students well and her personal connection to the topics we discussed.

There were 18 students in Noelle's class which she described as mostly Hispanic, with a few Black and two White. She made a distinction between her Black students and her African students who were originally from Ethiopia. Of her 18 students, 16 were low income, receiving free or reduced lunch, eight students were described as having low English proficiency, and four students were described as children with special needs. Of her students' families, Noelle noted that those who did not speak English were very hesitant to come into the school unless they had a translator, shrinking from participation in school events, but she was able to recognize their involvement with their children academically in other ways.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Noelle described her desire to teach as a passion for helping others, especially low-income and students of color. Describing the multiple roles she had as a teacher, including social worker, guidance counselor, nurse, and mother at times, she hoped to instill compassion in her students. In addition to learning the basics, she wished to prepare students to work alongside others to achieve common goals at work or in their communities. She longed for her students to become self-sufficient and happy noting that later success may be through academics or a trade. Shaping these aspirations for her students was her desire for a better world and an educational system that could help meet these goals. Noelle lamented at what she described as the “deficiencies” of our “robotic” education system focused on testing:

It's just ridiculous. We're creating a society of people who are not happy and I feel like that's why we have all of these horrific things happening. It's sad. It literally breaks my heart to hear when a high school kid has done something awful to themselves or to a classmate. We're not encouraging them to work together. We're not encouraging them to respect one another. We're not encouraging them to learn and learn to love learning. We're just like, “You need to do this and you need to get a good grade and good luck to you”...I don't think we teach them to be good people in the process of that.

Noelle believed that her purpose in teaching was to always make sure that she met the needs of all of her students despite issues that might be seen as holding them back. She stated, “I'm always looking for ways to make them feel successful. My philosophy is to build confidence in students and their abilities.” She illustrated this point with an example of two of her students with special needs who were able to join what they perceived to be a more advanced group in guided mathematics. “To be put in that group with the students they kind of look up to as the smart kids, it was huge for them. I wanted to tell them... ‘You're all capable of this...

Look at what you accomplished.”” Noelle saw opportunities to celebrate successes with her students as important for her diverse learners who were more often used to being the ones not doing the right thing or not getting the right answer. She also spoke about knowing her students well as essential for developing a rapport and mutual respect:

When they know that you know something about them and you're invested in them, it's easier to approach them when they're misbehaving or when something happens. They know that “okay, you care about me because you know about me. You took the time to know me. The fact that you're talking to me, it's not because you don't like me, it's because you want better for me.”

Reflecting on her personal definitions of social justice and culturally responsive teaching, Noelle came across as well versed in these pedagogical approaches. Pausing thoughtfully, Noelle articulated:

It's always been an idea. I think of it as not just being tolerant, but being accepting of other perspectives and trying to make things as equal as possible for everyone despite their differences. Because things are unequal and things are unfair, and so trying to level the playing field. And that's across so many different areas, whether its gender equality, racial equality, sexual equality, everything, socioeconomic equality. Making sure that everyone gets treated fairly. You know, because a lot of times people think everyone gets the same and that's fair, but that's not fair. Understanding that there are differences and we have to address each difference in a different way.

She described a range of approaches for integrating many cultures into the classroom, from simply decorating the classroom to ensure there is a diverse reflection of the faces in the class to reading books that do not portray only white characters. Also, in terms of academics,

incorporating materials that deal with differences in general, so students realize people can be different, but more importantly, addressing these differences and creating opportunities for open discussions. An example of this was Noelle's description of a teachable moment in her follow-up writing prompt which described her fairy tale unit. She wrote:

Interestingly enough though, there was a boy (who normally does not voluntarily speak up) who had a strong reaction when we read a story that presented Jack from *Jack in the Beanstalk* as black. He immediately called out and said, "This book is wrong!" I stopped and asked him, what he meant by his comment and he said, "Jack is not supposed to be brown. His color is supposed to be peach." I then I asked my class if this were true, is Jack supposed to be only be peach. A girl then raised her hand and said, "No, the author can choose to make Jack any color he wants him to be." And to that, the boy said "Ohhhhh", as if this were some big revelation for him. I was excited that he had made that statement out loud, because it allowed for his perception to be challenged. I know we could have gone into a deeper discussion, but for that moment I felt that it was enough.

Noelle described the challenges for implementing these pedagogical approaches when so much of the work of teachers is collaborative and tied to standards:

I feel like I get a lot of blank stares like, "Oh, that's nice," but nothing, like nobody's like, "Oh, that's so great like I want to..." They don't see how it's necessarily tied to standards or they don't have time for it. It's not important to them to really incorporate it.

Despite sharing materials she created with her grade level team, Noelle often felt as if they brushed over her attempts to teach in more inclusive ways. She illustrated this point by describing how her first year mentor teacher tried to discourage her from emphasizing this multicultural approach in her teaching. While not in a mean-spirited way, she suggested that

since there were so many things Noelle had to cover in her first year of teaching, she should not put that pressure on herself “to add on one more *thing* to do.” Despite that advice, Noelle worked with another team member who was interested in the inclusion of diverse books across the curriculum to develop a unit for Black history month. While the other teachers on her team decided they did not want to include these lessons, after the unit was complete, her mentor teacher praised her work noting the successes. For Noelle, implementing this approach to teaching was a personal goal in which she sought out opportunities to incorporate diversity into other aspects of the curriculum. She noted:

My goal this year was to teach them about Nelson Mandela. I did it. That's not a standard, but I fit it in where I could. Yeah, and I shared it with my team. No one else really cared to do it. It sucks, but I still did it for my students and I'm glad they got it. Every year I make sure to do Black history month things. Nobody on my team ever really wants to do it. They're like, “It's not a standard.” I'm like, “Well, teaching students to be kind isn't a standard either, but we still do it.”

In reflecting about why teachers are not receptive to including units such as Black history month in their teaching, Noelle suggested that they do not care about it enough or perhaps do not see the value in it. Furthermore, she suggested:

I don't think some of the teachers are comfortable talking about race...I guess it is White privilege...They don't realize that race still needs to be talked about. I think they like to pretend that things can be colorblind. It is also tough.

Noelle was supported in her commitment to multicultural content integration by two other Black teachers who pulled her aside her first year, sharing their own resources. Noelle stated that the

three of them continued to share things and do things along with the music and art teachers whom she noted “are usually more into it, especially as it relates to what they're doing.”

In addition to these examples of additive multicultural content integration (Banks, 1989; 2002), Noelle also described examples of a more transformative nature. For example, focusing on diverse or multiple perspectives, Noelle transformed her language arts unit on fairytales, making a strong effort to find and include fairytales that did not only have White characters. She made a strong effort to incorporate Native American, African, and Asian perspectives as well as different versions of stories that students may have heard before. Around President’s Day, instead of just focusing on American presidents, she did lessons about Nelson Mandela, talking about the work that he did, why his work was important, and its impact, and tied it in with current events.

Adding more depth to typical units focusing on contributions approaches (Banks, 1989; 2002) during Black history month, Noelle chose to begin her unit teaching about African kingdoms rather than starting with slavery. She stated, “I wanted to show that Black history isn't just rooted in sadness and scary stuff.” Noelle incorporated student learning across the curriculum by using flexible morning times to create African drums with her students and then tying the project to math standards, having them finger paint the drums with 100 dots to demonstrate proficiency counting to 100. Noelle excitedly noted her principal’s approval. “I pulled it off...She loved it and [she said] that was impressive... maximizing time to fit it in.”

While it seemed difficult to escape the additive approach to multicultural content integration, Noelle demonstrated her desire to improve her practice and relate to her individual students:

Every year I always wished I'm more on top of things to do things for the Hispanic month. I think it's November, and by then I'm still not... I'm still scrambling, but I wish... doing more with that, especially since our school, it has such a huge Hispanic population... In the past I've had some Spanish students who don't want to identify with their Hispanic identify... I've asked them all where their families are from, they're like, "I don't know, we're from [the name of their state]." That's all they want to identify as and they don't want to recognize where their families are from.

However, Noelle recognized that her smaller contributions may be turning a small piece of equity understanding on for her students since while young, they did understand fairness:

I think if you go from there [fairness] that's a good place to start, and we're supposed to have—part of our school improvement plan is to have community engagement and stuff... I really wanted to do something with making some kind of—doing something for homelessness, because we do have some students that are homeless in our school.

Teaching about it in general, because we talk about wants and needs and how some people don't have shelter and don't have enough food.

Noelle was keenly aware of the benefits culturally relevant pedagogy may have in regards to the opportunity gap and structural oppression. She noticed gaps in academic achievement each year with her White students out-performing other students. However, she noted that teachers are not necessarily conscious of this when creating lessons. While gaps in achievement were discussed often as a school, Noelle believed there was an understanding that students of color and low-income students were not doing as well, creating a deficit perspective:

No one is blind to that and I think people are okay with talking about it and addressing it, but I do think a common cop out from a lot of teachers is, "Oh, it's their home life. Oh,

it's their upbringing. Oh, these poverty kids can't do this and poverty kids can't do that.”

It's almost like this hopelessness in a sense. I think every teacher, if their kids could do well, they would want that for them. But when they don't do well they chalk it up to, “Oh, they're just a poverty kid, and home's crazy, and that's just what's going to happen.” I do think sometimes it's hard to reach some of those students. I see it and I've dealt with it.

That doesn't mean it's okay and you just let it go because of those circumstances.

Noelle found it frustrating to hear the excuses teachers made about poor students and students of color, because she identified with a lot of these children. She described herself as growing up low-income and often was the only Black girl in her class, so she felt like she stuck out. She empathized with the students in her school and stressed:

It's tough to hear other people talk about them like that because I feel like they're talking about me. When they talk like that it's like, “You're talking about me.” I hate being—the ones that do well—I hate that they're referred to almost as an anomaly. “It's so strange that they did so well.” I [pause] just get that the cards are stacked against them. I understand that. But it doesn't mean they can't do it.

The emotional aspect of hearing the perspectives of her colleagues was correlated with Noelle's view of teaching as a political endeavor. Noelle perceived her colleagues as wanting their students to do well, but not understanding the ramifications if they did not. She stressed:

I don't think they understand the trajectory of a bad education. I think they see adults who aren't successful, who are in the prison system, who aren't doing well—they don't see it tied to the education they receive. They see it as a cultural issue. They see it as a family issue, a poverty issue... I totally believe in the schools to prison plan.

Noelle added that her school was conscious of what has been described as the school to prison pipeline when it came to suspension and retention, and noted that administrators were trying to make sure they were not reinforcing it in disciplinary actions, especially with Black boys. Additionally, Noelle made the connection to the over-representation of Black boys in special education programs. She suggested that this problem may be perpetuated due in part to pre-judgments or personal biases. Noelle described this:

Like, you view this student as being aggressive because you perceive Black boys as being aggressive or you perceive “Blackness” as being aggressive. You see anger and you don’t see the reasons behind it. You know what I mean? You see this outburst and you think this kid is just aggressive and angry but you don’t see the frustration that might be underlying. They don’t—and it’s their perception of, “Well, this is how...” This is how I think they see it, “This is how those kinds of people act,” and just the comments that teachers make about students and their families, it’s just definitely there.

Noelle gave an example of comments she heard another teacher make during a lunch in which she felt very uncomfortable about how she was referring to her students. The teacher questioned the eligibility of her Hispanic students to attend their school based on where they live, described them as illegal immigrants, and as sucking the system dry. Recalling these comments struck a nerve with Noelle who emphasized:

So you view this child as a problem? I get that having an influx of students is affecting our school system, but that’s happening everywhere and it’s just kind of your perception on that. I don’t see how it doesn’t affect how you deal with that student or that family. I just – I think she’s a great teacher, but when you say things like that, how do you not treat

that child differently when you assume these kinds of things and don't understand—I don't know, it's just strange to me.

Noelle recognized the types of assumptions teachers, students, and parents hold are often linked to a “hidden curriculum.” She described another example of people questioning the qualifications of students of color who are selected for the gifted and talented program. She described how White parents question the validity of the selection process when their children are not accepted into the program, threatening to pull their children out of the school, rather than keep them in the regular education classroom.

Influence of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Noelle noted both personal and professional experiences as having had a strong influence on her pedagogical perceptions. Growing up in a wealthy New England town, Noelle felt isolated being one of only a few Black students. She was further isolated from other Black peers when placed in honors classes. Her middle school world language teacher became a strong mentor, pushing Noelle with high standards and expectations. She noted this teacher really understood her as an individual and tapped into that understanding. She fondly recalled the card her teacher gave her at eighth grade graduation, in which she laid out her hopes and dreams for Noelle and disclosed that she had been Noelle’s sponsor throughout middle school, financing special school activities such as a trip to Washington, D.C. that her mother otherwise would not have been able to afford. This personal investment had a lasting impact on Noelle as she described:

I was like, wow, people believe in me and they invested in me, and they are helping me in a way that's not just like homework help. It was really just a lifetime, it was going to be a lifetime gain, I guess.

Even through high school Noelle experienced feelings of isolation and frustration in higher level courses. For example, during group projects she knew people did not want to work with her and she did not identify with many of the characters in assigned reading. Worse, she could not recall a single teacher addressing those hurtful moments that made her feel like an outsider. Noelle reflected, “It was always said, ‘Our school is so diverse.’ You have students from so many different countries and that’s always been the common thing that I heard going through school, but we never talked about it, except for U.N. day.”

It was not until college that Noelle experienced access to the kind of books and environment in which race and culture were discussed. Majoring in African-American studies allowed Noelle to grow in cultural and sociocultural awareness, as she recalled having missed out on something during her previous school experiences. This denial of cultural identity has influenced the ways in which Noelle approaches her classroom community:

That’s always been a conscious effort of mine because I think I felt like I missed out on something, and so I really wanted to incorporate that into my classroom as much as possible, and then also I just feel like I want to – I want my students to be tolerant, I want my students to be accepting, I want – If I can have a student that comes out of my classroom that is going to be all about social justice, then I feel like I’ve accomplished something, you know, and so I want to kind of help spring that thinking for them at a young age, and so that’s something that I think is very important to me.

Noelle suggested this type of learning would be important to her no matter the population of students she taught, noting that a primarily White student population ought to have opportunities to engage with, and exposure to, multiple perspectives. She tied this importance to recent tragedies such as the murder of Trayvon Martin. She articulated:

I still get very frustrated by things that I see happening...It reminded me that our perception of the Black boy, it hasn't changed, and somebody's dead now. It kind of reminded me of it, but these are things that I've always, that have been shaped from childhood and teenage years and then I get those reminders...

For Noelle, building tolerance, acceptance, and community among her students was important because she did not have that type of school experience and she lamented, "The teachers didn't do anything about it."

Professionally, Noelle was upset by colleagues who seemed to lack understanding of sociocultural issues. She recalled a lunch room conversation following Trayvon Martin's death:

I remember them not really understanding what the huge deal was, like about Zimmerman not being arrested, or they were like, "The police are doing their job" and this and that. But no, they're not doing their job. Things aren't going the way that it should. If the races were reversed it would be a whole different narrative. It would be a different conversation. It was really frustrating and I remember saying, "I have a brother who is," at the time, he was fifteen. I was like, "That's my brother, and that makes me upset to know that my brother could be walking home with a hoodie on and that could happen to him."

During this conversation Noelle shared about an event her brother experienced in which he was in a nice area of his hometown and was harassed and taken to the police station because he looked suspicious for being Black in a neighborhood the police perceived him to not belong. However, Noelle felt sharing this did little to change her colleagues' understanding of her perspective. She stated:

I see it. I know that it's real. I remember sharing that story and they were all like quiet. I still don't think they got it. I think they just, they didn't believe that it was an issue with race. It's just... it is. These are our students. These are the kids you work with. These are the kinds of issues that they're going to face. I don't think they really understand that. I don't think they respect it and I don't think they, I think they're the kind of people that would have been on that jury and acquitted George Zimmerman.

Part of Noelle's ability to maintain within a work environment that she perceived lacked a lot of collegial support for her points of view in and out of the classroom was her ability to separate their lack of understanding from their good intentions. Unfortunately, Noelle felt only "tolerated" by many of her colleagues and urged, "I feel like they accept me because I'm educated, I fit in, I've assimilated. But I feel like in any other setting, [they] wouldn't talk to me. I know that."

Influence of Teacher Education. Noelle received her education from a large, urban, private university in the middle-Atlantic region of the United States. With a high national ranking, Noelle attended this same university for both her undergraduate and master's degrees, majoring in African-American Studies and Elementary Education respectively. Noelle noted that she was required to take one or two courses that dealt with diversity during her master's program, and considered them to be some of her favorites, influencing her perspectives as a teacher. While many of her classmates were uncomfortable discussing race, she felt more comfortable, but did not want to be the voice for all Black women. She posed that such courses are helpful, but may need to start earlier. Noelle described her undergraduate experience as a "fortunate" one, since her university was liberal enough to force those conversations early-on. She noted:

We had to do these different workshops during orientation our freshman year in college. It dealt with race, it dealt with sexuality, and it dealt with gender. In our freshman dorms, we had to have those conversations. We had to do it. I think that people who came out of my college, I feel like, have a better handle and are maybe a little bit more comfortable talking about it. I don't think everybody's comfortable still.

While Noelle's undergraduate program was focused on social justice and different cultural movements, her graduate education program had one course that stood out. Focusing on diverse students, the class emphasized how to incorporate multiculturalism in literature and other components of teaching. For example, Noelle learned about being conscious of the demographics of people depicted in the classroom books and decorations. This impacted Noelle early in her career because it was so fresh in her mind. She described how when she was looking for things for her classroom, she was very conscious of what people looked like. She said, "I wanted to make sure that it was diverse." And although the majority of her students were not going to be White, she did not want to exclude those images entirely since:

I don't want to isolate White students I have in my class. Especially knowing what it is like to be the one Black person, you know, I get it. It's uncomfortable at times. And so I don't ever want them—I mean I know it's inevitable—but I don't want to be the cause of them being the odd man out.

While not emphasized by the program as a whole, Noelle experienced social justice perspectives during some of the courses in which the professors believed in it and in which their teaching brought out discussions of related topics. For example, one of her language arts professors highlighted a connection between illiteracy and incarceration. In addition to her work as a professor, she taught in a juvenile detention center, and brought topics of justice into her

graduate courses. Noelle recalled a major take-away and inspiration from this professor was, “It’s more than just teaching a child to read, it’s setting them up for their future, and so she kind of had these undertones of social justice...just by her work you knew that she was very involved.”

Influence of Professional Development. Noelle completed 27 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions or courses required for her position, several were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Noelle described her desire to seek out professional development focusing on issues of race and teaching but she did not see opportunities within the district’s course offerings. She attended a course entitled “Academic Diversity Institute” one summer hoping these topics would be covered, but instead only one or two things were included related to race. Most topics dealt with English language learners and diversity in terms of learning style and special education.

Noelle described courses related to her practice teaching literacy and math as “best” professional development, but stressed a conference entitled “Teaching with Poverty in Mind” as “huge” for her in terms of evolving her pedagogical perspective. While often frustrated with other teachers’ presumption of their students’ inabilities given their life circumstances, such as poverty and the assumption of a lack of home support, she noted that it could be easy to fall into that line of thinking when students do not perform as well as desired. However, Noelle stated:

But after going to this Eric Jensen thing, that kind of opened up my eyes like okay, that’s not an excuse anymore. If I’m really going to try to reach these students, I do have to work harder. I have to work hard and I have to approach things from a different point of view and I have to—like the reason they’re not remembering things is that their working memory ability is really low. I have to do things to help build working memory... It’s not

just that I have to teach academic stuff, I have to literally get their brains to the point where they can hold onto information, because that's what happens with students who are in poverty.

Noelle felt the weight of this task in addition to all of the demands facing teachers, but she wished every teacher could have experienced this learning opportunity she described as “dynamic” and “engaging.” She believed it could change their outlook that teachers are defeated before they begin, when working with students in poverty.

Noelle and one other teacher were sent to the Eric Jensen course along with several of the administrators. The goal was for them to bring back information and share it with grade level teams and the school. However, Noelle said that never really happened in terms of a staff meeting. She hoped to talk about working memory and the opportunities to develop that with activities during morning meeting. While the other teacher and an instructional coach were willing to take that on along with Noelle, it was not possible since staff meetings were devoted to mathematics workshop, a school improvement goal. Despite the inability to share her learning with the school staff in a large forum, Noelle brought an example of a staff newsletter with information from Jensen (2010) research. Administrators pulled information from his books and website, and included information in the staff notes regularly so teachers could learn some of the ideas. For Noelle, this was a good way to continuously be reminded of her learning. She said the course “re-inspired everybody, probably, in that room to go back to the schools and do some of these things [and] made you want to do it.” The staff notes helped her to continue this enthusiasm, trying new things each week. When probed about what “it” was exactly, Noelle described engagement activities to get students excited about learning, positive reinforcement, working memory activities during morning meeting and math centers, mixed-ability grouping,

the inclusion of music and movement, as well as facts regarding the effects of stress on students and ways to decrease disruptive behaviors. Noelle noted that she now included those kinds of approaches, being mindful of specific students in her classroom.

Reflection. Reflecting on how more equitable teaching approaches might be encouraged, Noelle had several suggestions, putting the impetus for change on school leaders. She thought teachers ought to be encouraged to teach in equitable ways by being shown why it is important to do so. She noted how initiatives such as guided mathematics are made school-wide mandates with staff meetings and peer observations being devoted to such mandates. She has observed how when teachers are able to see the benefits of changing their teaching, they are more likely to get onboard with new approaches. For Noelle, she remained optimistic saying this could “set people on fire,” sparking passion. Reflecting on the interview process, Noelle expressed her enjoyment, since she did not often have the opportunity to discuss these topics; furthermore she suggested, “This has re-grounded me in why I got into teaching.” Rather than going from one thing to the next, she viewed the interviews as opportunities to reflect on what she had been doing and what she wanted to do in the future. She also indicated that she hoped to test the boundaries of what she perceived to be acceptable, pushing herself without letting fear stand in the way of getting to “the heart of what it is I want to do.”

Leigh. Leigh was a single White female in her mid to late twenties. She was in her third year of teaching an upper elementary grade level in the GATE program at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place after school in Leigh’s classroom, which reflected her passion for social studies and science topics as well as her ongoing work to create classroom routines and systems that were effective for her particular students. During each interview,

Leigh's responses suggested frustration with student behavior which she described as much more challenging than previous years, leaving her less excited about her job than in the past.

Leigh was grade level leader for the second year in a row, and described how she was thrown into the role due in part to "a revolving door" for teachers at W. E. B. DuBois. As a Title one school, Leigh described DuBois as "challenging," but rewarding as well, since she felt like she was making a difference. Teaching within the gifted and talented education (GATE) program, Leigh experienced extremes in parental involvement, ranging from what she considered to be too much involvement to not much at all. She felt the school was rich in resources, citing their SMART boards, coaches, and online resources. She noted that at times these could be viewed as too much, since new teachers did not always know where to find what was available to them.

Leigh described her class as a "diverse mix" with a few Hispanic students and a majority of Black and white students. She had several students she considered to be "low" the GATE program, since usually students are on or above grade level. None of her students were English language learners. A major challenge for Leigh was "behavior problems" among her students. More challenging than previous groups, Leigh stated:

I just try to laugh, like I've tried so many different things. All my kids have behavior contracts this year. I've never needed that before and now they all have them at their desk, every student. That way I can ensure that those that are doing the right thing...are rewarded... and those that aren't, they are supposed to take it home and get it signed by their parents.

Implementing various reward systems throughout the year, Leigh felt that her group of boys were particularly challenging, feeding off each other, with "attitude problems" and a general lack

of care. Leigh felt these behaviors were not in line with goals of the GATE program. In order to be selected for the program, students had to be nominated with a portfolio of creative examples of work that showed deep or extended thinking on different projects so it was not based solely on test scores. Leigh described how she met the needs of high achieving students:

Basically, we teach—they have advanced math—but I'm teaching fourth grade math and some of fifth grade math. That's the biggest difference. Then, I have a few different things for GATE that you are required to do for language arts. Pretty much social studies and science are the same but I try—typically in this class you would get through content quicker—and then you can do more projects, sort of extended things.

With high expectations for her students' performance, Leigh suggested that the lack of follow-up with student motivation and quality of work once students were in the GATE program was problematic, since she felt, "It should be a privilege to be in this class." She suggested that if there was a possibility of program expulsion, perhaps "that would be more of an incentive" for students to work harder and behave.

Pedagogical Perceptions. Leigh saw her role as a teacher to prepare students for success in the world outside of school. Noting that school cannot prepare students for everything, she suggested that giving students the basics and exposing them to a wide range may show them what opportunities are available. At the elementary level, she believed it was important to allow students to discover their interests. She said, "Half my class wants to be basketball players but... the reality of that... seeing that there [are] different things for them to do." Leigh recognized in addition to teaching content, she was also teaching life skills such as accountability, responsibility, and making good choices. Leigh admitted she felt stuck on the standards, but tried to tie them to student accountability by making them clear to her students with "I Can"

statements so students would know lesson objectives and what they were supposed to be learning.

Challenges Leigh described included a lack of time to plan for every lesson to be “excellent” and a lack of parental involvement. She elaborated:

There's not enough happening at home and there's not enough time during our school day to really get them where they need to be. There's that lag in summers when you tend to see that drop because they haven't had it. I just think parents need to be more accountable too, in some way, of helping their kids to succeed, too. There should be something there. I know there's struggles and there's all kinds of stories, but the bottom line is I feel that's one of my challenges, is that I'm doing everything... It has to be both or you can't do it.

Leigh connected the challenge of having parents who were not involved as tied to the challenge of closing gaps in achievement. I sensed a bit of hopelessness in Leigh who said:

It's hard because then they're still behind. I don't know how you close that gap. Especially if there's no parent help. I think parents can be a huge piece in that. I'm not trying to put it all on parents, but like, in the classroom, my kids that are sort of my lower students—you know, they're in a lot of my intervention groups—are the same kids, and they have been all year. I hope that I'm getting them further along, but they're still going to be my lower students at the end of this year. I don't know, as the teacher the reality is I don't know how to fix that. I don't know how to get there to where my higher level students are.

Leigh suggested that one way for gaps in educational achievement to be overcome was for greater student motivation, which illustrated a meritocratic view of schooling. While she admitted that some of the challenges facing students may be stamina in regards to the length of

the school day and expectations of standardized testing, she saw an irony in their lack of success given the extra supports many students receive. For example, Leigh suggested:

My first thought is that some of these students who are lower, like, that are struggling socio [economically], they have more support and more help than anyone else in the school, which makes me feel like, from the teacher's perspective, they do get a lot of support. I mean, I don't have it in my classroom, GATE. I mean, our ESOL teachers and our Special Ed teachers, I mean, they're in pull out. They're in those rooms working with a lot of the kids, too, that aren't even in their groups when they're pushing in. We also have the coaches, the instructional coaches for math. They never come in my room. They're usually in one of the rooms with the lower student population trying to help them and support them. When I look at it with those eyes, I feel they're getting more support than the other students. Not to say that it's unfair. They need that support, but they are getting it.

Leigh saw little connection between schooling and structural oppression and suggested that instead, issues related to stereotyping emanated from the students' communities who then brought those biases to school. She wondered if perhaps the attitudes she experienced were related to socioeconomics, noting how certain students had "a desire to prove something" in terms of challenging Leigh on issues of fairness. While she perceived students to be making the wrong choices at times, she described how they tried to flip issues on her. She described a lack of caring among these students in terms of consequences. She said:

If you can get them on task and get them working then they do perform well and they, you know, they can do amazing things, but I can't tell you how much work it is sometimes to get them to do that... some of that has to come from them or come from,

especially as they get older. I'm doing my best to sort of pull that out of them but... it's sort of a battle everyday with different things.

She saw major differences in the “social worlds” of her Black students living in communities close to the school and those students who were from other communities, but attended DuBois for the GATE program. She also saw a difference in the background knowledge of students who did not have as many opportunities outside of school. For example, Leigh described one of her Hispanic student’s incorrect test responses suggesting trees clean water. She noted:

I was thinking trees don't really clean water but that was the answer he circled and I was trying to understand why. He was like, well back home they had cactus, and they would get water from the cactus and the water was clean enough to drink. So he was using his background knowledge, but that didn't help him on the test because that wasn't, you know, technically our trees here don't clean the water in terms of making it drinkable.

Additionally, she viewed students who had opportunities outside of school such as traveling, as having a richer pool from which to draw ideas during writing. She made attempts to better understand her students by having them write letters to her about what they did at home, but this seemed to reinforce her negative perspectives regarding which parents were involved with students academically. She related:

That was interesting to read through. Some of them just go home and do homework, eat, and go to bed. But, you know, there were some that were like, “I'll read with my parents” or “I'll do this before bed every day” ...Others that maybe are like, “I go out and play basketball,” that's, you know, it's just sort of a difference. You see more of the education a little bit more—content I guess—happening more at home [with] parents that help with homework, versus parents who don't.

Reflecting on her personal definitions of culturally responsive teaching, Leigh recognized learning about the term in college. She described this pedagogical approach:

Culturally responsive teaching is where you are, I would say, I guess, aware and recognize that you have different cultures in your classroom. Kids come from different backgrounds, different diversities. They have different background knowledge, different understanding, sometimes, of questions and concepts, and that they need to be taught in different ways because of that.

Leigh suggested that when implementing this approach to teaching, teachers may be aware of the need to frontload certain background information for students who do not have it, as well as work to develop a sense of community within the class. She described this as important for recognizing all the different cultures and unique students within the class. Additionally, she described teachers may try to learn about the cultures and languages within the class for a “symbiotic relationship.” Leigh felt showing an interest in the backgrounds of diverse students was important because:

It's not a negative thing in school, but it looks like a negative thing because it might be inhibiting them from moving forward or making the progress as quickly as other students who maybe can read more easily or get these background concepts.

While Leigh also described opportunities in which teachers may offer alternative forms of assessment to students as part of culturally responsive teaching, she described this approach as making an “exception” that may inhibit them from going further in school. Leigh expressed her understanding of culturally responsive teaching as “one more thing” for teachers to do, but necessary for classes with “those types of challenges.”

While Leigh did not perceive to have these “challenges” in her class, she described examples in which she utilized what she understood as culturally responsive teaching. During morning meetings she often had students greet each other in different languages, the school held an international night annually, and one year she had international teachers visit her class to teach students about what school was like in their country. Viewing multicultural content integration as additive, Leigh stated, “I think you have a choice as a teacher to expose kids to more, you know, ethnically diverse things just randomly, being able to pull that in.” She viewed this to be difficult given the many things teachers are expected to cover. Further, she expressed fear, recognizing a political nature to such work. She stated:

Some teachers may be uncomfortable with it today. There [are] people that are so—I do feel like I'm—the suing that goes on, people being afraid to offend somebody else, and religion in the schools. That's not something I usually discuss with my kids either. I don't know if that's good or bad, really. Some teachers may not feel comfortable with that piece as well, just the way that schools are. I'm afraid to bring a goldfish to my room because I'll get in trouble. I mean, because everything has to be approved or you know, like, it's just different. When I was in school we raised ducklings in our classroom. It's just a different world, but I can't do that now just because of... you know?

While noting the challenges associated with equitable teaching, Leigh understood the importance of knowing students well, both academically and personally. She viewed this as important for best supporting students. She stated, “The point is, they should be doing it in all the classrooms. Sometimes there's just not enough time for it.”

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Leigh’s experiences teaching at DuBois impacted her perceptions of her role as a teacher. Over the course of the interviews, Leigh

remarked at the “toughness” of her job and I sensed an overriding fear inhibiting her autonomy and ability to address issues related to equity, which she perceived indicated a political stance.

She remarked:

I always try to teach in a non-biased way. Like I never throw in political things or anything like that, not that it wouldn't be okay to have a debate for them too, but I don't feel like it's appropriate for me to point out my political beliefs to them because I think that should be their decision. I'm sure their parents have in ways, and they probably have them, but I just feel that the teacher, you need to be kind of neutral on some things because you want your kids to learn and see both sides.

She attempted to impart understanding of multiple perspectives through her unit about the Civil War. Noting that students often tend to favor the northern perspective, she tried to pull in materials about the southern generals and their stories, illustrating why their cause was important to them. Leigh remarked that recognizing different perspectives was a life skill that could be transferred to understanding other ethnicities as well. However, Leigh expressed her trepidation teaching this curriculum:

Like the slavery issue during the Civil War, there is a sense of—it's not that I'm afraid to talk about it—but it's like things sometimes always become political, even in the classroom. You want kids to look at things with an open mind, and a lot of times they're already shut. You know, it's already whatever's influenced them. Like, their parents, you know, they're kind of closed-minded to certain things and that's just how they are, which I think can be a challenge, too.

She described how students were quick to catch others saying “racial things” and class discussions could turn into arguments. She elaborated:

I'm thinking of two boys sitting over here and one said, "That's because I'm Black," or something, or "You think that just..." something related to one of them being White and the other being Black. The other kid was like, "No. That's not at all what I meant." You know? I just sort of observed it. It wasn't anything serious, but there is that... there's already that kind of... I don't know.

Leigh felt a barrier or lack of comfort addressing such topics in the classroom since students may be quick to jump on what is said even if unintentional. She felt this to be especially true with her particular class since she experienced their Socratic Seminars turning sour. She described her class as “confrontational” and worried about issues going home and the negative backlash from parents. Since she felt this was a challenging issue for teachers, she aimed to avoid politics in the classroom and furthered:

I try not to talk about politics and stuff in my classroom because I feel like, I mean, I'm teaching them content. I'm teaching them certain things, but how their beliefs and how they're going to grow up, is kind of... that's their choice and their decision. Like, I don't want to be an influence either way.

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Leigh received her pre-service teacher education from a nationally ranked, suburban, public university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She acknowledged differences between her student teaching and in-service teaching experiences. During student teaching Leigh recognized the challenge of working in an urban setting and noted that parents were not present and there was a lot of poverty and drama. She did not feel like she could work in that same setting had she been offered a job, there since she would have burned out quickly. She said, “I love teaching all of my kids, but I love teaching. I don't like being a cop in my classroom.”

Focused on developing reading skills with her students, Leigh felt her student teaching experience was an introduction to the effects parents who are not involved have on the reading ability of their children. She stated:

Those kids that are behind are going to stay behind unless they're really being pushed. I know we have the summer school programs. We have other things to kind of help move them along. I just remember this literature being really interesting in helping me to see where some of this is coming from, when you're comparing different homes- a student who's being read to when they're really young and where they read together with their parents every night versus maybe a student whose parents can't read with him every night.

Leigh recognized the fact that some parents may be unable to focus on their child's education if they are working. Additionally, she noted that parents may not have the tools they need or understand the impact of reading with their child. This experience was enlightening to Leigh since she was able to see that her childhood was not the same as others. This recognition allowed Leigh to see that she should not give up on a student because they do not have home support, but it also created a sense of frustration. She lamented:

Maybe there's a sense of frustration with teachers sometimes, because you feel like, this isn't even my child and I'm advocating more and really the parent should be the biggest advocate. I feel like it should be the biggest advocate. Obviously I'm a teacher. I'm an advocate, too. That's a given. It's hard if you're more of an advocate than the parent is. It's difficult. It doesn't mean you can't do it or the kids won't succeed. It's just more challenging to get them, maybe, where they need to be.

Leigh recalled some limited course work centered on issues of diversity during her teacher education program, but had difficulty reflecting on big ideas influencing her pedagogical perceptions. Instead, she emphasized the importance of meeting with struggling readers more frequently to meet goals. However, I sensed Leigh's disheartened views regarding many of her students' abilities based on her view of their home lives when she remarked, "So I feel like you kind of, once you start off behind, you are sort of always behind because no matter what, your kids aren't going to be at that next level."

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Leigh completed 61 professional development courses and trainings during her time working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions or courses required for her position, at least 15 were extended courses in which she earned graduate credit. Many of the courses Leigh completed were related to her role teaching within the GATE program; however she was also motivated by a desire to complete her master's plus 30 in a fairly short amount of time.

Leigh described several courses that she found beneficial to her teaching including Responsive Classroom which she referenced a lot. Her favorite courses were ones that provided a tangible resource such as a book or DVD to use during lessons. She described professional development classes as a nice break to have lunch with adults and spend the day learning something that could be immediately taken back to the classroom. She shared examples of science DVDs she utilized for lessons on the scientific method as well as a book about mathematics workshop. She discussed how these resources were helpful in planning ways to engage her challenging class. She felt success implementing new approaches for teaching mathematics since the course modeled actual lessons.

In terms of course work related to issues of diversity, Leigh noted that much of this learning was embedded in courses related to differentiation and teaching English language learners. She offered:

I think that maybe some teachers don't view—I think they perceive it as important—but what I know now, I don't know that I would be like, "I need to go take a diversity course as much as I'd like to take a guided reading whatever." I feel like that's more beneficial to me as a teacher, though in reality, I'm sure a diversity course would probably be very beneficial as well. I just don't feel like as a teacher I would be as motivated to take it.

While noting that tangible resources to help with instruction were of most relevance, Leigh suggested that including scenarios related to issues of diversity during professional development courses may also enhance learning in that area.

Reflection. Leigh expressed fear of discussions with students having the potential to get out of hand during our interviews, so I was not surprised when I received a phone call from her a week later asking advice regarding an incident she had encountered which later became her written reflection.

She described how several of her Black students felt unfairly punished during a class with another teacher. They perceived this teacher to be singling out Black students' behaviors over white students and brought their concerns to Leigh. Leigh felt unprepared for the discussion since she described her students as "volatile" since they called her colleague "racist." When she told them they may not fully understand the weight of such a comment, they expressed to Leigh that she did not understand because she was White. Not sure of what to do, Leigh wrote about her dilemma:

No course, class or lecture ever told me what to do in a situation like this. I felt unprepared, unsure and frankly uncomfortable. Not only did I feel uncomfortable but I could tell that my other students... looked just as confused and alarmed as I did. I wanted to get students back to class quietly, maintain order and get in my last quick lesson before the day ended. To diffuse the situation I told all students to write me a note separately about what happened and why they feel this way. This appeased them and they calmed down and went to work on letters to me when they returned to class. These letters were a way for me to take a moment to think about what to do, ascertain more details about what made them feel this way, as well as make sure students felt heard.

Ultimately, Leigh took the matter to an administrator who suggested that students may have had a heightened awareness due to recent events in the news surrounding the racist comments of Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling. While Leigh was alarmed by her students' responses, she reflected on how important it is for teachers to be fair and consistent with all students, stating, "You gain the respect of students this way." At the same time, she disliked the idea of hard-working teachers "walking on egg shells" out of fear for racial inconsistencies. She remarked, "It's a fine line and a sad reality." When probed about why her students may have perceived her to not understand as a White woman, she suggested that they may be prejudiced, assuming she could not see things as "unfair." She also wrote, "I would never assume someone is responding to me in a way because of my ethnicity."

In my member-check with Leigh, I asked her to think about how teachers may be better supported to feel prepared and comfortable addressing situations like the one she experienced. She suggested:

It's hard because situations cannot necessarily be taught; however, there might be some general themes or example situations that could be shared with teachers either in professional developments, college classes, trainings, etc... I also think it depends on the school that you work at. If it is a school that has a lot of racial issues, perhaps administration should provide a day of training or talk at [the] beginning of year to address issues and make teachers prepared and feel more comfortable.

Leigh also suggested that rather than discuss current events such as the NBA incident in class, utilizing writing prompts may introduce such topics to facilitate later discussions.

Leigh expressed a lot of doubt and fear regarding culturally responsive teaching. She suggested that teachers need to understand what it means and what it looks like. Craving a list of strategies or models of this type of teaching, when asked if there was something I had her thinking about at the end of our interviews, she shared:

I mean, definitely, a lot. Just, I mean like even now my mind is spinning on what I can do for... I think you're aware of the diversity, but I don't [think] it's always there when I'm teaching or when I'm differentiating... It's kind of, it's there. It's living in the classroom, but I probably don't put as much value or emphasis on it as I'd like to... There are ways that I can integrate it a little bit better. How tricky it is as a teacher, too. Just thinking about some of these situations, like, this situation ["Multicultural Day Parade"], like what would I do? It's like... you're your own worst critic in how you handle things sometimes.

Alex. Alex was a single white female in her early twenties and was a first year teacher in a lower elementary grade level at the time of the interviews. The interviews took place after school in Alex's classroom, which reflected the many hours put in creating lessons and classroom systems during her first year of teaching. Throughout each interview, Alex's

responses revealed her passion for her long-anticipated career as well as the unanticipated struggles she faced as a new teacher.

Alex described her class of 17 as “diverse on every single level” with the majority of her students speaking languages other than English in their homes. Seven of her students were described as very limited in their understanding of English, speaking mostly Spanish, which was intimidating to Alex since she did not know any Spanish, and did not have experience working with English language learners before she started teaching. She described this challenge as something she had to focus on, utilizing hand gestures and many visuals to help her students understand concepts during class. She stated, “It’s also as much work as you put into it,” noting the rewards when students picked up words in English. For Alex it was important to make sure students knew she valued them speaking Spanish too. She said, “I want them to feel comfortable. I’ll try and do what I can in Spanish.”

Alex described the lack of parental involvement she had, but caveated this with a deep understanding of her students’ community. Alex mentioned how prior to accepting her position, she was nervous about the reputation of W. E. B. DuBois Elementary. She said she was warned not to teach at the school and when googling its name, she saw horrifying comments. She noted DuBois was surrounded by homes worth half a million dollars, but the children from those homes did not attend the school. Many of her students lived in several of the nearby trailer park communities and she described the families as “living in poverty.” She saw that parents worked many hours to make ends meet, and while they may not be as involved as many teachers would prefer, she recognized a difference in priorities and that they cared deeply for their children.

Early in the school year Alex visited the homes of her students, which had lasting impressions. Alex had a deeper empathy for families and her students, noting that she often

thought about them going home to very small living quarters. She described strong family and community bonds, noting how older siblings dropped her students off and picked them up, and were often the ones helping with homework and relaying messages to parents. Alex viewed these caring relationships between siblings transferring to the classroom community. She said, “So that aspect at home really comes into the classroom as well, and they really have a strong tendency to care for each other, which is really nice.”

Pedagogical Perceptions. Alex viewed her role as a teacher was to help students socially and emotionally as well as prepare them to be well-rounded individuals in all areas. She described the importance of seeing the whole child and expressing a deep care for them rather than simply teaching them skills. She said, “You have to show them that you're there for them. There's a lot of teaching that happens just with the conversations that you have with them.” A challenge Alex faced, given this view of teaching, was the shifting expectations of the lower elementary grade levels. Working previously in a laboratory school at her university, Alex experienced more independence during her student teaching. When she began her career at DuBois, she was surprised at the demanding expectations. She said, “Then I came here and it is very academic. They expect kids to be reading very high level text, in my opinion, by the end of the year.” Describing herself as “going along with all the testing” Alex emphasized the challenge of balancing time for teaching and testing. Additionally, since many of her students did not attend preschool, she felt it was important to also teach them school routines and expectations.

Alex described her biggest challenge was her lack of autonomy as a teacher. She viewed her current work as “robotic,” being forced into a box of how to teach. She said, “I do find a balance, but it's difficult, and it weighs on me and sometimes I struggle.” Wishing to instill a love of learning, Alex thought about her students being confined to small trailers in the evening,

and hoped for her class to be a place for learning and movement. Recalling an incident after her students visited the library, Alex gave an example of her lack of autonomy. With 15 minutes left in the school day, she noticed that several of her students were engaged in their non-fiction books, pointing out components such as the table of contents. Her language arts lesson that morning was about non-fiction books, so while her class schedule had that time allotted for mathematics practice, she instead seized this opportunity, or teachable moment, to reinforce her lesson from the morning. She elaborated:

I took advantage of the teachable moment and I said, "Who else has a non-fiction book?"

Then they were all looking and they were all excited. It wasn't even like we're sitting here, you know, twiddling our thumbs or not doing anything. That's when the principal came in and she said, "What are you doing?" I explained and she said, "What are you supposed to be doing right now?"

After walking away, the principal left Alex feeling like she had done something wrong. She reflected, "That was one of those times that as a teacher, I made a decision because that's what's best for my kids... we can expand on what we learned this morning." Frustrated, Alex was able to gain some validation for her decision by calling her mother, a veteran teacher, whom she described as an encouraging mentor who grounded her in her decision-making.

Describing her personal definitions of social justice and culturally responsive teaching, Alex cited an influential professor, who taught a class on multiculturalism, as shaping her understanding of the terms. While she admitted difficulty articulating definitions, Alex suggested social justice was:

Everyone being treated equally based on their class, their culture, their gender, all of those aspects and that they are... that they are still getting what they need and that you're teaching based on that, teaching to everyone and making sure that everyone succeeds. Recalling her multiculturalism class, Alex noted that her professor emphasized learning about culture should not be restricted only to holidays such as Mexico's Day of the Dead. Further, she stated culturally responsive teaching was about "trying to get to know the different cultures in your class and being aware of that, and keeping that in mind as you go throughout the whole year." Alex tied this explanation to an understanding of parental involvement. While some teachers viewed a lack of parental involvement in school as a lack of caring, Alex recognized that in some cultures, teachers are valued as experts, and parents may believe that being overly involved might take away from the teacher. Additionally, Alex articulated having a deep understanding of students was important for building background knowledge and scaffolding lessons. She described this as "equitable" stating, "Not everyone getting the same; everyone getting what they need."

Alex demonstrated the challenge of balance, walking a fine line between bucking the system and doing what was expected of her as a first year teacher. When asked about the political nature of schooling, she noted the complexity stating:

That's a really tough question. I feel like what goes on in our classroom is kind of like up to us. I feel like the politics of it happens with administration and then it comes down to "You teach this... This is how you're going to do it based on this." But when it comes down to like what I'm actually doing in my room day-to-day... no one is there watching me teach that list. I feel like the teacher's beliefs are really important, and as far as the political aspect of it goes, I mean that's so far up and away from us...

Reflecting further, Alex decided that the political aspects of teaching may not be as far removed as she initially described. She stated, “I guess it could be political in the fact that teachers have to go with what they believe and make decisions based on that.” She connected this to culturally responsive teaching, noting that she made decisions for her particular students, but needed to be ready to defend her actions. She elaborated:

As a first year teacher, I always feel like [someone] is going to come back and say, “Why did you do this?” And I always have my defense ready as much as I can. I try to look at it from my perspective and the administration's perspective and a parent's perspective, like when I'm making big decisions, but I ultimately have to do what I believe is best.

Role of Experiences Impacting Perceptions. Excited to be teaching in a school she perceived needed her more than others, Alex was learning to navigate the idiosyncrasies of working in a Title 1 school. She said, “We're also Priority or something. It's some weird thing that I haven't heard of before... it's basically saying, like out of the Title 1 schools, we are at the top of the list for things.” A “Priority” designation was due to not making adequate yearly progress or gaps in educational achievement among specific subgroups. Alex described how over the summer, a panel of teachers got together and compiled resources and lessons for teachers. Additionally, they unpacked the standards and described what was crucial to teach. While adjusting to more structured expectations than during her student teaching, Alex suggested school leaders really put a lot of value into how the teachers helped students, because they were aware of the student population and they understood teachers’ struggles. For example, while they understood the difficulty in making expected growth in reading when students still do not know letters and sounds, she described their high expectations:

They basically said, "We understand that, we know that, but we don't want to lower the bar. We don't want to lower our expectations by saying that some kids can be here or some kids can be there. This is the benchmark so this is what we're expecting."

While Alex was learning to respect these high expectations, she thought it came at a price, given the stress teachers felt. She emphasized, "I don't want to fail and I don't want to be labeled an ineffective teacher... I push myself really hard."

While the district and school provided many supports with translators, literacy coaches, and programs providing students with free books over the summer, Alex felt as though the mandates to teach in prescribed ways indicated the district did not want teachers to think for themselves, and she said teachers were fearful to make mistakes. Noting the differences between her teaching experiences Alex described:

I felt like the other school was really focused on, "Here's what we want to teach. What's the best way that we can teach it?" Whereas I feel like here, they're like, "Here's what you're going to use. Find a way to make it good."

Alex suggested it was important to find a balance, figuring some things out on her own while also taking advice from experts as a first year teacher. However, she recognized the high turnover of teachers using the metaphor of a race to describe morale:

That's why I feel like we're just running our race a lot faster right now. Instead of maintaining a good speed to make it all the way there, we are sprinting and going as fast as we can to try and push them and catch them up, and eventually we're going to run out of steam and be burned out before we reach the finish line...

Role of Teacher Education Impacting Perceptions. Alex received her pre-service teacher education from a nationally ranked, urban, public university in the mid-western region of the

United States. Noting her student teaching was valuable in shaping her pedagogical perceptions, she appreciated the freedoms she was provided to test the teaching waters. Since the university had its own laboratory school, it was not subject to the same oversight as public schools. Describing these aspects of standardization as the “difficulties of teaching,” Alex said she was able to “just focus on the kids.” Additionally, her professors encouraged her to try new approaches.

Valuing research, the university and its laboratory school invited student teachers and graduate students to conduct inquiry projects. Alex was excited to share an artifact from her student teaching which exemplified her collaboration with a doctoral student. Together, they created a class website for students and families to get to know each other better. Posting photos, videos, and establishing opportunities for families to present aspects of their cultures during class, Alex described the rich discussions that came out of the project. While somewhat of an additive (Banks, 1989; 2002) approach to multiculturalism, Alex noted, “Each kid did get their shining moment. They would put it on the projector, and they'd get to stand up there and talk about who was in the picture, and what the picture was, and why it was important.” Since the project carried throughout the school year and facilitated classroom community, Alex did not see this project as a contributions approach to content integration as her multiculturalism teacher warned against.

Role of Professional Development Impacting Perceptions. Alex completed 12 professional development courses and trainings during her first year working at APS as documented by her district learning plan transcript. While many were short, mandatory training sessions, two were extended courses related to her position. As a new teacher, Alex had not yet

had the opportunity to engage in longer term courses for graduate credit other than “Great Beginnings,” a course designed for beginning teachers.

Alex described the benefits of prolonged professional development opportunities which included building her repertoire of resources. She felt the district had a well-established set of course offerings as well as strong rubrics for judging student work. As a first year teacher, Alex appreciated the opportunities provided in Great Beginnings. Led by other district teachers, ranging in their number of years of experience at the same grade level, Alex found them to be very supportive, understanding, and knowledgeable. Visiting their classrooms, Alex described how she and other first year teachers received great examples, took pictures and notes. She elaborated, “It's not just the flexibility, but it's that they get what we're going through.” She described the willingness of the mentor teachers to visit their classrooms and adapt to their needs, discussing anything from report cards to guided reading. She stated:

It's just so practical and exactly what we need. That's why I value that one the most because it feels more like a community and an open place that we can discuss our problems and see where we need to go from there.

Influencing Alex's desire to develop strong connections with her students, she shared an artifact from Great Beginnings, a book they received prior to beginning the school year entitled *Conscious Classroom Management: Unlocking the Secrets of Great Teaching* (Smith, 2004). Focused on classroom management, she had flagged a chapter entitled “Positive Connections.” She described:

This part, they were talking about your head, your heart, and your gut. Your head is what you think, your heart is what you feel, and your gut is what you know; and following those instincts in the classroom, which is good, because I think it's easy to get caught up

as a first year teacher...What do I do?... It's like dialing it back and thinking reasonably.

What do I know in my gut? What is my gut telling me?

Alex believed this book helped her to refocus when she had moments of despair and reminded her to take that time to do what she knew her students needed.

Reflection. Alex's written reflection described an issue that had been on her mind throughout her first year of teaching. Nearing the end of the school year, Alex was getting her students ready for DRA assessments and lamented the fact that "while this should be a time of celebration for teachers and students, excited about the hard work and growth we've achieved, for our classes, it is stressful and discouraging." She felt this way because while some of her students made considerable gains over the course of the year, for some students, their assessments indicated otherwise, since they did not meet the set benchmarks. She remarked how only utilizing this assessment did not take into account the bigger picture—that many students started the year unable to identify a single letter or number. Additionally, it did not take into account the challenges they faced outside of school. For Alex, she felt compelled to celebrate their gains emphasizing:

...to a teacher who knows these students, who sees them come to school some days in their pajamas because they don't have other clothes to wear, or tuck their snack into their backpack so they have something to eat at home, I am not just happy... I am ecstatic. I celebrate their accomplishment, and commend them on their hard work and effort despite the challenges [they] are facing...So while I may be labeled as an ineffective teacher for "low" test scores, I choose to celebrate my own success with my students because I see past the number on the paper and simply see my wonderful class... who did the best they could – and achieved success in my book.

Reflecting on culturally responsive teaching approaches, Alex suggested that her experiences as a child and within the classroom professionally have cultivated her perspectives on teaching. Growing up she was close to her grandfather who instilled in her a pride for their heritage. Alex believed relationships such as that ought to be encouraged in the classroom as well. She stated, “[Students] should feel that they are valued in the room and that they have a place and that the experiences that they are bringing to the table matter and that they're free and open to discuss it.” She suggested the best way to convince teachers of the importance of building affirming perspectives and student-centered approaches would be to show them the benefits and connect these approaches to improved academics utilizing real examples. Reflecting on the interview itself, Alex appreciated the opportunity to think more deeply about her teaching and stated:

I'm glad that I did this because I don't really think about it every day... One of the things that I got from my mentor teacher was to be reflective with my practices and she really drilled that into me. I think that's good because I'm reflecting all day on what I taught, how I taught it, where my kids are... but not always thinking of how I'm fitting their cultural needs... I'm thinking *what else am I overlooking?*

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented eight case profiles organized by their respective schools. Descriptions of the eight participants were augmented with details about their pedagogical perceptions and explanations of how their experiences, education, and professional development informed their ideas about culturally responsive teaching. In the following chapter I present the five key findings which emerged from the co-construction of knowledge with teacher participants in this study.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

Exploring the literature and perceptions of eight elementary school teachers regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching, this study examined how experiences, education, and professional development informed pedagogy. It was anticipated that a better understanding of why some teachers demonstrate greater predisposition towards culturally responsive teaching approaches would provide insight for schools of education and facilitators of professional development. This chapter presents the major findings obtained from the analysis of 16 interviews with a sample of eight teachers, artifacts and documents collected, discussion of a teaching case, written reflections, and member-checks with participants.

Research Findings

Five key findings were identified in this study.

1. Opportunities for critical reflection increased teachers' awareness of the need for culturally relevant pedagogy.
2. In general, teachers did not recognize a political nature to their work, limiting transformative or social action approaches to content integration and contributing to their deficit perspectives.
3. Action or inaction, in terms of culturally responsive teaching, was motivated by teachers' emotions, such as responsibility, empathy, and fear.
4. Transformative experiences influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for equitable teaching.
5. Institutional supports influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for equitable teaching and advocacy for English language learners and students living in poverty.

Table 5.1 summarizes key participant demographics.

Table 5.1

Participant Summary

School	Key School Characteristics	Teacher	Age Range	Race	Current level teaching	Years Taught
Jaime Escalante Elementary	Title 1 11% Asian 28% Black 47% Hispanic	Danica	25-29	White	Pre-k	3
	11% White 4% Other 57% LEP 71% Free/Reduced	Courtney	25-29	White	Lower elementary	6
Emma Hart Willard Elementary	32% Asian 8% Black 15% Hispanic 39% White	Josephine	40-49	White	Lower elementary	23
	6% Other 24% LEP 23% Free/Reduced	Matilda	40-49	White	Upper elementary	5
Temple Grandin Elementary	18% Asian 24% Black 20% Hispanic 32% White 7 % Other 33% LEP 41% Free/Reduced	Peyton	25-29	White	Special Education	2
W. E. B. DuBois Elementary	Title 1 “Priority” 7% Asian 32% Black	Noelle	25-29	Black-Haitian	Lower elementary	3
	43% Hispanic 15% White 3% Other	Leigh	25-29	White	Upper elementary	3
	39% LEP 65% Free/Reduced	Alex	Under 25	White	Lower elementary	1

Following is an expanded description of each finding along with supporting details from the data collected from participants.

Finding 1. Opportunities for critical reflection increased teachers' awareness of the need for culturally relevant pedagogy. Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing learning to improve their practice and a growing “awareness” of topics related to culturally relevant pedagogy. The teaching case and interview process were also cited as reflection opportunities, building upon prior knowledge or introducing concepts they previously had not considered. Several participants articulated the need for humility in consciousness-raising, while others deeply questioned current practices, inspiring further action in their classrooms or school communities.

Four out of eight participants had familiarity with the term *culturally responsive teaching* prior to the interviews. Peyton, Noelle, Leigh, and Alex described having previous exposure to this term during their educational experiences. Peyton and Leigh articulated similar understandings of this approach, noting the importance of “recognizing” or being “aware” of the cultures within the classroom. Additionally, they suggested teachers should present lessons in ways that make sense to cultures in the classroom since students may have differences in their background knowledge. Noelle and Alex had deeper definitions, emphasizing that teachers utilizing this approach to teaching recognize various forms of oppression or power imbalances within the classroom regarding class, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomics. Furthermore, culturally responsive teachers are not only tolerant of their diverse students, but accepting of their differences in order to create opportunities for equitable instruction throughout the entire school year, beyond isolated content units.

Reflecting on the benefits of equitable instruction for diverse students, most participants suggested “sensitivity” or “celebration,” while lacking an awareness of the problems of inequity, such as limited power, access, and opportunity within and beyond the classroom. Noelle was

more keenly aware of the critical aspects of culturally responsive teaching, connecting this approach to the need for personal work confronting biases. She also recognized potential benefits such as ameliorating gaps in educational opportunity. Comparatively, Leigh suggested this approach to be “one more thing,” but necessary for some classroom “challenges.”

Interview as intervention. Seven out of eight participants discussed the importance of life-long learning and self-reflection for improving teaching practices and growing in their pedagogical perspectives. Throughout the interviews participants identified district-led opportunities for reflection as inspiring more thought about student culture and equitable teaching practices. Some discussed spontaneous class interactions which raised questions about race, while others examined their misunderstandings and errors in cross-cultural experiences as leading to critical reflection and improvement. All participants expressed a desire to know more about the topics we discussed or make changes to their teaching at the conclusion of our interviews. Several participants described the reflective process and growing “awareness” very generally, while others were more critical in their reflections.

For example, Danica and Courtney saw a need for more equitable teaching in their classrooms and hoped to acquire more strategies to implement this approach. Danica realized there was more to learn given her population of students and longed for examples of culturally responsive teachers. Following our interviews, Courtney wrote to me about the importance of self-reflection, and while she believed she had a choice to teach this way, her population of students made it a responsibility. Pondering better ways to “embrace” the cultures of her students, she described her desire to extend her approaches and counter deficit perspectives. She wrote:

I think one of the most important things that teachers need to do is to be reflective because you should constantly be looking at what you're doing... I find a huge problem when teachers are blaming problems on students and parents... you're the only one who can control the situation, then you should always be looking at...what you could do better.

Leigh and Alex described that they were more consciously looking at how they contributed to inequitable systems. At the end of the interviews, Leigh described how her mind was spinning and she recognized that issues involving diversity were “living in the classroom” but she did not put as much value on those as she should. Checking back in with Leigh following the interviews, she admitted that while nothing significantly changed in her teaching, she was giving more thought to her influence in the classroom. She began to recognize the benefit to strategies such as frontloading vocabulary and using visuals as helpful for all of her students. After sharing some of the preliminary findings of this study, I invited her to share additional insights prompted by the summary. Leigh noted that “affirming perspectives” was important, since standardized testing paints a limited picture of student growth. She stated that acknowledging growth and progress is important and this should be measured in different ways with different students. She noted, “I've just been thinking about how sometimes I feel like you lose sight of... There's so much going on and that might be a piece that sometimes you lose sight of when really you shouldn't.” At the conclusion of our interviews Alex acknowledged that while she spent a lot of time reflecting on her teaching as a first year teacher, she had not been thinking about the cultural needs of her students as much and wondered what else she could be overlooking. While she appreciated the “Great Beginnings” professional development course for supporting her efforts to teach from the “head, heart, and gut,” she articulated an interest in

seeking out a newly offered professional development course directly related to cultural proficiency, to better understand its connection to academics.

Matilda and Peyton humbly recognized the process of understanding problems of inequity as an ongoing endeavor. Expressing her love for continuous learning, Matilda suggested that she was initially drawn to the invitation to participate in this study in the hope that she could impart some wisdom, but afterwards she realized she gained a lot too. She was prompted to think more critically about the racial makeup of her class and wondered if Emma Hart Willard was as culturally inclusive as they needed to be, noting some parents were hesitant to participate in school events. Showing great excitement for the definition of culturally responsive teaching, she suggested a mostly White teaching force needs to be more educated, discuss racism, and participate in opportunities to develop empathy for diverse perspectives, in order to build bridges for student learning. Peyton questioned the validity of implementing the same curriculum for all students and reflected on a “hidden curriculum” in education. She pondered:

I think there is truth to the idea of a “hidden curriculum.” What we value in a Western classroom could be very different culture to culture—[the] expectation to work cooperatively with other students, to sit at a desk for long periods of time, raising hands, etc. I also think we reinforce traditional gender roles in the elementary classroom...

Peyton expressed a desire to teach her students about some of the concepts we discussed and provide better flexibility so she might partner with families in more authentic ways. She emphasized these initiatives were a “work in progress.”

Josephine and Noelle reflected more critically about their pedagogical perceptions over the course of the interviews. While Josephine believed deeply in the need for teachers to change with the students entering their classrooms, she began to recognize aspects of teaching she

previously took for granted. For example, she identified that school assemblies were “very American” and many of the White families did not attend the International Night at Emma Hart Willard. She remarked:

I haven't even thought how does this help us? This helps me realize, and this article [“Multicultural Day Parade”]... Just this whole awareness... you asking me these questions, like I always noticed the people that come to International Night. This, having this and sharing it [with] the committee and saying, “What do you think? What can we do to avoid something like that?”

Josephine connected the importance of changing inequitable practices to preparing students to participate in a pluralistic society, and hoped to lead others in growing their awareness of the consequences of uneven aspects of schooling. Noelle also articulated a desire to take her passion for equitable teaching further. Appreciative of the opportunity to discuss ideas she did not often have the chance to engage about with colleagues, she expressed ideas to incorporate social action within the classroom. Noelle suggested the interview “re-grounded” her pedagogical orientation and she hoped to let go of her fears and test the boundaries of what was acceptable. Checking back in with Noelle following the interviews, I asked her to reflect on how she might be a leader or advocate for these approaches moving forward. She articulated:

I think that being a model of this kind of approach and sharing my resources with my colleagues can be helpful. For those who are very rigid in following and meeting standards, being sure to highlight how it correlates to standards can help sway those people.

“Multicultural Day Parade” teaching case. At the onset of the second interview with participants, a teaching case narrative was utilized to facilitate discussion around a real world

classroom situation (See Appendix F). The case described a dilemma faced by Ms. Morrison during a multicultural event involving the entire school. Sharing a kilt as an example, she instructed students to bring in ethnic clothing, or what she called “costumes,” to showcase their cultures in a parade through the school. On the day of the event, Emily brought in a soccer uniform and Keisha brought a favorite sweat shirt and jeans. Despite their protestation that those clothes represented their culture, Ms. Morrison did not allow them to participate in the parade, telling the girls that their clothes were “everyday clothing.” Although she questioned her decision, Ms. Morrison worried what other teachers and students might think if she allowed the girls to participate. Issues related to the case included socially constructed concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture, how diversity is often integrated in superficial or trivial ways, concepts of alienation and inequity, as well as student identity (Gorski & Pothini, 2014). Utilizing this teaching case to facilitate discussion, I was able to elicit participants’ wisdom as they reached their own conclusions about the challenge faced by Ms. Morrison.

After reading through the teaching case, participants were asked to give their initial thoughts about the scenario. Many were able to immediately identify problems, however many were also thoughtful about the ambiguity in the case in terms of what was right or wrong. For example, several participants including Danica, Josephine, Matilda, and Peyton saw the event as a positive way to honor cultures and bring the school community together. Emphasizing its value for creating “awareness,” they suggested it was an opportunity for students to learn about diversity and have exposure to non-dominant cultures. Courtney, Noelle, and Alex, on the other hand, instantly identified the event as a cursory approach for including diversity and recognized the danger in “showcasing” student culture. Alex stated, “If it’s just the parade, and then that’s it, then I think you are just going to contribute to stereotypes and it’s not really going to serve its

purpose.” Courtney perceived the additive nature and abhorred, “Yeah, we’re only going to represent you *tonight*.” Several participants felt empathy for Ms. Morrison’s dilemma, wondering how they would have handled the situation had they been in her shoes. Josephine and Matilda expressed anger and disappointment with Ms. Morrison and suggested she should have allowed Emily and Keisha to participate. Danica and Courtney also saw this exclusion as a problem, but believed Ms. Morrison had not been well-prepared to introduce the event to her class. Courtney urged, “It’s going back to how people throughout years have struggled with being a part of something and being excluded so many times. I guess it’s just the exact opposite of what was supposed to be embraced that day.” Several participants suggested the use of multiple examples rather than simply the kilt. Additionally, some proposed that she might have included books to better explain aspects of multiculturalism to her class.

Over the course of the conversation, participants were able to examine issues more deeply, beyond the obvious exclusion of Emily and Keisha from a school event. Courtney, Matilda, and Noelle viewed Ms. Morrison’s description of ethnic clothing as “costumes” problematic, since this word is associated with Halloween, and therefore could be trivializing or demeaning to students. After discussing the teaching case at length, several other participants, including Danica, came to similar conclusions. Courtney, Noelle, and Alex viewed the entire event as alienating since they saw it as a limited opportunity and as “normalizing” American culture. They believed the event stereotyped culture by presenting a narrow vision of diversity. Noelle furthered:

I could see many people making that mistake and I was kind of appalled, but then this would happen and could happen, and I'm sure it does happen all the time that people don't really view American culture or people in America as an identity. They're looking for

something—the other—different. I was a little upset by the end of it. Not upset, but kind of sad about it because I'm sure those girls are going to internalize that and kind of feel "I don't have a culture identity" when they do.

Josephine, Leigh, Noelle, and Alex wondered how students who could not trace their heritage would be able to participate in the parade. Matilda too, suggested students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not have the resources to buy, or have access to, ethnic clothing. Reflecting further, she decided only including ethnic dress in the event may present stereotypical notions of culture. Danica wondered if all students would be comfortable with the spotlight on them, suggesting the inherent problem of such events, placing the burden of educating others on the people from the least powerful position. Additionally, Matilda and Leigh reflected that some students may be self-conscious about their culture, preferring to assimilate. Leigh mentioned, "I can see some kids maybe not knowing what their background is and not feeling like they can participate." Matilda worried about various potential conflicts:

Perhaps they don't want to represent themselves because they feel like "if you know that this is my religion, you're not going to..." [They] may be targeted, or "you're going to treat me differently. I want to just be like every other kid." Not everybody wants to wear it on their sleeve. It's part of who I am in my heart and I don't need to represent it...

Families that left it all behind and fled and don't have those kinds of clothing—families that they've been here for a while, they don't embrace a country of origin, or they have twelve countries of origin—who do you pick?

Reflecting on the meaning of terminology in the case including race, ethnicity, and culture, all participants expressed confusion about definitions, often changing their mind as they

described each term. Alex described her fear for using incorrect terms in her professional and personal life:

...I'll say I'm even guilty of sometimes being, "Wait, what's the correct term?" I want to use the correct term, but I always feel like I'm tip-toeing around it, too. I don't want to use the incorrect term, so I feel like I am extra sensitive for those things. I feel like most people aren't like that, but, I don't want to say it, unless I know it's 100% correct.

She described her preference for discussing race with her students whom she viewed as less biased; however expressed the awkwardness she felt having similar discussions with adults:

If you're trying to say something, but you don't want to offend them, even going between the terms of Black and African American, I know some prefer one, and not the other. It goes back and forth. Even then, I would like to address it how you prefer, but everyone has a different preference. I don't know. It's complicated.

Matilda questioned use of such terms entirely and stated, "Does it matter?" questioning the relevancy of using these qualifiers entirely. She was the only participant to recognize the socially constructed nature of this classification system. She connected this critical view of terminology to an experience visiting a science museum exhibition about race which helped visitors question their assumptions.

Several ideas were presented during the interviews to improve the event without changing its structure entirely. Most participants suggested the parade in isolation was not useful, but should be part of a larger unit focusing on cultures. Participants had ideas for incorporating class discussions, projects, and interviews with family members. Additionally, Josephine viewed the interaction between Ms. Morrison and the girls as a missed opportunity to reflect with them

and the entire class about issues of cultural identity. Describing this dilemma as an “exciting” opportunity, or teachable moment, Josephine stated:

I don't think she really gave them an opportunity to explain why they chose those outfits. So maybe giving them a chance to... I think her first reaction was, “Oh, no, no. Those are every day,” but what was the background? Why did they choose those outfits? Maybe letting them participate and then coming back and reflecting... because I think that was the purpose, not just the parade. I mean, I know there is an awareness, but I think we need to talk about as a class, “What were some of the things that you noticed?” and see if it comes up.

Josephine and Matilda connected this teaching case to a similar event held in their own school. While they did not believe their “International Night” should be eliminated, the teaching case raised questions for them about its inclusivity. Josephine noted that International Night attracted many of the students and families who did not typically attend other school events. However, she posited “International Night is open to all families, but the White families are not the families that you see that night.” She also considered the makeup of the committee leading it as people like her, connected to their own ethnic heritage. She wondered how more voices might be included in the planning of International Night and stated, “I think you’d have to bring it not to that just that one committee. I think it would have to be a whole school discussion, so that you reach the voices and the awareness of like this teacher [Ms. Morrison].”

Alex and Danica concluded that an event such as the one described in the case may not even be the best option given its lack of significance or authenticity. Danica showed the greatest shift in her perspective over the course of the discussion, offering a suggestion for the diversity

committee to seek input from a more inclusive group of representatives to determine better ways to incorporate diversity throughout the entire school.

By looking at the various perspectives and considering the challenges and possible alternatives, this process allowed me to better understand teachers' perceptions of the concepts central to this case. Also, all eight participants connected with this teaching case, recognizing similar events within their own schools. The discussions raised questions participants had not yet considered, and several articulated the value in utilizing this case study approach for learning about issues related to equity in education. Leigh reflected on the discussion:

It's just interesting, because it's one of those things that you kind of have to soak on it for a while to think about. Because you know, I kind of read it [and] was like, "What would I do in this situation?" I don't know on the spot. I don't know what I would have done. I might have done what she did... I hope that she went back to those kids and at least maybe had a discussion. Maybe talk to them and say, "You know what? You guys actually did have a really valid point," because sometimes teachers are wrong, too. I don't think that's bad for the kids to know that.

Several participants described how what may seem like a good idea could potentially be an alienating experience and schools should exercise caution when planning similar events.

At the end of the interviews, I asked participants if there was anything I had them thinking about that they would like to share, and Josephine returned to the discussion of the teaching case connecting it to the International Night at her school. She questioned:

What does that really do to build up the awareness of our community? When I think about who comes to that event, I struggle... What can we do in our own classrooms to foster that love of different nationalities and stuff?

Reflecting on alternatives, Josephine suggested their school event was just the tip of the iceberg, but worried how to do more given challenges such as a lack of time. She believed this case had her thinking more critically about creating the impetus for change and leading others in discussions about better ways to integrate diversity. She articulated, “Maybe when I sit in on those [International Night] committees—having more of—a better voice to speak up and say, “What else can we do? What happens after International Night? Like what do we do after that?”

Matilda, on the other hand, reflected on how much better their International Night was compared to the one described in the teaching case. Sharing the school flier advertising this event, and writing about it in her reflection prompt following our interviews, Matilda viewed Emma Hart Willard’s International Night as community highlight that created an opportunity to know and partner with students and families better. She viewed the event as a unifying and positive learning experience for both presenters and attendees. She described the experience:

Tables are set up around the cafeteria and families begin to unpack their wares. Nepal had hand-loomed tapestries turned into accessories more assorted than the rainbow. Korea had at least four varieties of food for our palettes to expand. Ireland had a dress worn by a dancer who has since moved on to more “American” pursuits. Afghanistan had beautiful girls wearing beautiful flowing gowns. They called themselves Kurds, however, not Afghans. Mongolia had amazing hats being worn by at least three generations of Mongolians. Uganda had a family so expansive they spilled out from around the table all telling tales of animals those of us present had only read about in books or seen in zoos. All students wearing clothing to represent their countries or heritage were invited to participate in the fashion show.

Asking questions prompted by sincere interest in understanding and making appropriate cultural references, Matilda learned the difference between Nepali (language) and Nepalese (the people) which, although seemingly superficial, could go deeper with more familiarity. The flier Matilda shared described International Night as an opportunity to “celebrate” and “showcase” cultural heritage through a fashion show of traditional clothing, music, performances, and finger food. Therefore, it was somewhat surprising that Matilda did not see any shortcomings with this event since during our discussion of the teaching case she recognized the use of clothing could be stereotypical and some students may not want to wear their cultures on their sleeves. However, given the voluntary nature of International Night, Matilda viewed this as a choice and an event in which many families were excited to participate. Further, Matilda articulated how some of her typically shy students beamed when given the opportunity to share aspects of their cultures.

Finding 2. In general, teachers did not recognize a political nature to their work, limiting transformative or social action approaches to content integration and contributing to their deficit perspectives. Most participants did not initially recognize social inequities related to class and race as an influence on, or perpetuated by schools. Many viewed schools as “equalizers” and were not critical of meritocracy. Since participants had difficulty articulating critical, democratic or social justice intentions beyond equitable practices such as differentiation, most had difficulty integrating transformative and social action approaches to their teaching. Furthermore, their perceived lack of autonomy and fear of being labeled ineffective teachers led many to succumb to the pressures of standardization and testing. This led to additive approaches to multicultural content integration and some deficit perspectives of diverse students. Ultimately, teachers had difficulty practicing “intentionality about changing the systems of oppression” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 471) and acting as “change agents.”

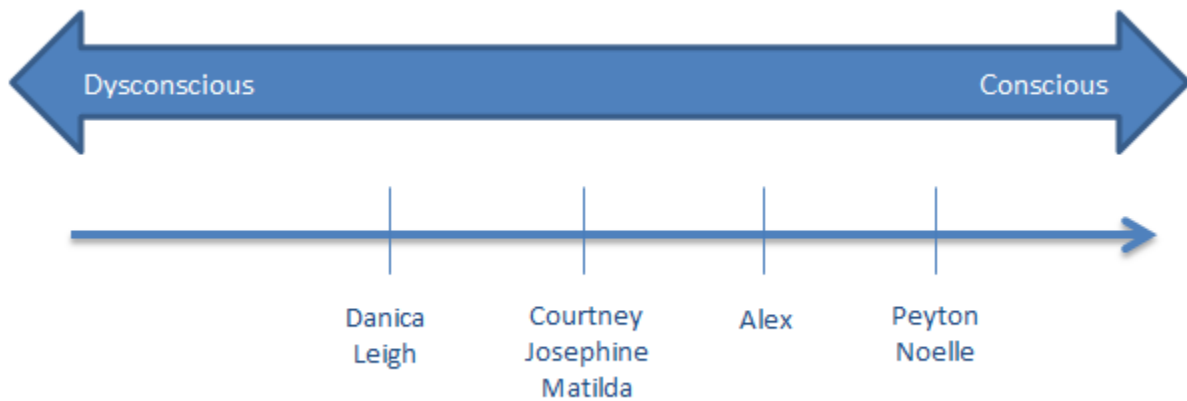
Purpose of education. All participants cited an idealistic purpose of K-12 education but did not connect their roles as educators to the project of democracy or the promotion of a critical citizenry. While some of the classroom actions described by participants may be considered political, most did not describe a need to address politics within the classroom or see teaching as a political activity. Peyton and Noelle both described their desire to work with special populations including children with special needs and low-income students. Leigh and Alex suggested they were needed more and making a difference at W. E. B. DuBois Elementary, which they discovered did not have a strong reputation within the community. While Josephine described her hope of instilling a lifelong passion for learning among her students, Matilda, Leigh, and Danica emphasized the importance of teaching skills to prepare students for further education and future jobs, including those that do not yet exist. Noelle and Alex advocated more egalitarian purposes, urging the importance of teaching the whole child, socially and emotionally, as well as preparing them to work together towards common goals, characteristics that would carry into their adulthood work within communities.

Sociocultural consciousness. Emanating from their idealistic views of the purpose of education, most participants had difficulty recognizing the role inequity plays in maintaining systems of power and advantaging those who benefit from these systems. All eight of the participants were able to discuss the multiple perspectives students bring to the classroom which are shaped by their worldview and place in the social order, although not necessarily in those terms. Instead, they recognized how race, ethnicity, English language proficiency, and socioeconomic status impacted success in school. However, uncritical of neutral and meritocratic views of school, most participants were unable to describe transformative practices within the classroom articulating the need for mitigating approaches which conformed to the existing

system of standardization. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of participants' sociocultural consciousness in relation to each other.

Figure 5.1

Sociocultural Consciousness



Danica and Matilda recognized political aspects of schooling beyond their control such as the fact that schools are publicly funded and law-makers and administrators make decisions about what to teach. Danica and Courtney viewed biases within the educational system as an issue of the past. For example, Danica suggested that biases within standardized testing have largely been eliminated, but did not find fault with the nature of testing itself. Courtney saw younger teachers unaffected by issues of racism, as older teachers may be more prone to prejudiced points of views, and she described culturally responsive teaching as just “good teaching.” Ultimately, all three viewed schools as great “equalizers.” Unaffected by outside society, each suggested that schools level the playing field for students.

Uncritical of neutral and meritocratic views of education, several participants suggested that inequities students face in school emanate from their own cultures or communities. For example, Danica believed many Muslim students begin school unaware of the social skills necessary for success due to her perception that their parents do not communicate with them. She

also suggested a “culture of poverty” among her students, which contributed to deficit views. Leigh illuminated several examples of deficit theories including the need for greater student motivation and better parental involvement in their children’s education, describing some of their inequitable realities as “excuses.” She noted differences in the social worlds of her students of color and suggested aggressive behaviors derived from their desire to “prove something.” Additionally, she found irony in the lower achievement of some students including English language learners, since they received more services in school. By not questioning how larger power differentials contribute to inequitable systems, meritocratic perspectives prevailed. Following up with Leigh regarding her written reflection, I described the idea of a “hidden curriculum” in schools and asked if she saw examples of this in her own school or classroom. She was able to connect her lack of awareness to her own worldview, a starting point for understanding the role inequities play advantaging those with power. She stated:

I am not aware that I teach a hidden curriculum or that there is one present. I suppose, however, I have only even grown up in the community and culture that I know of so it seems “normal” or acceptable. I am sure that there are some differences in cultures as far as education goes in [different] countries. Is our education system the “US” way or does it reflect only one specific culture? It is something to think about and I honestly do not have an answer for it at this time.

Peyton and Noelle demonstrated a more heightened awareness of some of the sociocultural issues present within schools. For example, unlike Leigh who wished for stricter guidelines as an incentive for students to try harder in her class, Peyton recognized the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education and disciplinary actions, reinforcing negative identity perceptions. Critical of zero-tolerance procedures, she wished she had more of an impact

on teachers like her father who shared similar views as Leigh. Noelle emphasized the importance of building confidence in students' abilities in order to counter deficit perspectives of what may be seen as holding them back in school. She recognized the ramifications of a poor education, tying this to higher rates of incarceration. She showed particular concern for Black boys and English language learners, urging that teachers who hold deficit perspectives cannot help but treat those students differently. Recalling her colleagues' lack of understanding of the larger implications of Trayvon Martin's death, she suggested many teachers had difficulty recognizing the intersection of race and politics within the classroom. She stated, "I think they think that we're in that post-racial [era]. They think we're there, and it's like, 'No, it's not the case.' So to bring that up [they] would be like, 'There isn't a problem. Why are we talking about it?'"

Josephine described her lack of patience with some of her colleagues' lower expectations for their population of students. She believed high expectations led to more success. Matilda and Noelle also articulated a lack of awareness regarding gaps in achievement since they perceived teachers to disregard this when lesson planning. They believed equitable practices were more often developed through attempts to raise achievement on standardized testing. Noelle was discouraged by colleagues who showed no interest in incorporating multicultural lessons she worked hard to connect to the standards. She stated, "As a team, we do create things together and we do share things, but there are things that I try to incorporate and I do it regardless of..." Describing her lesson connecting African drums with mathematics, she wished for more support:

Everyone was just like, "Oh my God that came out great." But nobody was willing to try it... Everybody was so impressed by it, but nobody did it. They were like, "Oh, I'd love for my kids to come and see this." But it's like, "Well why don't you just do it with your class?"

She found some support from the music teacher, who asked her to have students bring their drums to their next music class in which he extended their lesson, teaching Noelle's class more about African drumming and engaging them in a drumming circle.

Succumbing to the pressures of testing, several participants lamented this reality of the educational system. Alex described testing as the "difficulty of teaching," Matilda called it a "game of numbers" and "broken barometer for success," and Noelle believed the educational system was "deficient." Going along with aspects of education they perceived they could not control, Noelle and Alex described their dilemmas mitigating the system. Noelle made tenacious efforts to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in her classroom while tying her approaches to the standards. Describing her success as "pulling it off" she pointed out the challenge of defending her choices. She stated, "I don't think I necessarily have a choice in what I teach. But I have a choice in how I teach it, and I think there's a lot of autonomy there." Alex also felt compelled to defend her decisions, noting her lack of autonomy. As a first year teacher, she was challenged to find a balance between teaching and testing, as well as doing what she believed was best for her students.

Multicultural content integration. All eight participants cited contributions approaches (Banks, 1989; 2002) to multicultural content integration as examples of equitable teaching. Some of these included singular lessons about heroes and holidays. Seven out of eight participants gave examples of additive approaches (Banks, 1989; 2002) which added ethnic content to their curriculums such as more inclusive books, units, and attempts to incorporate representations of their particular students. Only Courtney, Matilda, and Noelle described transformative and social action approaches (Banks, 1989; 2002) or plans for content integration. Table 5.2 provides an

overview of the approaches participants discussed and Table 5.3 illustrates specific examples participants cited related to their multicultural content integration.

Table 5.2

Approaches to Content Integration

	Contributions	Additive	Transformative	Social Action
Danica	✓	✓		
Courtney	✓	✓	✓	
Peyton	✓	✓		
Josephine	✓			
Matilda	✓	✓	✓	✓
Noelle	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leigh	✓	✓		
Alex	✓	✓		

Table 5.3

Examples of Content Integration

Contributions (27 examples)	Additive (11 examples)
<p>All Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “International Night” events • Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day • Multicultural books <p>Danica:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing-alongs and assemblies “celebrating” differences such as holidays <p>Noelle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black history month unit <p>Leigh:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit from international teachers 	<p>Danica:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books about non-traditional families • Holidays, Families, Community, and World units <p>Courtney:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books about non-traditional families • “So you think you’re different?” Book box • Examples, images representing students <p>Peyton:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples, images representing students <p>Matilda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read-aloud books connected to students’ ethnicity <p>Noelle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples, images representing students <p>Leigh:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greeting in other languages during morning meeting <p>Alex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greeting in other languages during morning meeting • Multicultural class website

Transformative (8 examples)	Social Action (2 examples)
<p>Courtney:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizing comic strips and music to teach literacy Affirming “controversial” writing topics <p>Matilda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizing alternate forms of assessment Example: “tableaus” for math and science <p>Noelle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently seeking out multicultural characters, alternative interpretations of familiar stories Other countries’ presidents African history beyond slavery Connecting culture to standards Example: African drums and counting to 100 Using teachable moments to confront assumptions about race 	<p>Matilda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eco-justice related to science units <p>Noelle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unit/action addressing homelessness (<i>Planning</i>)

Participants had difficulty acting as “change agents” in their attempts to incorporate multicultural approaches within the curriculum. This difficulty was due in part to their perceptions of school being a place of political neutrality and their perceived inability to challenge the core structure of the curriculum. While a few participants were able to take “action” of some kind through additive and transformative approaches, none described attempts to critique social problems and establish plans of action to empower their own population of students. Leigh described her fear for including anything political within the classroom and Courtney only recognized choices she made as political when probed further. She conceded:

Yeah, I guess so. Because you are showing... by reading a book [*And*] *Tango Makes Three*, I’m pushing my beliefs, I guess, on them a little bit. Because I’m teaching them this is okay, rather than reading a book that is about a mom and dad.

Matilda and Noelle were closest to incorporating social action approaches, describing a science unit related to human effects on the environment and a plan for teaching and responding to homelessness, respectively. Participants articulated social justice intentions through

differentiation practices and advocacy for students supported by district initiatives (this will be discussed at length later in the chapter), but did not perceive conducting classroom inquiry or addressing broader social issues related to power imbalances facing their students to be pedagogical purposes.

Finding 3. Action or inaction, in terms of culturally responsive teaching, was motivated by teachers' emotions such as responsibility, empathy, and fear. Despite perceptions of school being a place of political neutrality and their perceived inability to challenge the core structure of the curriculum, participants were able to take culturally responsive action in several ways through additive, transformative, and student advocacy approaches supported by their district. Throughout the interviews each of the participants expressed emotional aspects of their profession. For example, Alex described her work as teaching from the “head, heart, and gut,” and ultimately she, as well as the other participants, made pedagogical decisions based on their feelings of responsibility, empathy, and fear.

Responsibility. Josephine, Matilda, Noelle, and Alex expressed a strong sense of responsibility for student learning as influencing their actions in the classroom. Equitable teaching was viewed as a personal goal and participants believed that this approach required a conscientious effort.

Josephine mentioned how over the course of her career she learned to do what was “right” for students without being rushed and tied to the pacing guide. She described many ways that she felt able to support students within the realm of her control. Recognizing a responsibility to advocate for students and families beyond the classroom, Josephine wrote in her reflection, “I make it my job to help them find what they need.” She took a proactive approach when working with students whose families did not speak English and believed she should be aware of how

much support they may need. Seeking out district resources, Josephine often utilized the school liaison to communicate and advocate for families. She wrote:

Taking the time to seek out the liaison is very common for me and very important. I feel that liaisons are in our building to help us communicate with families, but I also am very aware of how much they are not sought out and used in our building. I feel very strongly in communicating with families and making sure they know what resources there are for them.

Josephine articulated that this sense of responsibility stemmed from her experiences as a child of immigrants. She lacked patience with other teachers who did not share this same sense of urgency:

Again, if that teacher is not open because there's not a... you can tell, there's a connection from me because of the way I grew up. If that teacher doesn't have that connection, "Oh, that's just too much work. Oh, no. I don't want to do that." Or, "Oh, I forgot." I hear a lot of that.

Josephine described how she often took it upon herself to help her colleagues utilize district supports; especially new teachers, because she believed students needed someone to be proactive meeting their needs. At the conclusion of our interviews, Matilda too, reflected on how influential teachers are during the times students are with them. Drawing a parallel to superheroes, she suggested their responsibility stating, "I don't think we remember the power that we have over people... We really want to use our powers for good and make it a good seven and a half hours when they're there."

Noelle described her personal goal to address issues related to culture and meet the standards through culturally responsive practices. She specifically sought out to work with

diverse students, but discovered the high turnover rate within her school. She described her frustration with teachers she perceived to be giving up:

The thing for me that kind of bothers me—you know what kind of school you're going into. Our school is a Title 1 school. It's not a secret. When you come to interview you are asked about these kinds of things, like behavior issues. You basically are told that this is not the easiest school to work at. I know when you are actually in it, it's a different experience than like hearing and anticipating it, but I think it's almost a cop out a little bit when people do that.

She admitted the struggles she faced and stated, “Yeah, and it's tough. I'm not saying it's a cake walk. My first year, I went home crying a lot. I cried so much... I cried because it was hard, but because I also wanted to do better for them.” Noelle described the challenge of teaching lessons with more critical thinking and the mistakes and adjustments from which she learned.

Both Noelle and Alex described their fears about “failing” their students. While Alex bemoaned the difficulties of benchmarks and frequent testing, she believed such measures propelled her, motivating her work with struggling students and helping them to reach higher levels of achievement. Struggling to find balance during her first year teaching, she reflected on the weight of her responsibility and the necessity to cover topics deeply for genuine learning:

I know all these things. It's what I've learned from my mom. It's what I've learned from my student teaching school. It's what I've learned from my experiences, but when you get into this environment and it's completely different, and it's the real thing. It's a real job. It's not an internship that they can be like, “Oops. You messed up. Oh, well.” It's actually kids. It actually matters. You're actually being evaluated. You're the only teacher in the room now.

Empathy. Seven out of the eight participants cited feelings of empathy connected with their perceptions of the need for equitable actions in the classroom. Danica described the necessity of empathy for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy:

I think that to some extent you have to be able to have some kind of empathy—or being able to step into somebody else's shoes at all—to be able to do that. Because I don't know if you can necessarily teach that.

Both Josephine and Noelle personally identified with their students, driving their desire to reach them in relevant ways. Peyton, Matilda, Courtney, and Alex developed empathy for their diverse students through learning experiences which introduced them to different perspectives.

Having been raised in an immigrant family whose ways and customs she described as “sticking out” from other families, Josephine understood firsthand how it felt to be different from her peers in school. She related:

That awareness helped me be cognizant of students who come from similar backgrounds. I was the child who did not have a “background” or “prior knowledge” that many kids need to be able to understand and make connections to topics and units of study in the elementary world. I was the one with questions and comments that many times I kept to myself because I didn't want to be embarrassed or stick out to my fellow peers. Being mindful of that, I find I take the time in my weekly lesson plans to reach students with similar backgrounds.

She reached these students by taking extra steps such as including visuals and frontloading vocabulary prior to lessons and guided reading groups. She carefully selected books students could relate to with familiar situations and topics. Josephine admitted these steps required more planning time but found they made a huge impact on student learning.

Noelle also identified with many of her students, as a woman of color who grew up in an affluent town with much less than her peers. While she could relate to their feelings of isolation, she also described how she felt alone in her professional role too. She empathized with the students in her school when teachers articulated their deficit perspectives:

It's tough to hear other people talk about them like that because I feel like they're talking about me. When they talk like that, it's like, "You're talking about me." I hate being—the ones that do well—I hate that they're referred to almost as an anomaly. "It's so strange that they did so well." I [pause] get that the cards are stacked against them. I understand that. But it doesn't mean they can't do it.

Frustrated by ignorant points of view, Noelle believed such experiences impacted her desire to teach in culturally responsive ways. She hoped to be an inspiration to her colleagues and often shared multicultural lessons she worked hard to tie to standards and the curriculum her grade level team planned. However, many times she felt unheard and unsupported in her endeavors. Only feeling "tolerated," she described her resentment:

I feel like my colleagues are just not acknowledging me as a Black person. "So do you think that history's insignificant? So how do you view me?" You know... it's always that thing where like as a person of color, and as a person who comes from poverty, it's like [they think] you only care because it happened to you and it's not really that important. It's kind of like pulling the race card. You're only making a big deal about this because—like you're talking about this because it's important to you, but not because it's real. You know, like it's—yeah.

Peyton admitted that prior to her course work examining issues of race and privilege she had a more limited understanding of the perspectives of people of color. She related:

I never would think of these things. As a majority person... sharing the perspectives of those different people was really... just hearing some of the minority cultures speaking about things that they've experienced and the ways that they've felt, just walking in somewhere, and it's all White people... We talked about, a lot, why that happens, and you feel in common with that person.

Matilda, too, described how hearing the perspectives of parents of color during a professional development course enlarged her sympathies. She recalled a parent speaking about her experiences as an English language learner during her own school experience, and how she often felt scared and overwhelmed. Matilda believed listening to this parent describe her experiences was “huge” for her, developing her empathy working with students.

Courtney and Alex both described the importance of empathizing with students in order to build their comfort and confidence in the classroom. Courtney learned to allow students to express many different ideas in the classroom during her master’s program focused on literacy. Rather than shutting students down, she believed it was important for children to share things about themselves which also helped other students to develop empathy for their peers. She recalled:

I had a child who his father died in the night and he saw the ambulance and everything. He started talking about it one day during his share and you could tell some of the children were very taken-aback by it. We let him continue to share because he needed to get it off his chest and talk about it, so that the other kids could see what he was going through. That’s important because it’s teaching children to be empathetic. If we told him stop, they might not know what he’s dealing with and they might have treated him a little differently if he was having a rough day and was a little angry.

Courtney believed that by having this type of teaching approach, she was shaping children to be more empathetic and appreciative of their peers. Alex believed having a deeper understanding of her students “code-switching” between home and school helped her to affirm their successes and growth beyond standardized measures. She noted:

A lot of my students who are Spanish are the ones that are really behind, or they're the ones that are trying. I give them so much credit. They go home and speak Spanish, and then come here and speak English all day. I take their successes and hardships very personally. Because I care for them as my students, I want to make sure that they succeed as much as possible.

Fear. Courtney, Noelle, and Leigh each expressed feelings of fear impacting their decisions to address issues related to systemic power with their students. While Courtney felt comfortable reading books about different types of families at Jaime Escalante Elementary, she became fearful when she moved to a more affluent and less diverse school. Noelle recognized a hierarchy of topics that were acceptable to discuss with students, and hoped to push her fears aside. Leigh was fearful of confrontational situations erupting in her class and felt she was unprepared; therefore she walked on “eggshells” to avoid issues of race. It can be understood that fear went beyond mere perceptions, but was in fact a reality for some, as Danica’s example of the parent who wanted their child removed from discussions of Black history and President Obama illustrated.

Courtney suggested that many of her students at Jaime Escalante were very aware of the plurality of family compositions since many of them lived with extended families and friends. The demographics of her student population gave her more confidence reading *And Tango Makes Three* despite the warning of her principal. However, after checking back in with

Courtney several months following our interviews, she expressed fears about including multicultural content in her new school district. She wrote:

I will be teaching a different demographic this year, so I will definitely have to be more mindful about the books I choose to read in my classroom and the incorporation of my personal beliefs. I wonder if this would have been an issue ten years ago. In certain parts of the [district] you have to be careful about the incorporation of particular ideas. In certain areas I believe that the population can be more sensitive in terms of the discussion of this topic.

Believing the population of her new school was not very diverse, she suggested she had to be more cautious when choosing materials and incorporating topics relating to diversity.

Noelle articulated a passion for spontaneous class interactions that raised questions and led to discussions about race. Instead of avoiding such “teachable moments” she believed it was important to address moments that might otherwise breed a level of intolerance in the classroom. However, she admitted these conversations generated some fear in her and she described this as “entering sticky territory.” She recognized a hierarchy of acceptable topics, noting that she was warned in her teacher education program that some states do not allow teachers to discuss homosexuality. She expressed wanting students to know that families are different but they are still considered families and stated, “I want them to know it's out there but I can't say more. That's a challenge for me to kind of reign it in sometimes.” Viewing topics such as same-sex families as a “trigger,” she was curious why multicultural content had less volatility in the classroom. She stated:

Yeah so I'm always nervous. I think the cultural part is a lot easier for me to talk about and address, but everything else is a lot more difficult; and then when it comes to money and equity in that sense, that's also difficult.

Noelle hoped to “test the boundaries” and push herself to not be afraid, but felt it was important for her job security to tie all of her multicultural and diverse content integration to the standards.

Viewing this as a professional challenge she elaborated on its necessity:

...so it's not like, “Oh, I've decided not to teach something,” to teach this instead. So that's always the challenge is making sure it fits. And like I said, I don't think any administrator would be like “oh you can't do this or you shouldn't have done that.” I think they would definitely support it, but I just—you never know. Or even if it's just a parent, like, “Why did my child have to do this?” You know? And so just making sure that it ties to something, just to cover my bases.

Out of all the participants, Leigh expressed the most fear about polemic topics coming up during her teaching. Describing her perception of culturally responsive teaching, she believed many teachers would be fearful to incorporate diverse perspectives. She worried about litigious repercussions as well as the potential volatility of her students. She preferred to teach in what she believed to be an unbiased way, avoiding issues such as race. She suggested she should learn about her students' lives outside of school to better understand their behaviors in the classroom, but was fearful of home visits, believing their communities could be unsafe. Leigh expressed fear about the potential for backlash during class discussions of politics or history topics such as slavery. Viewing her students as “confrontational,” she found discussions difficult to manage, but understood this was unavoidable at times. After a situation in which her students felt singled out by another teacher because of their race, Leigh learned how current events potentially

heightened students’ awareness and raised tensions regarding race. The dilemma she faced in how to best respond to her students caused her turmoil and she reflected, “No course, class or lecture ever told me what to do in a situation like this. I felt unprepared, unsure and frankly uncomfortable.”

Finding 4. Transformative experiences influenced teachers’ perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. All participants cited particular experiences as the impetus for transforming pedagogical perceptions to more closely align with tenets of culturally responsive or equitable teaching. Josephine and Noelle were most influenced by their personal experiences which helped them to better identify with the students in their classrooms. Danica, Leigh, and Alex described their roles in the classroom as shaping their beliefs about teaching. Courtney and Peyton experienced educational course and field work related to issues of diversity, which helped inform their perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. Matilda expressed that professional development had the most impact on her beliefs and was grateful for the support of the district in promoting more “liberal” ideals. Table 5.4 provides an overview of the factors participants described as influential to their pedagogical beliefs.

Table 5.4

Factors Most Influential to Perceptions

	Danica	Courtney	Josephine	Matilda	Peyton	Noelle	Leigh	Alex
Personal Experiences			✓			✓		
Teaching Experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Education Coursework		✓			✓	✓		
Education Fieldwork					✓			
Professional Development; District Support				✓				

Personal and professional experiences. Josephine and Noelle recognized their personal backgrounds helped them to identify with the students in their classes, which led to increased empathy and an awareness of the need for equitable practices. Josephine viewed her role as a “protector” and advocate for Hispanic families. She had a strong conviction to do as much as she could for her students, realizing that many other teachers did not have this same sense of responsibility, often blaming factors beyond their control for perceived student underperformance. Recalling her experiences as a child and her parents’ intimidation of school, she did her best to utilize district supports and affirm families who spoke languages other than English. Recognizing her personal growth over the years, Josephine believed working in a diverse district allowed her to “get over herself” and take the additional steps necessary to meet students’ needs. Her role as an instructional coach afforded her many professional development opportunities to improve her practices within the classroom and she expressed this as “God’s way to view kids differently.” Noelle viewed her own educational experiences feeling disconnected from the curriculum as a motivator to find ways to embrace the diverse perspectives of her students. While she had some course work in college that helped her to understand the sociocultural issues related to what she called a “deficient” educational system, her experiences at W. E. B. DuBois reinforced her beliefs about her responsibility to incorporate multicultural content so students could feel connected to the curriculum and better able to learn. She urged, “I know firsthand the importance of quality education and resources. I know it—I’m product of it.” Feeling ignored by many of her colleagues, she hoped to affirm her students by valuing their cultures and perhaps having an influence on other teachers in the process. She lamented at their lack of understanding regarding the future impact of a poor education. Noelle suggested many of her colleagues, coming from mono-cultural communities, had not been

challenged in their thinking, and she wished to put aside her fears and set an example for culturally responsive teaching.

Danica believed her two divergent teaching experiences helped change her perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. She reflected on the diversity of her new class:

I was just so kind of amazed how much more culturally diverse my new classroom was.

How socio-economically different it was than my other classroom. I was just, I'm really interested in how I can help or better my practices to meet the needs of these kids who are so much more diverse in differences than my last group of kids.

The questions Danica had regarding how to better support students in her new teaching role were developed further through sustained dialogue with peers in similar roles. During monthly meetings, she and other teachers discussed working with English language learners and students living in poverty. She described her personal growth:

I think we all bring our own cultural bias in with us. So you have to really be able to break out of that and think about someone else's background and culture and ethnicity in order to do this at all.

She grew in her understanding of how to better support students' learning and experimented with new strategies in the classroom.

Leigh and Alex each experienced disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) in their professional roles teaching at W. E. B. DuBois. Leigh expressed a sense of hopelessness working with students she perceived to have less support and motivation. She regretted "It's hard if you're more of an advocate than the parent is. It's difficult. It doesn't mean you can't do it or the kids won't succeed. It's just more challenging to get them maybe where they need to be." This sense of hopelessness led to lower expectations as she believed the "low" students would still be "low"

at the end of the year. She did recognize that she should not give up, but was very frustrated, feeling unsupported and ill-prepared to address issues of race that inevitably came up during lessons or in response to current events, such as the incident she described in her reflection. Leigh expressed a lot of doubt and fear in her role, but craved a better understanding of how to create more accord in her classroom. Her awakening to the need for addressing issues of equity became clear when asked if there was something I had her thinking about at the conclusion of our interviews. She admitted:

I mean, definitely a lot. Just, I mean like even now my mind is spinning on what I can do for... I think you're aware of the diversity, but I don't [think] it's always there when I'm teaching or when I'm differentiating... It's kind of, it's there. It's living in the classroom, but I probably don't put as much value or emphasis on it as I'd like to... There are ways that I can integrate it a little bit better. How tricky it is as a teacher...

With more affirming perspectives of her students, Alex faced a different dilemma regarding how to balance what she believed was best along with the rigidity of mandates she perceived were holding her back. Fearful of being labeled an ineffective teacher or eschewing her responsibility to her students, she missed the autonomy she felt as a student teacher in her university laboratory school. Alex suggested the rigidity and pressure in her school came at a price. She urged, "I don't want to fail and I don't want to be labeled an ineffective teacher... I push myself really hard." Alex felt as though the mandates to teach in prescribed ways indicated the district did not want teachers to think for themselves and she said teachers were fearful to make mistakes. She noted the differences between her teaching experiences:

I felt like the other school was really focused on "Here's what we want to teach. What's the best way that we can teach it?" Whereas I feel like here, they're like, "Here's what you're going to use. Find a way to make it good."

Alex was struggling to find a balance, acknowledging she had much to learn as a first year teacher. However, she worried about becoming jaded early-on, suggesting she was “sprinting” to help her students meet lofty expectations. She worried that she and others like her might “run out of steam and be burned out before we reach the finish line...”

Educational experiences. Courtney and Peyton each experienced course and field work designed to transform perspectives regarding issues related to race and culture. Courtney cited her master’s program focused on literacy and culture as influential in shifting her perspective of best practices for working with diverse students. She articulated that by the end of the program “you could see everybody’s mind shift.” She was motivated to “negotiate the curriculum” by embracing multiple approaches to literacy integration, recognizing many topics as valid forms of student expression, and including books depicting multiple points of view. Recognizing this took courage, Courtney experienced fear continuing these practices in her new role teaching in a less diverse setting. Peyton also felt some limitations addressing issues of equity with her particular population of students, but reflected a deeper understanding of sociocultural issues within schools and society due to her leadership experiences and course work focused on race and power. She became aware of her own role contributing to inequitable systems through activities designed to reflect on her privilege during her educational program. Peyton learned that developing a better understanding of multiple perspectives was important otherwise “you just find yourself in that comfortable circle and you don't challenge yourself.” She suggested “I would never have met those people that I met in that class, probably.” Peyton admitted

discomfort in the process of coming to her new understanding. “I did feel uncomfortable, especially when some of the minorities were talking about these things that happened. ‘Oh my gosh,’ and then I’m like, ‘Am I somehow serving into that without even thinking about it?’”

These transformative learning experiences awarded her more empathy working with parents, and she was better motivated to advocate for students with autism. She stated, “Maybe a lot of people think that kids with autism might not be as smart or something, and that’s definitely not true, and I try to break that stereotype.”

Professional development experiences. Matilda experienced a professional development conference that had a transformative effect on her understanding of multiple perspectives. Learning from parent members of the community, she developed empathy for English language learners and their families. Along with this empathy, she realized the difficulty in truly knowing another’s perspective. She stated, “You don’t understand it if you didn’t live it. If you grew up in Pakistan, you can tell me, but I can’t—I don’t experience smells, I don’t experience the sounds—I can’t live a day in your shoes.” Recognizing the personal work that needs to be done prior to understanding the humble and ongoing nature of learning to teach in culturally responsive ways, she believed teachers should work to build “bridges of trust.” She identified a transformation in her view of students believing she now had more “ownership” of them. Her learning was supported by district initiatives that helped her to extend her new knowledge into the classroom to better support English language learners and students living in poverty. She described her continual process of learning and stated, “I [continue] to question how I would handle things. I don’t ever want that to stop because I think then you’re complacent and you’re not really being an effective educator, and if you’re not questioning, something’s awry.”

Finding 5. Institutional supports influenced teachers’ perceptions of the need for equitable teaching and advocacy for English language learners and students living in poverty. Algonquian Public Schools (APS) articulated a commitment to closing gaps in achievement among subgroups of students, stating:

As a result of two years of reporting on the academic performance of [APS] students, it is clear that Black and Hispanic students do not perform academically, as a group, as well as their White and Asian counterparts. If appropriate programs and initiatives are not in place, these groups will not meet the expected goal of closing the achievement gap by the 2014-2015 school year. (APS, 2011)

A guiding question for the district’s plan to address this gap in educational opportunity was “How can schools improve content, pedagogy, and relationships in a coordinated way to engage low performing students in academic learning?” (APS, 2011). Implementing programs and initiatives to address this question, APS worked to instill “ownership” for the successes and failures of students among its faculty and staff. Some initiatives included programs to encourage enrollment of historically excluded students in its GATE program as well as a more proportionate referral of students to special education programs. Schools were taking on initiatives and utilizing resources to better support and engage parents. Additionally, professional learning communities were established within schools to provide time for grade level collaboration focused on examining data, curriculum pacing, and teaching practices to boost student learning. All eight participants described elements of the district’s plan for improving student achievement. These initiatives along with institutional resources had a strong influence on participants’ approaches to teaching literacy and working with English language learners. Additionally, all participants described ways in which their particular school was disseminating

Eric Jensen's (2010) poverty research among their staff. These supportive and collaborative initiatives, along with specific resources, led to increased teacher advocacy, constructivist and student-centered teaching approaches, and an increased knowledge of students, families, and communities.

Advocacy. While many teachers did not articulate their role as an activist or social action approaches to content integration, most cited advocacy measures beyond multicultural content integration as examples of their attempt to teach in more equitable ways. All participants described their professional learning communities (PLC) supported by the district to meet as grade level teams. Courtney, Josephine, and Matilda viewed these opportunities for collaboration as fostering an atmosphere of high expectations. Crediting school leaders, they recognized the positive changes in student and teacher learning because of PLCs. Josephine noted that instruction had become more data-driven and teachers no longer wasted precious instructional time on teaching peripheral units such as “pumpkins and apples.” Focused on the standards, best practices, and ways to improve home and school partnerships, teachers were more focused on student need. Josephine reflected on these higher expectations and stated, “Our culture at Willard [is] we can’t blame the kid. ‘Well, that kid doesn’t have any support at home?’ It is ‘What do we do in school?’” Through data driven instruction and teacher evaluation, participants suggested such accountability forced them to pay closer attention to test scores and reflect on adjusting their practices if necessary. All participants differentiated instruction as a result of this accountability. Describing methods they utilized for English language learners in particular, differentiation was viewed as an expectation for best practice. Courtney stated, “It’s expected that we differentiate everything in the school. No two children are alike.” Further, she elaborated

how literacy instruction was driven by goals related to closing gaps in achievement among students:

A lot of our instruction is—like our literacy discussions—are usually wrapped around that; More so literacy in our school because of the multiculturalism in our school. We have a lot of kids that don't speak English as a first language, so usually literacy... there's a larger gap, achievement gap, in literacy rather than math. Children who come in reading at a lower level, they're higher priority children. We're expected to read with those kids every single day, and usually they're read with for a second time with someone else.

Along with more focused planning for student learning, Josephine and Matilda viewed progress monitoring as a social justice approach for supporting students. Working collaboratively, teams met to design proactive interventions for identified students. Seven of the eight participants described organized efforts their school encouraged for teachers to visit students' homes at the onset of each school year. Six of the eight participants articulated the availability of district liaisons and translators to facilitate communication with families. Additionally, three of the four schools included in this study had a Responsive Classroom approach, and teachers viewed this as beneficial for building classroom community, confidence, and empathy among their students. Courtney described the value of providing "academic choice" which is promoted by a Responsive Classroom approach to teaching, and Leigh believed this approach improved her classroom management skills. Other examples of advocacy cited by Josephine and Matilda included arts integration and performance assessment as ways to provide equity for student learning. Additionally, several teachers described their personal steps acting as advocates for their students. Courtney encouraged greater parental involvement by timing her class events

appropriately and utilizing district supports such as translator services. Josephine articulated her responsibility to help families connect with resources. Matilda went above and beyond to ensure paperwork was signed by guardians so a student could attend field trips. Peyton advocated high expectations and inclusion for her students with autism. Alex affirmed her students' successes and encouraged them to speak their first languages in class to help each other learn. Table 5.5 provides an overview of some of the advocacy approaches described by participants.

Table 5.5

Advocacy Approaches

Examples of Teacher Advocacy Beyond Content Integration
<p>All participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade level PLCs focused on data and student growth • Scaffolding language during lessons <p>Danica:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging students in “M&M” activity to teach fairness • Connecting families to resources • Providing meals and other free resources • Visiting students’ homes prior to the school year • Encouraging students to speak other languages in class • Using translators to facilitate parent communication <p>Courtney:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging more parental involvement with timing of events • Utilizing translators in real time with headphones • Surveying parents to communicate in better ways • Visiting students’ homes prior to the school year • Creating classroom community through morning meeting and other Responsive Classroom approaches • Encouraging students to speak other languages in class <p>Peyton:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with physical education teacher to organize autism awareness booth to educate families during health and wellness night • Advocating high expectations for students with autism • Surveying parents to communicate in better ways • Visiting students’ homes prior to the school year • Teaching students about equity • Utilizing familiar concepts on traditional materials <p>Josephine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varying forms of assessment • Utilizing progress monitoring • Encouraging students historically excluded to enroll in GATE program

- Connecting families to resources
- Providing meals and other free resources
- Visiting students' homes prior to the school year
- Teaching students about equity
- Utilizing familiar concepts on traditional materials
- Using translators to facilitate parent communication

Matilda:

- Varying forms of assessment
- Utilizing progress monitoring
- Displaying student created materials in the classroom
- Recognizing class demographics and racial identity development when creating class lists
- Engaging students in Band-Aid activity to teach concept of equity
- Driving to student's home to have paperwork signed; providing transportation to field trip
- Visiting students' homes prior to the school year
- Teaching students about equity
- Creating classroom community through morning meeting and other Responsive Classroom approaches
- Utilizing familiar concepts on traditional materials

Noelle:

- Taking advantage of teachable moments—defying schedules
- Visiting students' homes prior to the school year
- Utilizing familiar concepts on traditional materials
- Using translators to facilitate parent communication

Leigh:

- Creating classroom community through morning meeting and other Responsive Classroom approaches
- Encouraging students to speak other languages in class

Alex:

- Celebrating growth and improvement beyond the test scores
- Taking advantage of teachable moments—defying schedules
- Visiting students' homes prior to the school year
- Checking in with students over the summer about reading
- Encouraging students to speak other languages in class
- Using translators to facilitate parent communication

Constructivist views. Many of the initiatives and supports encouraged by APS led teachers to include student-centered approaches to instruction. Several articulated the need for active learning opportunities that built upon students' existing knowledge and experience. Social interaction was viewed as a way to build community and facilitate construction of new knowledge. A few teachers, including Matilda, articulated that their role was to “build bridges” for students to connect their background knowledge to new concepts; and Josephine emphasized the importance of utilizing more purposeful activities related to the standards. All participants

recognized the complexity of their roles and realized adjusting and differentiating lessons was a continuous necessity of teaching and particularly for supporting English language learners.

Interestingly, only Josephine and Matilda suggested the importance of varied forms of assessment, partly because of Emma Hart Willard's arts-integration program. However, all participants seemed to lack an understanding of ways to transform their practices beyond helping students conform to the current system of standardization. Part of this difficulty was the lack of understanding about sociocultural and political issues influencing the educational system. Constructivist views did not include teacher recognition that school knowledge is value-laden; and teachers did not suggest that students may be empowered through explicit instruction regarding whose perspectives are reflected in, or excluded from, the curriculum. Courtney, Noelle, and Peyton showed the greatest understanding of some of these sociocultural issues due to their educational coursework and field experiences during college; and Noelle described a "teachable moment" during her fairy tale unit discussing and challenging unquestioned assumptions about race. However, Noelle also felt stymied by a lack of support from her colleagues and by the necessity to defend her pedagogical decisions.

Knowledge of students, families, communities. Seven of the eight participants cited opportunities to engage families as an important facet of schooling. Home visits encouraged by the district allowed participants to better understand the living situations of some of their students and how they perceived parents' abilities to assist with learning. Recognizing aspects of their students' home life, participants believed it was important to acknowledge difficulties students face related to poverty and language. Courtney and Peyton articulated the need for choosing appropriate methods of communication with families and Alex hoped to affirm student successes despite their difficulties. A few participants articulated these differences among

students as resources for learning. Josephine believed there was a need for schools to establish trust between families and school, noting that some may have had a negative perception of the institution of school. Noelle discussed the importance of recognizing that students may face conflicting personal relationships with school and the curriculum. This understanding was due in part to her personal experience feeling alienated from the curriculum as a student. Other than home visits and family communication approaches, none of the participants articulated a need to engage with community members, attend community events, or volunteer in the school community to better understand student interests and concerns. While many participants recognized that equitable teaching required a conscientious effort, none viewed activist approaches as catalysts for confronting injustice or social action teaching.

Influence of district professional learning opportunities. Several participants cited the same professional learning opportunities as having a strong influence on their pedagogical perceptions. These included courses related to teaching literacy and reaching English language learners, as well as learning about Eric Jensen's (2010) poverty research.

Courtney and Josephine described courses supported by the same text, *Catching Readers before They Fall: Supporting Readers who Struggle* (Johnson & Keier, 2010), as beneficial for learning strategies to reach students for whom English was not their first language. Courtney noted that she was taught to incorporate language throughout the school day to reach English language learners who may be struggling. With a sustained format, the course connected learning to classroom practice, and Courtney was able to focus on one struggling student in particular. Josephine also appreciated a sustained format and applauded the instructor for her hands-on approach helping her to organize her guided reading schedule. A major take-away from the course was her understanding of the need to engage struggling readers more frequently, but also

authentically. Courtney and Josephine learned strategies to reach students for whom English was not their first language such as building background knowledge, introducing vocabulary, and previewing books. Most importantly, Courtney and Josephine emphasized the importance of rejecting deficit perspectives of students and assuming the responsibility for better supporting students at school.

Peyton and Alex described their “Great Beginnings” course as an opportunity to discuss topics related to English language learners and Jensen research, and emphasized the many difficulties students had that often lead teachers to have lower expectations for student learning. In addition to learning strategies to support English language learners, their teacher mentors provided the flexibility to address topics related to first year teaching as they came up in the course. Alex shared aspects of a discussion regarding the population and history of W. E. B. DuBois:

We see a lot of kids who come in who don't know any of their letters, or they haven't been exposed to anything, because their parents don't really know, or they're working three jobs just to provide their housing and their food. It's good to keep that, I think, in perspective.

Alex suggested many of the initiatives to educate teachers about English language learners and students living in poverty spoke to the beliefs and values of APS as a district. She believed it was important to be prepared in her lessons in order to best support students. She noted the difficulty of this as a first year teacher and her guilt when she was less prepared:

I think the huge amount of planning that it takes, and preparation, to really fully support our [ELL] students... [Some] days, I feel really guilty. I'm like "I'm not doing all that I

can for my [ELL] students." They may suffer for it. They're suffering for my lack of planning.

Noelle, Matilda, Danica, and Courtney each described different ways in which they were developing an understanding of research on poverty and the brain and the connection of this research with education. Noelle had the opportunity to attend an Eric Jensen conference along with a few colleagues from her school and described the experience as “huge” for developing her understanding of working memory and the importance of not making excuses for students. She related some of her learning:

When it comes to students in poverty they forget more easily because of the stress and their brain—things that are happening in their brain are different from students who aren't as stressed, and so holding onto certain things is not as easy for them... It's not necessarily that they're trying to forget or they're not paying attention or they're not, you know, it's not a conscious thing on their part. It's things that's happening in their life. It's summer vacation. It's just, life is happening and that's the case, but to say why bother isn't going to solve it, you know? It's not going to help.

Noelle wished to change other teachers' defeated perspectives by sharing her new insights with the W. E. B. DuBois staff, but was disappointed about the lack of time during staff meetings to do so. However, W. E. B. DuBois leaders did attempt to disseminate Jensen research through the teacher bulletins and by doing so reinforced and continued Noelle's learning.

Matilda's principal was sharing knowledge from an Eric Jensen conference by providing reading materials to staff and offering two days each week for teachers to engage with Jensen materials. Along with other supports, such as free weekend meals for students in need, Emma Hart Willard's leaders encouraged teachers to view school as a place where students' brains

could indeed change despite the stress of poverty. Matilda related her sense of ability within the four walls of her classroom:

...during those seven and a half hours, you do have autonomy. While those kids are coming in with their culture, that doesn't matter that at home they don't have power. It doesn't matter that at home they don't have food. In our community, everybody is exactly the same level and is exactly the same level of importance and that we all have something to contribute at our table. If we're not all contributing at our table—it's kind of like a leg that table—we're not able to support... Something's going to fall down. If you don't feel like you are a valued member of our team, something needs to change. That's our job as a community, to change it.

Danica and Courtney described how other staff members at Jaime Escalante were beginning to share their knowledge of Jensen research after attending the conference. For Danica, she believed this new initiative was her first encounter with coursework related to issues of social justice. Courtney described how such “training” enlightened her to how teachers create stereotypes about children, believing they will never learn and giving up on those students. She related:

Sadly, it does happen in certain classrooms, when kids aren't just getting it. You just got to keep trying. That's mainly what teaching is about. When it's not working you keep being reflective of yourself, not of their family or the child. It's you. You're the only one that is responsible for this. Obviously a parent-teacher relationship would strengthen that and getting them onboard and trying to find ways to help them and see what they do at home already. But you should always first be the most reflective of yourself.

Courtney was excited to learn more about the conference her colleagues attended and discover strategies to help students “change that state of mind, so that they can do [their] best learning.” While participants described the need for more teacher responsibility regarding student poverty, a few participants who engaged with the Eric Jensen research described a “culture of poverty” rather than an understanding of the social and class inequities leading to fewer privileges for those with lower incomes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings which emerged from the co-construction of knowledge with teacher participants in this study. Utilizing supporting details and explanations five key findings were concluded from the analysis of data. These findings related to teachers’ perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy, experiences, education, professional development, reflections on the interview, discussion of a teaching case, their practice, and transformative learning. The primary finding indicated that opportunities for critical reflection increased participants’ awareness of the need for culturally relevant pedagogy. The second finding suggested teachers have difficulty recognizing the political nature of their work which makes social action and more affirming perspectives of their most disenfranchised students a challenge. Finding three suggested action or inaction within the classroom, in terms of culturally responsive teaching, was connected to the emotional nature of teachers’ work. Finding four illuminated that transformative experiences influenced teachers’ perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. Lastly, finding five described the institutional supports influencing teachers’ perceptions of the need for equity and advocacy for English language learners and students living in poverty. In the following chapter I discuss how the findings inform the research questions and return to the literature to connect this research to adult learning and development. Additionally, I make

recommendations for policy-makers, schools of education, school districts and leaders, professional development, and individual teachers. Lastly, I provide suggestions for further research and conclude with a final reflection on the study.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“We cannot remain here,

however shelter'd this port and however calm these waters we must

not anchor here”

-Walt Whitman, 1871

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching in order to gain a better understanding of why some teachers demonstrate greater predisposition towards teaching philosophies and practices for a pluralistic and democratic society. Desired outcomes included a better understanding of factors which enable teachers to develop and implement this approach to teaching, in the hopes that these insights would inform schools of education and facilitators of professional development.

Utilizing a constructivist research design, eight teachers across four different elementary schools within the same district were selected for participation. Data gathered included two semi-structured interviews with each participant, artifacts and documents, discussion of a teaching case, and written response to a reflection prompt. Utilizing a “general inductive approach” (Thomas, 2003) data was analyzed to explore the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the need for culturally responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers' experiences, education, and professional development affect their perceptions?

Through the collection of various forms of data, the research questions were addressed and the case profiles and findings were presented in chapters four and five. The paramount finding was

that while culturally relevant pedagogy arguably has critical and transformative outcomes for students, the process of learning to utilize such pedagogical approaches is in itself a transformative process. Learning to teach in more equitable ways may be supported through opportunities to critically reflect about forms of oppression within school and society as well as through transformative learning experiences supported by educational institutions. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the findings.

Table 6.1

Findings

Finding	Description
1	Opportunities for critical reflection increased teachers' awareness of the need for culturally relevant pedagogy.
2	In general, teachers did not recognize a political nature to their work, limiting transformative or social action approaches to content integration and contributing to their deficit perspectives.
3	Action or inaction, in terms of culturally responsive teaching, was motivated by teachers' emotions, such as responsibility, empathy, and fear.
4	Transformative experiences influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for equitable teaching.
5	Institutional supports influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for equitable teaching and advocacy for English language learners and students living in poverty.

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate these findings while considering the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and adult learning and development. Additionally, conclusions will be drawn from this research, recommendations will be made to educators and researchers, and I conclude with a final reflection on the study. The implications of these findings are

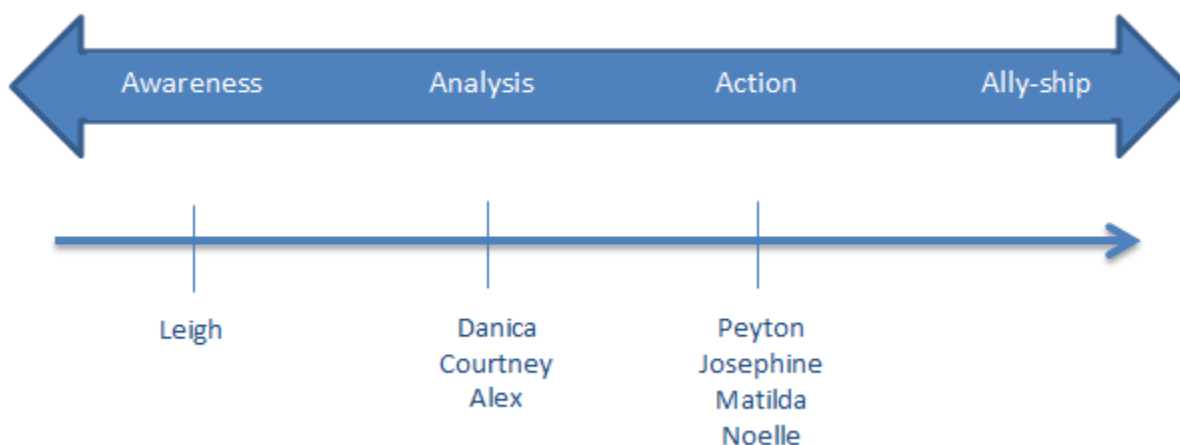
intended to enlarge our understanding of the processes by which teachers develop equitable teaching philosophies and practices.

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching

It is difficult to make conclusive statements regarding participants' understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy since learning to teach in ways that work towards social justice may be understood as an ongoing process of changing one's ways of thinking and critically examining common educational practices that privilege the dominant group in society. However, we can examine the movement of participants along a continuum of *awareness* to *ally-ship* as they reflected on their pedagogical beliefs and practices throughout this study. Their examples and relative positions on a change agency continuum reveal the transformative nature of this development. Figure 6.1 depicts participants' position on a change agency continuum.

Figure 6.1

Change Agency



Mezirow (1990) describes “critical reflection” as a trigger for transformative learning. Unlike other forms of learning, such reflection includes an aspect of critique regarding existing frames of reference. He states:

By far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection—reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting... Critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do. (p.13)

Rather than learning a series of steps to implement culturally responsive teaching, teachers are charged first with coming to understand their values and self-concept that have been uncritically acquired during the process of socialization. Further, by reevaluating ideologies through critical discourse with others, assumptions may be challenged, and alternative perspectives may lead to transformation and action.

Awareness. Developing awareness may be understood as ingress to intentionally working to redress systems of oppression. Leigh was at a place of entering into more liberatory consciousness, demonstrated by her questioning the consequences and limitations of her understanding of sociocultural issues and their effects in the classroom. Over the course of the interview Leigh expressed a more limited understanding of many of the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. However, through our ongoing discourse and critical reflection about the teaching case, as well as her own classroom dilemma, Leigh began to more consciously look at how her frame of reference may have contributed to inequitable systems. The discussion of the teaching case raised questions about the consequences of classroom decisions Leigh had not yet considered. She described how this process required her to “soak on” the issues, considering how

she might respond to the situation herself. At the end of the interviews, Leigh described how her mind was spinning and she recognized that issues involving diversity were “living in the classroom” but she did not put as much value on those as she should. Checking back in with Leigh following the interviews, she admitted that while nothing significantly changed in her teaching, she was giving more thought to her influence in the classroom. After sharing some of the preliminary findings of this study, Leigh shared additional insights recognizing that “affirming perspectives” were important given the limitations of standardized testing. She noted, “I’ve just been thinking about how sometimes I feel like you lose sight of... There’s so much going on and that might be a piece that sometimes you lose sight of when really you shouldn’t.” Fearful of addressing diverse perspectives within her classroom, Leigh preferred to teach in what she believed to be an unbiased way, avoiding issues such as race. With deficit views of her students, she found such discussions difficult to manage, but came to understand how this was sometimes unavoidable. After a situation in which her students felt singled out by another teacher because of their race, Leigh learned how current events potentially heightened students’ awareness and raised tensions. The dilemma she faced regarding how to best respond to her students caused her turmoil and she reflected, “No course, class or lecture ever told me what to do in a situation like this. I felt unprepared, unsure and frankly uncomfortable.” Following up with Leigh about this incident, I described the idea of a “hidden curriculum” in schools and asked if she saw examples of this in her own school or classroom. She was able to connect her lack of awareness to her own worldview, a starting point for understanding the role inequities play advantaging those with power. She stated:

I am not aware that I teach a hidden curriculum or that there is one present. I suppose, however, I have only even grown up in the community and culture that I know of so it

seems “normal” or acceptable. I am sure that there are some differences in cultures as far as education goes in [different] countries. Is our education system the “US” way or does it reflect only one specific culture? It is something to think about and I honestly do not have an answer for it at this time.

This line of questioning in response to the incident regarding race may be an example of a “disorienting dilemma,” or sudden trigger related to Leigh’s uncertainty as to how to act given the situation. Through the process of examining her own assumptions, Leigh became more aware of the limitations of her point of view. This initial step in the transformative learning process may lead to further analysis and the decision to explore, or take some form of action towards new and more dependable interpretations; conversely, Leigh may decide to take no action.

Analysis. Ongoing analysis may be seen as a never-ending process of learning to teach in more equitable ways. However, in the development of a liberatory consciousness, analysis may be understood as the process of gathering information to explain oppressive factors at work in society or educational institutions, and determining ways to act that maintain the status quo or ameliorate gaps in opportunity. Sojourning in what might be seen as a place of disorientation, Danica, Courtney and Alex wrestled with how they might best teach their population of students.

Experiencing disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) associated with their new teaching roles, Courtney, Danica, and Alex began to critically assess their assumptions and participate in dialogue with others, so they might gather more accurate and complete information to inform their pedagogical decisions moving forward. For example, concluding our interviews, Alex acknowledged that while she spent a lot of time reflecting on her practice as a first year teacher, she had not been thinking about the cultural needs of her students as much, and wondered what else she could be overlooking. While she appreciated the “Great Beginnings”

professional development course for supporting her efforts to teach from the “head, heart, and gut,” she articulated an interest in seeking out newly offered professional development directly related to cultural proficiency, to better understand its connection to academics. “Great Beginnings” provided opportunities to discuss issues contributing to her dilemmas regarding school expectations and how she felt she might best support English language learners. During these classes, Alex and her peers reflected on the many difficulties students had, which could lead teachers to have lower expectations for student learning. She described the willingness of the course instructors to adapt discussions to the needs of teachers:

It's just so practical and exactly what we need. That's why I value that one the most because it feels more like a community and an open place that we can discuss our problems and see where we need to go from there.

Through these opportunities for dialogue, Alex was able to examine her autonomous experiences working in the university laboratory school compared with what she perceived to be a more authoritarian structure at her new school. Recognizing how her anxieties contributed to her dilemma and uncertainty as to how she might act, Alex was engaging in what Mezirow (2009) describes as “epistemic cognition,” or reflective judgment about the uncertainty involved with problem-solving, along with the ability to act. Considering evidence and opinions, Alex realized that she could not be fully certain in her knowledge of what was best, especially as a first year teacher with much to learn. However, seeing multiple solutions to her dilemma, by engaging in dialogue during “Great Beginnings,” and considering the accompanying reading materials, helped her to refocus when she had moments of despair, and reminded her to take the time to do what she believed was best for her students.

Danica and Courtney exemplified the emotional aspects of transformative learning while experiencing dilemmas in their new teaching roles. Despite some of her contradictions, Danica understood the importance of teaching with the needs of her specific student population in mind. Experiencing a dilemma in how to better instruct her new group of students, she recognized the differences between teachers' affirmation of students' abilities from her two different teaching experiences. Believing lower expectations were unfair and symptomatic of the population at her new school, she stated:

It wouldn't be fair to teach with the bias that we come in with and that our goal is to teach every kid. Every kid is ready to learn, the same way every other child is, and that in order for that to happen, we need to be culturally sensitive.

While she was analyzing how to implement equitable teaching, she saw sensitivity as a first step for teachers who have a diverse student population. She cited feelings of empathy connected with perceptions of the need for equitable actions in the classroom. Danica described the necessity of teachers to step into their students' shoes in order to teach in more affirming and equitable ways. Courtney, on the other hand, experienced fear in her new role. Believing the population of her new school was not very diverse, she suggested she had to be more cautious when choosing materials and incorporating topics relating to culture than she had done previously. Fearful of potential negative backlash, Courtney's dilemma resulted in her retreating to a perceived place of safety, by avoiding controversial issues in her new professional setting.

Action. Recognizing the need for action or advocacy developed from previous transformative learning experiences and institutional supports, Peyton, Josephine, Matilda, and Noelle inhabited different places along the path to action within their school settings. Love (2000) describes these different paths:

Sometimes it means taking individual initiative to follow a course of action. Sometimes it means encouraging others to take action. Sometimes it means organizing and supporting other people to feel empowered to take the action that the situation requires. And sometimes, locating the resources that empower another person to act with agency is required. In still other cases, reminding others that they are right for the task... (p.472)

Developing her empathy through professional development experiences, Matilda described individual initiatives she took to advocate for her students. These included some additive and transformative approaches to multicultural content integration as well as the use of progress monitoring and varied assessment, which was supported by her school. Additionally, Matilda took individual steps such as driving to a student's home to ensure paperwork was signed and provided transportation to a field trip for a student who otherwise might not attend.

Through a personal identification with their students and transformative educational experiences, Josephine and Peyton exemplified advocacy approaches that included locating resources for families, encouraging historically excluded students to participate more fully in school activities and programs, and supporting the empowerment of others. While Josephine believed deeply in the need for teachers to change with the students entering their classrooms, she began to recognize aspects of teaching she previously took for granted. For example, she identified that school assemblies were "very American" and many of the White families did not attend the International Night at Emma Hart Willard. She proposed sharing her newfound awareness drawn from the discussion of the teaching case with the International Night committee at Emma Hart Willard, so they might problematize and improve this event. Josephine connected the importance of changing inequitable practices to preparing students to participate in a pluralistic society, and hoped to lead others in growing their awareness of the consequences of

uneven aspects of schooling. Peyton also acted in ways that enabled others to grow in awareness by collaborating with the physical education teacher to invite autism representatives to a health and wellness event. She hoped to empower her students by raising awareness of their abilities among the other teachers and families at Temple Grandin.

In addition to the many additive and transformative approaches to multicultural content integration she implemented, Noelle articulated a desire to take her passion for equitable teaching further. While she worked to share her pedagogical beliefs and practices with her colleagues, she hoped to better encourage them to take action of their own. Noelle suggested the interview “re-grounded” her pedagogical orientation and she hoped to let go of her fears and test the boundaries of what was acceptable. Checking back in with Noelle following the interviews, I asked her to reflect on how she might be a leader or advocate for these approaches moving forward. She articulated:

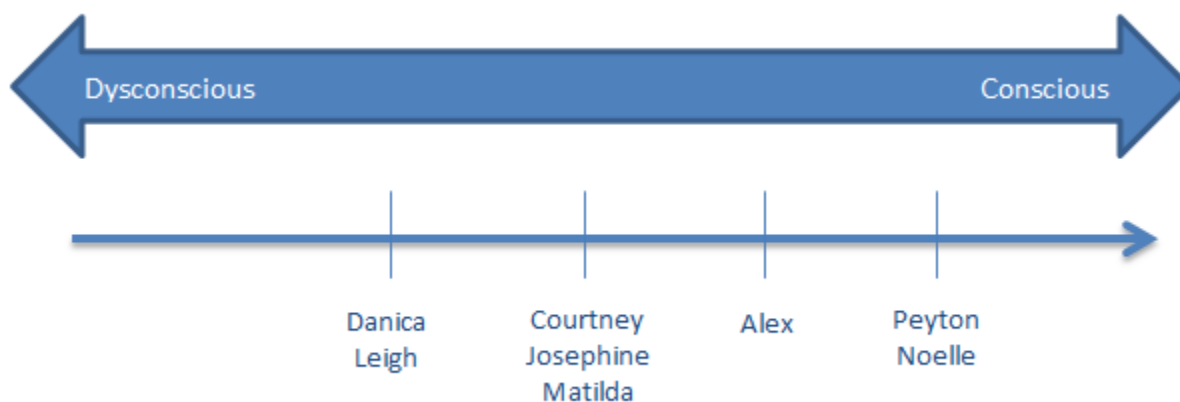
I think that being a model of this kind of approach and sharing my resources with my colleagues can be helpful. For those who are very rigid in following and meeting standards, being sure to highlight how it correlates to standards can help sway those people.

Ally-ship. Progressing in their journey towards more authentic liberation work, “individuals accept accountability to self and community for the consequences of the action that has been taken or not taken” (Love, 2000, p.471). Interrupting patterns of marginalization, an *ally* works to empower others while remaining open to the reevaluation of ideologies that have been produced and conditioned through their socialization. The process of becoming an ally can be understood as an ongoing process that may not ever be fully achieved if one truly remains open to the reevaluation of their ideologies.

Participants had difficulty including social action approaches in their attempts to incorporate multicultural content within the curriculum. This difficulty was due in part to their perceptions of school being a place of political neutrality and their perceived inability to challenge the core structure of the curriculum. While a few participants were able to take “action” through additive, transformative, and even some advocacy approaches, none described attempts to critique social problems and establish plans of action as ways to empower their students. This difficulty is understandable since it would require a major shift in ideologies about the purpose of education. While some participants’ experiences and education led them to question previous frames of reference and be more critical of aspects of education, most maintained idealistic views of schooling. Figure 6.2 illustrates participants’ sociocultural consciousness relative to each other.

Figure 6.2

Sociocultural Consciousness



Emanating from their idealistic views of the purpose of education, most participants had difficulty recognizing the role inequity plays in maintaining systems of power and advantaging those who benefit from these systems. All eight of the participants were able to discuss the

multiple perspectives students bring to the classroom including how race, ethnicity, English language proficiency, and socioeconomic status impact success in school. However, uncritical of neutral and meritocratic views of school, most participants were unable to describe social action approaches within the classroom, instead articulating mitigating approaches which conformed to the existing system of standardization. Suggesting a lack of exposure to critical pedagogy, participants did not perceive conducting classroom inquiry or addressing broader social issues related to power imbalances facing their students to be pedagogical purposes. For example, proponents of this approach advocate the promotion of democracy as the purpose of education, and might include lessons problematizing war or developing media literacy as initiating proactive responses.

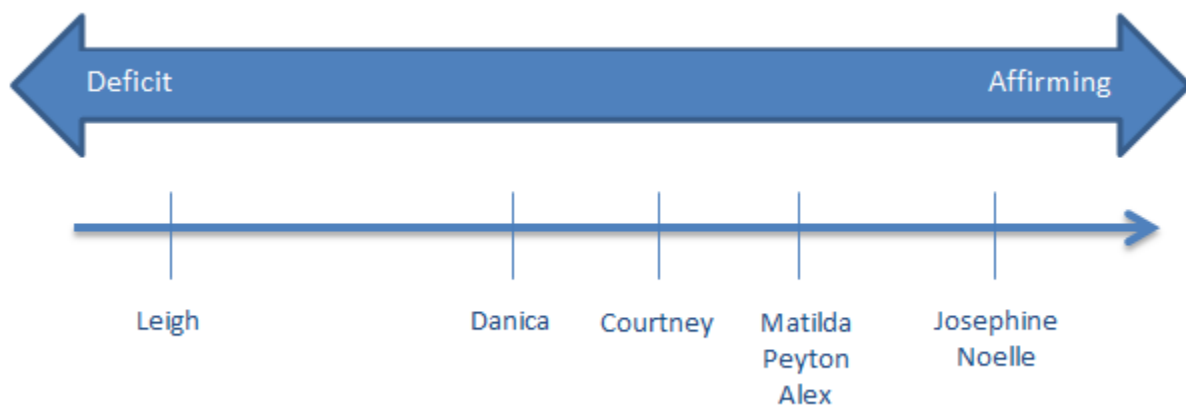
Peyton and Noelle demonstrated the most awareness of sociocultural issues present within the educational system, stemming from their personal and transformative learning experiences confronting their own roles and levels of privilege within society. They were able to recognize the over-representation of Black boys in special education and disciplinary actions as reinforcing negative identity perceptions. Noelle emphasized the importance of building confidence in students' abilities in order to counter such deficit perspectives. She also recognized the ramifications of a poor education, tying this to higher rates of incarceration. Interestingly, while Noelle articulated a passion for "teachable moments" that might counter intolerance, she admitted these conversations generated some fear. She recognized a hierarchy of acceptable topics, noting that she was warned in her teacher education program that some states do not allow teachers to discuss homosexuality. Demonstrating less awareness of structural inequities, Danica and Courtney viewed biases within the educational system as an issue of the past. For example, Danica suggested that biases within standardized testing have largely been eliminated,

but did not find fault with the nature of testing itself. Despite an emancipatory-focused master's program, Courtney saw younger teachers unaffected by issues of racism, as older teachers may be more prone to prejudiced points of views, and she described culturally responsive teaching as just "good teaching." Uncritical of neutral and meritocratic views of education, several other participants suggested that schools "equalize" or level the playing field for students.

Having had no opportunities to problematize the political nature of their work, not only were participants limited in their transformative and social action approaches to content integration, but this lack of awareness led to some deficit perspectives of their students as well. Figure 6.3 illustrates participants' affirming perspectives of students relative to each other.

Figure 6.3

Affirming Perspectives



Some participants articulated that inequities students faced in school emanated from their own cultures or communities. For example, Danica believed many Muslim students begin school unaware of the social skills necessary for success, due to her perception that their parents did not communicate with them. She also suggested a "culture of poverty" among her students, which contributed to deficit views. Leigh illuminated several examples of deficit theories, including the

need for greater student motivation and better parental involvement in their children's education, describing some of their inequitable realities as "excuses." She noted differences in the social worlds of her students of color and suggested aggressive behaviors derived from their desire to "prove something." She wished for harsher policies to enforce better behavior and effort. Ladson-Billings (2006) explains how teachers appropriate the term "culture" to explain their deficit perspectives of student behavior:

But the problem of culture in teaching is not merely one of exclusion. It is also one of overdetermination [sic]. What I mean by this is that culture is randomly and regularly used to explain everything. So at the same moment teacher education students learn nothing about culture, they use it with authority as one of the primary explanations for everything from school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline. (p.104)

Teachers with more affirming perspectives of their students viewed their role was to add to students' existing funds of knowledge, embrace their strengths, and recognize their performance styles and language abilities as assets rather than deficits within the classroom. This more affirming perspective was tied not only with sociocultural consciousness but their emotions too. Personal or transformative experiences led to greater empathy and a sense of responsibility for equitable action working with students.

Influence of Experiences, Education, and Professional Development on Perceptions

Mezirow (2009) describes transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change" (p.22). Transformative experiences may be "epochal," and sudden, or "incremental," comprising of several changes in point of view over time (Mezirow,

2000). Participants in this study exemplified a range of experiences that support theories of transformative learning and constructive development. Josephine and Noelle's personal experiences over time influenced their perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. Leigh, Danica, and Alex experienced disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) in their professional roles leading them to question the appropriateness of their current epistemic assumptions. Courtney, Peyton, and Matilda experienced transformative learning opportunities during their pre-service education and professional development, yet Courtney complicates theory, suggesting this type of learning is not always a process of reflection followed by immediate action, but may include "delayed action" or a "reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action" (Mezirow, 2009, p.22). Each of their stories illustrates the complex nature of transformative learning.

Personal experiences. Both Josephine and Noelle personally identified with their students, driving their desire to reach them in relevant ways. Josephine described how over the course of her career she learned to do what was "right" for students without being rushed and tied to the pacing guide. She described many ways that she felt able to support students within the realm of her control. Recognizing a responsibility to advocate for students and families beyond the classroom, Josephine was proactive, writing in her reflection, "I make it my job to help them find what they need." Josephine articulated that this sense of responsibility stemmed from her experiences as a child of immigrants, but it may also be understood that as a veteran teacher, Josephine acquired knowledge and skills over time through her various roles, which built her self-confidence and ability to weigh evidence and authority when making decisions. For example, during our discussion of the teaching case, Josephine connected the importance of changing such inequitable practices to preparing students to participate in a pluralistic society,

and hoped to lead others within her own school in growing their awareness of the consequences of a similar event. Further, rather than seeing the contradiction between Ms. Morrison and the girls as an obstacle, Josephine viewed their interaction as a missed opportunity to reflect with them and the entire class about issues of cultural identity. Describing this dilemma as an “exciting” opportunity, or teachable moment, Josephine reflects Kegan’s (1982; 1994) highest order of consciousness, which is the ability to see the complexities of life and become open to other possibilities. Individuals who are able to operate at this stage of development do not see conflict in contradictions, but seek out contradictions as possibility for growth and connectedness. According to Kegan (1994) individuals operating at this “Inter-individual Balance,” rarely develop before the age of 40.

Noelle also identified with many of her students as a woman of color who grew up in an affluent town with much less than her peers. While she could relate to students’ feelings of isolation, she also described how she felt alone in her professional role. She empathized with students when teachers articulated their deficit perspectives and stated, “It’s tough to hear other people talk about them like that because I feel like they’re talking about me.” Noelle believed such experiences impacted her desire to teach in culturally responsive ways. She hoped to be an inspiration to her colleagues and often shared her multicultural lessons. Feeling ignored by many of her colleagues, she hoped to affirm her students by valuing their cultures and perhaps having an impact on other teachers in the process. Noelle suggested many of her colleagues, coming from mono-cultural communities, had not been challenged in their thinking. While Noelle was able to recognize systemic oppression and the social justice issues emerging in the teaching case, her ability to work in more culturally responsive ways despite a lack of support among colleagues indicates what Kegan (1982) describes as “self-authoring.” Operating from the

“Institutional Balance” stage of development, Noelle was not defined by others and was less concerned about how others perceived her. While only 30% of adults are believed to reach this stage (Eriksen, 2006), Kegan (1994) suggests operating from this way of knowing is a demand of modern life.

Professional experiences. Danica, Leigh, and Alex each experienced disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) in regards to their professional experiences. The demands of their professional situations required a change in their previously taken-for-granted frames of reference. Making meaning through critical reflection and reflective discourse with peers, these participants exemplified Kegan’s (1982) “Interpersonal Balance” of development. With internalized values from their culture or community, they were unsettled by conflicting ideas of what they knew to be true. Partially defined by the opinion and judgment of others, Kegan (1994; 2000) suggests most adults operate from this stage, and learning self-authorship ought to be the central purpose of adult learning.

For example, Danica believed her two divergent teaching experiences shaped her perceptions of the need for equitable teaching. She felt amazement at the cultural and socioeconomic diversity among students in her new teaching role. With a sense of responsibility for how she might improve her practice to meet the needs of these different students, she began to recognize the need to evolve her understanding and practices. The questions Danica had regarding how to support students were developed further through sustained dialogue with peers in similar roles during monthly meetings. She described her personal growth as she began to recognize the biases she brought to the classroom. Developing this understanding, she experimented with new strategies in the classroom.

Leigh expressed a sense of hopelessness working with students she perceived had less support and motivation. Believing she was more of an advocate than some parents, she felt challenged to meet benchmarks. This sense of hopelessness led to lower expectations, as she perceived the “low” students would still be “low” at the end of the year. Feeling unsupported and ill-prepared to address issues of race that inevitably came up during lessons or in response to current events Leigh expressed a lot of doubt and fear in her role. Her awakening to the need for addressing issues of equity became clear over the course of our interviews and discourse regarding the teaching case and the incident described in her written reflection.

Fearful of being labeled an ineffective teacher, Alex experienced discord balancing her desire for a truly student-centered classroom within the structure of standardization and frequent testing. Alex felt as though the mandates to teach in prescribed ways indicated the district did not want teachers to think for themselves and she said teachers were fearful to make mistakes. Alex believed having a deeper understanding of her students “code-switching” between home and school helped her to affirm their successes and growth beyond standardized measures, yet she acknowledged she had much to learn as a first year teacher. Developing her pedagogical perspectives, “Great Beginnings” permitted the opportunity to dialogue with other first year teachers and mentor teachers regarding their sense of purpose and responsibility.

Education. Peyton and Courtney each experienced course and field work during their pre-service teacher education which focused on transformative or emancipatory learning. Examining issues of race and her own privilege, Peyton grew in her understanding of the perspectives of people of color. She related how as a majority person she might not otherwise think to change her points of view. Reflecting this deeper understanding of sociocultural issues within schools and society, she became aware of her own role contributing to inequitable

systems through activities designed to encourage critical reflection and rational discourse with peers. Peyton learned that developing a better understanding of multiple perspectives was important otherwise “you just find yourself in that comfortable circle and you don't challenge yourself.” Peyton admitted the discomfort associated with this process of coming to new understandings, which also affected relationships with others such as her father. On the other hand, these experiences awarded her more empathy working with families and advocating for her students with autism.

Courtney's master's program focusing on emancipatory approaches to literacy instruction was influential in shifting her perspective of best practices for working with diverse students. She articulated that by the end of the program “you could see everybody's mind shift.” She was motivated to “negotiate the curriculum” by embracing multiple approaches to literacy integration, recognized what others may view as “controversial” topics were instead valid forms of student expression, and included books depicting multiple points of view. Rather than shutting students down, she believed it was important for children to share things about themselves which also helped other students develop empathy for their peers. Despite this transformative learning experience, Courtney still had difficulty recognizing the role inequity plays in maintaining systems of power and advantaging those who benefit from these systems. When she switched schools, she faced a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) as to whether she should include some of the diverse topics she previously embraced. Given the differences in her new population, Courtney perceived that they may not be as open to these approaches to learning and she feared negative repercussions. This example suggests Mezirow's (2009) assertion:

A transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act or not. This decision may result in immediate or delayed action,

caused by situational constraints, or lack of information on how to act, or a reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action. (p.22)

Courtney may have made the decision not to act due to what she perceived to be a constraint or perhaps, due to the reaffirmation of a previous point of view—mainly that this type of learning may be for diverse students only. Partially unsettled by conflicting ideas of what she knew to be true, she was fearful of the judgment of others. This example suggests that individuals may need to periodically revisit old assumptions as they might not be “consistent in their meaning-making systems across life circumstances” (Eriksen, 2006, p.296).

Professional development. Matilda described the influence of professional development on her pedagogical perceptions. Hearing the perspectives of parents of color during a conference enlarged her sense of empathy and desire to advocate for students. She recalled a parent speaking about her experiences as an English language learner during her own schooling experience, and how she often felt scared and overwhelmed. Matilda believed listening to this parent was “huge” for her in terms of developing new points of view. Examining her own role as having a position with power, she came to better understand different forms of “group-ness” which included race, ethnicity, age, gender, faith, geography, language, shared history, occupation and job title, sexual orientation, ancestry, and family role. This opportunity to engage with reading material and dialogue with others, allowed her to examine ways in which people have been oppressed. She emphasized the personal work that may need to be done around one’s own culture prior to attempting to redress issues of injustice. She realized the difficulty in truly knowing another’s perspective stating, “You don’t understand it if you didn’t live it. If you grew up in Pakistan, you can tell me, but I can’t—I don’t experience smells, I don’t experience the sounds—I can’t live a day in your shoes.” Recognizing the humble and ongoing nature of learning to teach in culturally

responsive ways, she believed teachers should work to build “bridges of trust” and have more “ownership” of students. Through her advocacy approaches, supported by district and school initiatives, social justice issues were beginning to emerge for Matilda and she stated, “I don't ever want that [questioning] to stop because I think then you're complacent and you're not really being an effective educator, and if you're not questioning, something's awry.”

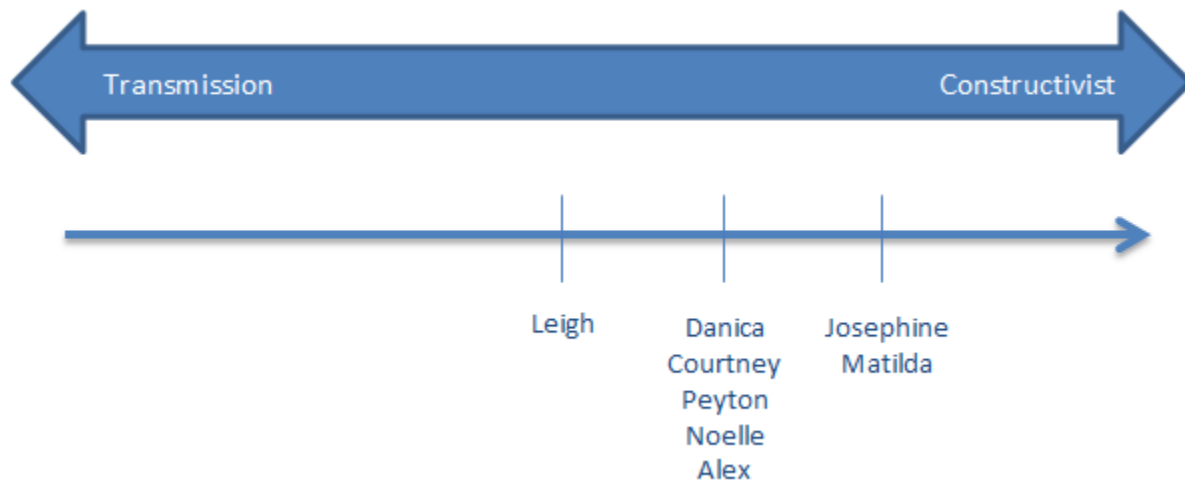
Influence of District Supports on Perceptions

Some scholars (Blummer & Tatum, 1999; Harwell, 2003) argue that professional learning must address a common understanding of the need for change along with central administrative support in order to sustain such efforts. APS articulated a commitment to closing achievement gaps and implemented programs and initiatives to improve content, pedagogy, and relationships. Participants in this study described the influence of these efforts had on improving their classroom practices and better understanding their population of students.

Many of the initiatives and supports encouraged by APS led teachers to more constructivist foundations for learning. All participants described their professional learning communities (PLC) as an example of their focus on student-centered approaches. Several viewed these opportunities for collaboration as fostering higher expectations. Active learning opportunities and social interaction was suggested as a way to build community and facilitate construction of new knowledge. Matilda articulated that her role was to “build bridges” for students to connect their background knowledge to new concepts; and Josephine emphasized the importance of utilizing more purposeful activities. All participants recognized the complexity of their profession and adjusting and differentiating lesson plans was a continuous necessity, particularly for supporting English language learners. Figure 6.4 illustrates participants’ constructivist orientation relative to each other.

Figure 6.4

Constructivist Views



While data gathering through PLCs and social interaction through Responsive Classroom approaches to teaching were seen as ways to facilitate meaning-making for students, only two participants described various forms of assessment as a regular practice. All participants seemed to lack an understanding of ways to transform their practices beyond helping students conform to higher achievement within the current system of standardized testing. In fact, holding higher expectations of students was often viewed in direct relation to the higher standards and benchmarks set by the district. Part of the difficulty seeing beyond current educational reforms was their lack of understanding about sociocultural and political issues influencing schooling. Constructivist views did not include teacher recognition that school knowledge is value-laden; and teachers did not believe it was a responsibility to empower students to understand whose perspectives are reflected in, or excluded from, the curriculum. Additionally, much of the responsibility for success and failure was taken on by teachers themselves. Josephine stated, “Our culture at Willard [is] we can’t blame the kid. ‘Well, that kid doesn’t have any support at

home?’ It is ‘What do we do in school?’” Through data driven instruction and teacher evaluation, participants suggested such accountability forced them to pay closer attention to test scores and reflect on adjusting their practices. All participants differentiated instruction as a result of this accountability.

Supporters of culturally relevant pedagogy suggest teachers’ deeper understanding or knowledge of students, families, and communities, enhances constructivist approaches and affirming perspectives. Seven of the eight participants described organized efforts their school encouraged for teachers to visit students’ homes at the beginning of each school year. Six of the eight participants articulated the availability of district liaisons and translators to facilitate communication with families. These supports gave many teachers insight about students’ lives outside school and some developed deeper relationships with their students and families. Only Josephine and Noelle described the importance of understanding families’ level of trust in schools and potential conflicts with the subject matter. While all participants described the resources offered by APS for students and families, few articulated differences among their students as resources for learning, other than their language. None described efforts to better understand the community in which their students lived by attending community events or interacting with leaders or organizations, so they might tailor instruction to align more closely with student interests and concerns. Contributing to the lack of acknowledgement of student strengths may be some of the deficit perspectives participants held about their students.

Poverty and education. Danica, Courtney, Matilda, and Noelle each described their developing understanding of the effects of poverty on the brain through professional learning opportunities engaging with Eric Jensen’s (2010) research. While they suggested the need for more teacher responsibility engaging with students in poverty, after encountering this material, a

few described a “culture of poverty,” among other deficit perspectives, rather than demonstrating greater understanding of the social and class inequities leading to fewer privileges for those with lower incomes. For example, most described the factors at work in their individual students’ lives as the impetus for difficulties in their school experiences. Further, they viewed school as a great equalizer, capable of changing the ill-effects of poverty on the brain, but *only* if teachers stopped making “excuses” and took on more responsibility to do so. Danica described how she had not previously thought to accommodate for a “culture of poverty” within her lessons.

Matilda recalled several ideas she learned:

It was talking about the equalizer of school and how, when we can start everybody’s day with equality, that when you’re here, everyone is the same. But then when they go home again, the stress of not having food and not having electricity really plays upon them... and those first five years are huge. The brain is just absorbing everything. If it's absorbing negative, it takes a long time to undo negative... It talks about how the brain can and does change.

Teachers were encouraged to view school as a place where students’ brains could indeed change despite the stressors of poverty. Matilda related her sense of ability to create change within the four walls of her classroom despite impoverished students “coming in with their culture.”

Courtney also urged that teachers should not give up on students. She stated, “That’s mainly what teaching is about. When it’s not working you keep being reflective of yourself, not of their family or the child. It’s you. You’re the only one that is responsible for this.” Participants were eager to discover strategies to help their students learn, but they also exhibited a common deficit perspective regarding a “culture of poverty” that was difficult to escape given their more limited understanding of sociocultural issues.

Gorski (2011) describes the danger of deficit perspectives and ignorance regarding structural inequities that “pathologize disenfranchised communities” (p.6) and in essence blame the victims. The examples given by participants about challenges facing their students living in poverty seemed to point more to what students are lacking, rather than the injustices that created their inequities. Gorski suggests that while focusing on how to “fix” students rather than critiquing the system that disenfranchises them, teachers have been socialized into perpetuating stereotypes about a mythological “culture of poverty” which ultimately benefits the interests and agendas of the wealthy few. Perpetuating these myths about poor people, including such generalizations that point to laziness, substance abuse, or inattentive parenting, have led to calls for welfare reform and the elimination of funding for programs that seek to address social conditions. For example, gains in educational inputs and outcomes were made during the Great Society’s War on Poverty program during the 1960s and 1970s, which saw increased funding concentrated in urban and rural schools. However, federal spending for such programs were reduced or eliminated during the 1980s, resulting in an increase in poverty, homelessness, and a decrease in health care access as well as a growth in achievement gaps which persists (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Howard, 2010). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest that the “savage inequalities” described by scholars like Kozol (1991) “are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Gorski (2011) describes the importance of recognizing these broader issues rather than relying on taken-for-granted frames of reference:

...even if we do not imagine the destruction of injustice on a systemic scale as our purview, by failing to understand the sociopolitical ramifications of institutionalized racism, economic injustice, and other systemic conditions, we all but ensure our failure at

facilitating and sustaining equity, even at the individual classroom level. After all, how can I facilitate and sustain an equitable classroom environment if I do not comprehend fully the very inequities I am attempting to unravel? (p.20)

Regarding how Jensen's work contributes to deficit perspectives, Sternberg (2008) warns against unequivocal arguments about the brain stating, "More likely, the arguments will pursue the red herring of whether such differences are biological. That question is a red herring because answering it will not help bring us any closer to closing the gap" (p.420). Additionally, Gorski (2015) and other educators engaged in an online social media discussion which was later published to his blog. In the discussion Jensen is critiqued and compared with Ruby Payne, for largely ignoring the structural issues affecting poverty and using a "no excuse" message "to divert attention from the structural barriers that [he] ignores" (para. 14). Gorski argues these social issues are not excuses but realities, and by only viewing brains as the problem educators are merely "mitigating those impacts" (para. 9). Participants who engaged with Eric Jensen's research took on much of the responsibility for student successes and failures themselves. Even Noelle, who expressed a broader understanding of sociocultural issues, suggested that she needed to work harder to build working memory among her students stating:

But after going to this Eric Jensen thing, that kind of opened up my eyes like okay, that's not an excuse anymore. If I'm really going to try to reach these students, I do have to work harder. I have to work hard and I have to approach things from a different point of view and I have to—like the reason they're not remembering things is that their working memory ability is really low. I have to do things to help build working memory... It's not just that I have to teach academic stuff, I have to literally get their brains to the point

where they can hold onto information because that's what happens with students who are in poverty.

Noelle maintained more affirming perspectives of her students, but she clearly longed for concrete solutions for what she could do in her classroom at that moment. The Eric Jensen conference gave her strategies to implement right away. However, by not engaging with the sociocultural implications, Noelle was burdened with bearing the brunt of responsibility for change. So while she described this learning opportunity as “dynamic” and “engaging” and believed it could change the defeated outlooks of many teachers who work with students living in poverty, Eric Jensen’s research may have also reinforced some deficit views among participants. Gorski (2015) suggests this is part of the problem with many reform efforts stating, “Teachers, themselves, are targets of a deficit view—blamed, as they are, for all kinds of things that are not really in their control” (para. 24). Instead, he advocates addressing both theory and practice when working with teachers, so that ideologies may be facilitated in transformation along with learning particular classroom practices. Offering several instructional possibilities, Gorski (2013) provides a few strategies that may be included for equitable teaching:

1. Incorporating music, art, and theater across the curriculum;
2. Having and communicating high expectations for all students;
3. Adopting higher-order, student-centered, rigorous pedagogies;
4. Incorporating movement and exercise into teaching and learning;
5. Making curricula relevant to the lives of low-income students;
6. Teaching about poverty and class bias;
7. Analyzing learning materials for class (and other) bias; and
8. Promoting literacy enjoyment. (p.119)

Along with practical strategies, teachers need to be critical of claims attributed to their most vulnerable students. Rather than viewing them as “subgroups” or “at-risk,” teachers might better recognize the relevancy of the funds of knowledge students bring with them to the classroom. Moreover, Dworin and Bomer (2008) urge, “Educators need critical literacy, habits of questioning and critiquing what is taken as established knowledge. The critical literacy of teachers is the most important antidote to the snake oil peddled in the educational marketplace” (p.118).

Cultural proficiency within APS. Along with many other school districts, APS adopted a framework developed by Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) as way to promote understanding and action towards cultural proficiency, both individually and within the organization. Cultural proficiency is described as, “An approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity” (p.3). Serving as a model for organizational change, it draws on some of the same principles associated with culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching such as sociocultural consciousness and affirming perspectives. The continuum describes changes mandated for *tolerance* which include destruction, incapacity, and blindness, and changes chosen for *transformation* which include pre-competence, competence, and proficiency. The essential elements for competence and proficiency include assessing the cultures present within the organization, valuing such diversity, managing the dynamics of difference such as conflicts and issues, adapting to diversity by adopting policies that support inclusion, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. Cultural “proficiency” aims to “esteem and learn from differences as a lifelong practice” (p.7). Culturally proficient individuals and organizations know “how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; [interact] effectively in a variety of cultural environments; [and advocate] for others” (p.7).

Emerging from grassroots efforts encouraging conversations about race and cultural competency, district leaders hoped to make cultural proficiency a more institutionalized part of APS. Using the framework developed by Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) along with multiple resources and examples from other school districts, APS believed cultural proficiency was important for staff members as well as the students they teach. A Cultural Proficiency Project was launched in the fall of 2013 with the purpose of creating learning opportunities in several areas. These included:

- Reflecting on and learning more about cultural influences (self, students, families, school cultures).
- Deepening an appreciation for diversity.
- Considering practices that support academic opportunity and success for all within a diverse environment.
- Embedding applications of cultural proficiency tools into the work of individuals, teams, and the school. (APS, 2013b)

Hoping to enable educators to better educate historically underserved students, APS piloted a course entitled “Introduction to Cultural Proficiency” during the 2013-2014 school year to engage the above purposes. The course description read:

In our schools, cultural proficiency refers to the ability of educators to successfully serve students of all cultural backgrounds represented in a school population. This course provides [APS] educators with an introduction to cultural proficiency. Participants examine the personal, instructional, and organizational dimensions of cultural proficiency and consider practices that support academic opportunity and success for all within a diverse environment. (APS, 2014a)

The course was opened to elementary, middle, and high school teachers during the fall of 2014 with the purpose of reflecting on their own thinking and practices within the classroom. An advanced seminar is currently being piloted with the following desired outcomes:

- Deepen understanding of the Cultural Proficiency framework.
- Explore factors that support the achievement of culturally diverse students and identify ways to build on these factors.
- Explore factors that negatively impact the achievement of culturally diverse students and identify ways to mitigate the effect of these factors.
- Embed applications of the cultural proficiency tools into the work of individuals, teams, and schools.
- Build capacity to foster trust, respect and collaboration in diverse environments by practicing communication strategies effective in facilitating cultural proficiency.

(APS Educational Specialist, personal communication, April 21, 2014)

The second level course will focus on leadership skills to support individuals who have the desire to make changes or lead groups within their schools.

These courses are elective for APS faculty and staff, but the preference is that teams of people from particular schools might attend to better enable collaboration and support for the intended outcomes. Challenges implementing such learning included time and budget constraints to introduce the content thoroughly, so the goal was to deliver a professional learning opportunity for individuals to apply to their own practices and then structure ways for people to continue their own learning.

Ultimately, the goal with this type of personal learning is to move beyond competence and towards proficiency. Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) describe this process as “esteeming and

learning from differences as a lifelong practice” (p.5). The recognition that personal and organizational work in this area is an ongoing process is discussed in the healthcare and social work literature as well, and scholars (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Ortega & Coulborn-Faller, 2011) have begun to problematize the term “competence,” offering “cultural humility” as a more appropriate end goal.

Beyond Action: Towards Ally-ship through Cultural Humility

Culturally proficient individuals and organizations know “how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; [interact] effectively in a variety of cultural environments; [and advocate] for others” (Nuri-Robins et al., 2012, p.7). Proponents of *cultural humility* suggest competency approaches conceit learning. While this is not merely a semantic debate, the distinction allows us to problematize the nature of working towards “competence” or “proficiency” and question whether or not such completeness may ever be fully realized. For example, Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) describe “the false sense of security in one’s training” (p.118) in their description of a nurse who dismissed the loud moans and possible pain of her Hispanic patient following surgery. During a discussion with the attending physician, the nurse suggested a cross-cultural medical course prepared her to recognize that “Hispanic patients over-express ‘the pain they are feeling’” and ultimately, the physician “had a difficult time influencing the perspective of the nurse, who focused on her self-proclaimed cultural expertise” (p.119). This example illustrates the danger of generalizations within the medical field and Tervalon and Murray-Garcia urge for “non-paternalistic partnerships” in doctor and patient relationships. The danger of terminology like “competence” in education is that some teachers may assume they have gained expertise when the process of learning to interact and teach in more equitable ways is an ongoing and transformative endeavor.

Cultural humility is described as a lifelong process by which individuals (in these cases physicians and social workers) commit to ongoing self-evaluation, work to redress inequalities, and advocate for the populations with whom they work. The reflective nature of this learning is emphasized as part of the growth process in a study looking at the cultural immersion experience of a group of American social work graduate students in Thailand (Shuldberg et al., 2012). The authors argue that through their volunteer experiences working alongside other social workers in Thailand, they experienced a disruption of their own ethnocentricities and developed critical consciousness through their dialogue with others. Additionally, journaling was found to be an effective method for reflection and sense-making of their experiences. Participants in the study demonstrated an increased self-awareness of their power and privilege as well as a critical examination of their values and assumptions. Positioning their research within an emancipatory paradigm, the researchers suggest this experience was an example of Freire's "problem posing education" and advocate similar experiences for immersing individuals within cultures other than their own in order to increase cultural humility. Ross (2010) examined the effects of course work within a community development graduate program aimed at fostering cultural humility through exposure to diverse communities. Results indicated that in addition to exposure and reading materials focused on structural inequities, students should engage in reflective writing and class discussions about their own privileges and beliefs. Schuessler, Wilder, and Byrd (2009) made similar conclusions after researching the use of reflective journaling among nursing students engaged in clinical experiences over four semesters. Results indicated that students changed their points of view over time and began to appreciate differences while acknowledging their own power and responsibility to advocate against stereotypes.

Ortega and Faller (2011) also critique competency approaches within the paradigm of critical race theory, arguing, “A cultural competence perspective typically fails to acknowledge the socio-structural mechanisms and institutional processes that prescribe and proscribe social injustices as a consequence of cultural differences when compared to mainstream, dominant society” (p.29). They suggest child welfare workers engage in cultural humility approaches to examine how their own perspectives and privilege shape their work, foster a sense of openness to learning more, and transcend limited views of knowledge. Ortega and Faller express this more complex view of the world “frees workers from having to possess expert knowledge about an array of cultural differences” (p.33).

Interestingly, two participants in this study articulated humility approaches to their work with diverse students. Noelle and Peyton emphasized that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to recognize various forms of oppression or power imbalances within the classroom regarding class, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomics. Furthermore, teachers are not only tolerant of their diverse students, but more affirming of their differences in order to create authentic opportunities for equitable instruction throughout the entire school year. While most participants lacked an awareness of the problems of inequity, such as limited power, access, and opportunity within and beyond the classroom, Noelle was more keenly aware of the critical aspects of culturally responsive teaching. She connected this approach to the need for personal work confronting biases. She also recognized potential benefits, such as ameliorating gaps in educational opportunity. Peyton attempted to be sensitive to the range of cultures and languages among families in her class, learning from and reflecting about early mistakes interacting with parents. She noted, “Sometimes, being the majority culture, sometimes people can look at you as you don't get it, when I'm trying to get it.” She recognized the “hidden

curriculum” of schooling and expressed a desire to teach her students about some of these concepts and provide better flexibility so she might partner with families in more authentic ways. She emphasized these initiatives were a “work in progress.” Noelle and Peyton may have been better positioned to articulate a cultural humility approach to working with diverse students and families since they also showed the most sociocultural consciousness among participants in this study.

A cultural humility approach to learning has the potential to support teachers in their work as allies. Remaining open to the reevaluation of ideologies that have been produced and conditioned through their socialization, teachers view their work as an ally as ongoing. Solutions to issues of misunderstanding regarding diversity often involve an attitude that those within other cultures, or holding other perspectives, need to be the ones to change. The “other” needs to conform to “our” cultural rules. When solutions like this are enacted as part of a “hidden curriculum,” or unspoken rules and norms, diversity is actually removed. The disenfranchised are burdened with problem-solving from the least powerful position within the sphere of influence. However, challenges to existing ways of knowing, offer the greatest type of growth for both students and teachers, and fostering this growth has the possibility for creating more equitable education. Recognizing the ongoing and reflective nature of this work is tied to transformative learning theory that promotes the development of individuals through self-examination of taken-for-granted points of view and dialogue with others. Humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness enable us to view our knowledge as partial and ever-evolving. The process teachers go through to learn authentically culturally responsive and equitable teaching is a transformative and philosophical shift in ideology.

Recommendations

In the following sections I make recommendations for educational policy-makers, schools of education, school districts and leaders, professional development initiatives, as well as individual teachers. Many of the recommendations are applicable across interest groups and I have drawn upon study findings and literature reviewed. Consistent with my intent to honor the voices of study participants, their recommendations are embedded throughout.

Recommendations for policy-makers. Several participants in this study discussed the pressures teachers face within the parameters of current school reform. Most troublesome was their perceived inability to act autonomously within their own classrooms, and their fear of being labeled an ineffective teacher. While a component of equitable teaching involves embracing affirming perspectives of students, teachers also need to be affirmed as capable professionals whose work is imbued with political ends. Sleeter (2011) describes the hegemonic structures which render attempts to teach in culturally responsive ways difficult and even unsafe. She states:

Culturally responsive pedagogy is not only about teaching, but is also a political endeavor directed toward equity and justice. Neoliberalism and its reforms based on standardization and decontextualisation [sic] frame education as both a commodity for individual economic advancement and a tool to shape workers for the global economy...not only are they antithetical to culturally responsive pedagogy, but neoliberalism itself can be understood as a backlash movement against political gains of poor and minoritised [sic] peoples... (p.19)

Policy-makers might look to examples of hegemonic educational legislation that take a colorblind approach to equality, such as the Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB2281) also referred to as the “Ethnic Studies Ban” which targets the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in

Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). Limiting the forms of knowledge deemed acceptable within schools, these types of educational policies perpetuate inequality by maintaining “Whiteness” as the norm. Policy-makers ought to examine whose interests are being served with such agendas as well as the profiteering that occurs as a result of neoliberal policies. If the purpose of public education is to teach students to be engaged and educated citizens able to participate in democracy, the structure of K-12 education needs to be democratized as well. Furthermore, discussions of equity must move beyond the confines of raising test scores. Policy-makers should change the focus of the reform conversation so that equitable teaching might be achieved in more authentic ways and pedagogically bankrupt approaches resulting in what some describe as “teaching to the test,” are no longer part of educational discourse.

Gorski (2013) advocates initiatives beyond individual schools and classrooms that have implications for policy-makers. Some of these include promoting universal access to early learning experiences such as preschool, supporting efforts to reduce class sizes, providing access to health services within schools, sustaining holistic approaches to learning such as physical education and fine arts programs, protecting funding for local libraries, and advocating for affordable housing and living wages. He suggests all of these make a difference in the education of students, particularly those in poverty. Additionally, by addressing these broader issues of injustice, policy-makers might allow teachers to move beyond simply mitigating problems outside the limits of their control. Lastly, the findings of this study indicate the transformative shift in ideology required for many individuals to embrace pluralistic views of learning. This type of adult learning extends beyond those within the field of education. Policy-makers should continue to humbly educate themselves, connect with the people they aim to empower and serve,

and recognize these issues need to be important to those with the power and privilege to enact change.

Recommendations for schools of education. The results of this study point to the need to foster a better understanding of the critical and democratic purposes of education during teachers' pre-service education. Utilizing transformative approaches to adult learning, such as case studies and group discussions of issues within education, schools of education might utilize such experiences to foster critical reflection. Further, as suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Villegas and Lucas (2002), pre-service teaching sites should be carefully selected in order to develop cultural humility among students through their exposure to diverse communities. Given the large number of students many schools of education need to place each year, the feasibility of providing all prospective teachers with a diverse student teaching experience may be a challenge. Therefore, these experiences may be fostered in ways beyond the selection of student teaching sites by encouraging cross-cultural exchanges, travel, and volunteer experiences within communities, such as the mentoring program described by Peyton. Ladson-Billings (2006) suggests pre-service teachers may gain more affirming perspectives of students this way, by interacting with them in settings other than school. Additionally, these experiences ought to be aimed at developing what Gay and Kirkland (2003) refer to as "cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection" (p.182). The authors argue that beyond conversations of race and justice, pre-service teachers should engage in authentic learning opportunities that confront the emotional component of transforming ideologies. Similar to the study by Shuldberg et al. (2012) which suggested dialogue and journaling were effective methods for critical reflection and the development of cultural humility among social workers, Gay and Kirkland (2003) argue for the connection between experiences and critical reflection. They state, "Turning critical thoughts

into transformative instructional actions helps to internalize the process so that it can be replicated in future endeavors” (p. 186).

Leigh expressed a lot of doubt and fear regarding culturally responsive teaching. She and other participants suggested that teachers need to understand what it means and what it looks like. Craving a list of strategies or models of this type of teaching, change agency among pre-service teachers with limited experience may be supported by challenging their existing frames of reference through opportunities to critique educational structures; but also by instilling in prospective teachers the belief change is possible, evidenced by success examples. This may be accomplished by introducing and connecting them to scholarship alongside methods of practice. Publications such as *Rethinking Schools* and groups like the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) may provide inspiration and support during and beyond their education. Furthermore, educators within schools of education should be developed in their own understanding and practice of culturally responsive teaching so they may promote and be success examples in their own right.

Potts and Schlichting (2011) describe the efforts of one school of education to create more meaningful opportunities for professional development related to social justice and culturally responsive practice through the use of forums, or diverse professional learning communities focused on discussion, reflection, and social action. There is a plethora of literature related to the challenges facing faculty to include diversity content within their courses. This challenge may be due to faculty disinterest, discomfort, lack of knowledge, time constraints, as well as student discomfort and disinterest. However, research supporting the need for culturally responsive teacher education, points to the ever-growing necessity of pre-service teachers to step into the field of teaching with a better understanding of equity, social justice, and global issues,

rather than the oversimplified notion of heroes and holidays. The goal of these professional development forums was to provide opportunity for dialogue including faculty, students, and other community members, that would improve course content and ultimately enhance students' understanding of cultural pluralism which they could then translate into multicultural classroom practices. Potts and Schlichting were professors within the school of education as well as members of the school's diversity committee and sought to build professional learning opportunities that would address community-building and a shared need for change. Professional learning communities (PLC) offer support, shared leadership, collective creativity, as well as shared values and vision. Evolving from interest and needs, six different professional forums were implemented. With the understanding that faculty needed a forum in which to discuss practices they currently used and share research and resources, they invited all full and part-time faculty to participate in a brown bag lunch. The less formal environment allowed participants to join at their own comfort level and served as a launching point for the development of more professional learning forums. Other forums included a faculty diversity showcase in which faculty and students could share their work publicly in the school of education, a reading group to analyze articles related to themes of social justice, an evening video night for students to view films and discuss themes related to diversity along with faculty, and a faculty staff retreat to gain insights from community members about how to develop better connections between the school of education and its diverse community. Additionally, a diversity portal was established as an online resource for the school of education. Each of these professional development opportunities was focused on the group of professors within the school of education, however many of the forums were opened up to the school as a whole and included students, staff, administration, and community stakeholders. Meeting regularly over the course of two years

across a variety of contexts, these professional learning opportunities reached many participants and included ongoing assessment. In each forum, feedback was elicited from participants using surveys, interviews, observations, reflections, artifacts, and e-mail responses. Using this evidence, Potts and Schlichting were convincing in their conclusion that they addressed faculty disinterest, discomfort, lack of knowledge, and time constraints by providing various opportunities for genuine discourse around issues of diversity and social justice. Further description of the budgetary considerations, planning of events, and grassroots organization of community members would be beneficial to other schools of education hoping to implement similar professional learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Recommendations for school districts and leaders. The results of this study indicated a strong support by the school district in developing participants' understanding of the need for equitable teaching and advocacy. Organized programs and initiatives better enabled teachers to include some culturally responsive teaching practices. Participants expressed several limitations within their school context including limited discussions of the sociocultural context of education, an over-reliance on standardized testing, and mitigating approaches rather than empowering approaches to transformative learning.

Reflecting on how more equitable teaching approaches might be encouraged, Noelle had several suggestions, placing the impetus for change on school leaders. She noted how initiatives such as guided mathematics are made school-wide mandates with staff meetings and time for peer observations being devoted to such learning. She observed how when able to see the benefits of changing their practice, teachers are more likely to get onboard with new approaches. Noelle suggested a district-wide understanding of the need for equitable teaching could “set people on fire” and spark passion. Alex lamented the stress and discouragement associated with

frequent testing. While students made considerable gains over the course of the year, for some, their assessments indicated otherwise. She believed by only utilizing standardized assessments the bigger picture was being overlooked. Courtney also recognized how some school practices contributed to “celebration” or additive approaches to diversity. She connected this to the teaching case recognizing the alienation students may feel. These examples suggest the need to foster transformative learning experiences at all levels across the school district. In order for school leaders to be prepared for the task of *authentically* leaving no child behind, a focus on cultural humility rather than proficiency may be one approach. Demands placed on school leaders such as managing, overseeing operations, as well as improving teaching and learning is a developmentally advanced task. Kegan and Lahey (2001) argue that professional development should address the contradictions between leaders’ intended goals and their behaviors. Gorski (2008) suggests while working towards more systemic change, we must also consider our own biases and expectations for students. He asks us to consider the source of deficit:

Does it lie in poor people, the most disenfranchised people among us? Does it lie in the education system itself—in, as Jonathan Kozol says, the savage inequalities of our schools? Or does it lie in us—educators with unquestionably good intentions who too often fall to the temptation of the quick fix, the easily digestible framework that never requires us to consider how we comply with the culture of classism. (p.34)

Lisi and Howe (1999) describe a Connecticut school district’s approach to implementing a model for multicultural education in order to support staff development. The Unified School District II (USD II) operating under the state’s child welfare and protection agency, the Department of Children and Families (DCF), recognized a racial imbalance between its teaching staff and diverse student population. In order to develop curriculum that prepares students to be

socially responsible in a society that is globally diverse, USD II and DCF sought to create a national model called the Multicultural Research and Education Center. Howe, a Connecticut Department of Education consultant, and Lisi, a professor at Connecticut State University as well as the Director of the Center for Multicultural Research and Education, developed a four step conceptual model for establishing the process of infusing multiculturalism into the curriculum. Their model addressed four key cyclical components for change: awareness, knowledge, skills, and action. Utilizing research regarding school improvement and change, multicultural education theory, adult learning, and professional development, the authors argued that teachers are not prepared to teach multiculturalism from their pre-service experiences. Additionally, professional development is often short and insufficient, focusing simply on awareness. Further, the needs of adult learners are often not addressed in such professional development courses. Over the course of three years, with financial support from federal grants, school-wide changes were implemented. During the pilot year (1994-1995), a needs assessment was conducted and all teachers and administrators participated in a three-day institute addressing multicultural curriculum development. Plans for a school media center began as well. During year two, the library acquired a wealth of professional texts as well as multicultural texts to support student learning. In year three, common planning time was embedded in the teaching schedule and planning and assessment tools were developed. Although work continued beyond the three years reported in this article, the embedded evaluation during the initial years led to improvements. Through surveys and focus groups, the researchers found that school staff experienced professional growth and higher levels of comfort with multicultural education, and implementation was happening at some lower levels of integration. With a better understanding of definitions of multicultural education, staff realized that there was more work to be done to

implement multicultural curriculum at higher levels of integration. Long term structures to support faculty, as well as common planning time, were added to create an atmosphere of joint cooperation. The researchers concluded that a school-wide commitment to change is necessary even if success does not happen immediately. Teachers cannot be expected to implement this type of curriculum individually. Instead, this philosophy must be supported by the organization and involve systemic changes. The authors were careful not to idealize the outcomes of this program. However, by not including data and specific examples of teacher and student perceptions, it is hard to determine the effectiveness of this model. Additionally, it would have been useful to include examples of improved student achievement, since ultimately this model was intended to create a curriculum to better serve the diverse student population.

Since the publication of Lisi and Howe's (1999) article, the Connecticut State Department of Education has developed a state-wide plan for accountability and improvement. The Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) includes several components for improvements related to English language learners, bullying and harassment, as well as multicultural education initiatives. Initiated in 2004, the CALI action plan focuses on addressing the learning needs of all students. "The newest additions include a focus on school leadership, culture and climate, and specific supports for English language learners and students with disabilities" (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010). Related to culture and climate is a two day workshop offered to teachers focusing on culturally responsive teaching as one of the means by which to improve student learning. Described as an "intensive, interactive two-day event, the focus is on providing critical knowledge and awareness but also practical skills" (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010) through seven modules including "cultural

competence,” as well as defining the significance and need for this approach, historical perspectives, and an understanding of bias.

Reflecting on ways to foster a deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching, Peyton suggested that teachers with a predisposition to cultural sensitivity should be specifically recruited and hired by school districts. She felt this would be a way in which districts could set direction to their work and teachers could be better supported by each other. This suggestion points to the usefulness of districts partnering with schools of education. With shared visions and reciprocal learning opportunities, pre-service and in-service teachers may be better supported in their ongoing learning. Additionally, teachers experiencing feelings of alienation, such as Noelle, may find support and encouragement implementing equitable practices.

Kotter (1995) describes eight steps to transforming an organization. These include establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, creating a vision, communicating the vision, empowering others to act on the vision, planning for and creating short-term wins, consolidating improvements and producing still more change, as well as institutionalizing new approaches. This process of change understandably requires a significant amount of time and understanding on the part of leaders at all levels. In the process of working for change, it may be important to elicit feedback regarding progress while focused on improvement and student and community needs. A model for evaluating strengths and weaknesses of initiatives should embody participatory, developmental, and advocacy approaches, shedding light on how district initiatives benefit all members of the school community, and particularly seeking out community members as experts. Gorski (2014) suggests this as a principle of educational equity, working with the community “in service to them” rather than telling them what they need. Fetterman (1997) advocates for such empowering forms of

evaluation that “appeal to evaluators committed to democratic forms of participation and decision making, building capacity, fostering independence and self-determination, and fostering a community of learners” (p. 267). Through processes of self-renewal incorporated into a culture embracing ongoing improvement, intended users of evaluations will be able to improve what they are doing to better serve multiple stakeholders.

Recommendations for professional development. In their descriptions of “best” professional development, participants cited many of the tenets of Knowles (1997) humanistic theory of andragogy, or adult learning. Their suggestions included understanding the purpose and application of their learning, connecting new concepts to prior experiences and their particular needs, as well as examining beliefs about teaching through interaction with peers. Josephine emphasized the complexity of learning to teach in culturally responsive ways, suggesting that teachers may not have the background or training to understand these pedagogical approaches. She and Danica could not recall issues of social justice being directly addressed in professional development. While Josephine believed her background contributed to her own awareness, she thought that teachers most likely need opportunities to address these issues directly. Danica realized too, that directly confronting issues of bias would be important. Matilda suggested giving the current population of teachers more opportunities for authentic learning in ways that “disrupted” them, in order to facilitate questioning their ideologies and to promote a better understanding of diverse perspectives. Thinking of her father, Peyton articulated that professional development focused on issues of diversity may be most effective early in teachers’ careers before pedagogical perspectives are “engrained,” and she appreciated approaches such as the discussion of the teaching case utilized during our interview. The disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) experienced by several participants may be understood as an ideal place

to begin, or a trigger for transformative learning. Some participants were working through this process in their “Great Beginnings” course. Designers of professional development might include such cohort approaches encouraged by Algonquian Public Schools to support novice teachers. Utilizing sustained methods over time, participants engaged in observations and peer discussions related to their practice and received feedback from mentor teachers. Additionally, elements of culturally responsive teaching may be incorporated into other professional development initiatives no matter the content, so more teachers gain exposure to structural issues within education, rather than just those who choose to participate in course work designed around cultural proficiency. This may be delivered best through team teaching with a content specialist and someone knowledgeable about culturally responsive teaching.

Recommendations for individual teachers. Reflecting on the interview process, Noelle expressed her enjoyment discussing topics she did not often have the opportunity to among colleagues. Furthermore, she suggested our discussion “re-grounded” her in her purposes as an educator. Reflecting on her current practices and goals for the future, she indicated that she hoped to test the boundaries of what she perceived to be acceptable, pushing herself without letting fear stand in the way of getting to “the heart of what it is I want to do.” Alex also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to think more deeply about her teaching and stated:

One of the things that I got from my mentor teacher was to be reflective with my practices and she really drilled that into me. I think that's good because I'm reflecting all day on what I taught, how I taught it, where my kids are... but not always thinking of how I'm fitting their cultural needs... I'm thinking *what else am I overlooking?*

Reflecting on practice can often escape teachers who are pulled in many different directions. Critically reflecting takes this process a step further, and urges reflection about the

purposes and consequences of classroom decisions. While educational and district supports can facilitate this type of transformative learning, individual teachers are capable of educating themselves too. Reading materials beyond the scope of practice alone may advance both personal and structural critique. Ayers (2004) suggests that teachers have the capacity to think more deeply about schooling and “must learn to think freely and without fear” (p.10). Working within their spheres of influence, teachers should look for other educators aligned with social justice groups for support. Remaining weary of initiatives that place the burden for change solely on their shoulders or that suggest quick fixes to complex issues, teachers should approach equitable teaching from a stance of continuous learning, or cultural humility. Cochran-Smith (1991) insists “that teaching is fundamentally a political activity in which every teacher plays a part by design or by default” (p. 280). Given this power teachers have to silence or affirm, it is important they adopt pedagogical approaches upon a foundation of genuine interest and respect for their students’ individuality.

Further Research

In consideration of the findings and limitations of this study, further research may address the following:

1. A larger study including diverse teachers across grade levels, with a range of teaching experience, may yield a broader range of perspectives.
2. A mixed-methods research approach including a district-wide survey, along with the case studies, may result in a deeper understanding of the particular context.
3. While participants shared many stories of their practice, there remains the possibility of disconnect between what they articulated and their actual practice. Classroom

observations might illuminate practices, and a study relating this topic to student outcomes may enhance our understanding of the value of equity-oriented pedagogy.

4. Given the lack of research linking cultural humility and the field of teacher education, more studies with this focus may further inform the use of critical reflection in transformative adult learning for the professional development of teachers.

Final Reflection on the Study

Consistent with constructivist research methodology, this study relied on the point of view of participants to uncover and understand their perceptions of equitable teaching and how they developed their ideologies. Their constructions of reality pointed to several conclusions regarding how teachers may be supported in developing educational philosophies and practices for a pluralistic and democratic society. While these case studies are situated within a particular context, thick description and considerable detail were provided so that the reader might determine the extent to which the findings from these cases may be applicable to their own setting.

Learning to teach in more equitable ways was an ongoing process of learning for teachers in this study. With varying levels of comfort and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, all were engaged along a continuum of developing awareness, critically examining their practices and the educational structures that privilege some members of society, as well as acting within their spheres of influence. Several factors enabled teachers to develop their understanding and advocate for students. These included opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue regarding dilemmas of practice, transformative learning experiences during pre-service and in-service education, and supports from their district. These findings indicate that while culturally responsive pedagogy arguably has critical and transformative outcomes, the process of learning

to adopt this ideology is not only transformative, but an ongoing process that may not—and *should not*—ever be considered complete lest we fall prey to hubris.

Reflecting on the study findings, I was surprised by how much influence participants felt that their school district had on their teaching. Participants in this study recognized many ways in which they were able to engage in culturally responsive practices, despite more limited understanding of critical pedagogy and democratic purposes of education. I attribute their efforts to the district's commitment towards enabling staff to better educate historically underserved students. I was somewhat less surprised by the emotional aspects of participants' stories. Most articulated dilemmas or feelings of resentment about aspects of education they believed were beyond their control, such as standardized testing. Their idealistic visions of education led me to recall a Teacher Activist Group Boston conference I attended in 2011. During an open forum to discuss topics related to social justice education, several speakers urged for regaining autonomous and democratic practices that have been lost in public schools. An education scholar in attendance agitated for conference participants to question whether or not public schools have *ever* fulfilled a democratic role. His question suggested the point—improving public education is and will continue to be an evolutionary process. Striving to reach our idealized vision of equity, we must work from a place of humble advocacy. Without patronizing or deficit views of students, all of us with a vested interest in education must work to empower the least powerful, and in the process recognize there are no easy fixes. Walt Whitman (1871a) wrote about working towards an ideal and loving spiritualization of democracy over a century ago, poetically imploring, “I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.”

Urging for continual growth, his suggestions bear veracity for educators too: we must not anchor within sheltered ports, nor expect to.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board

29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel 617-349-8234
Fax 617-349-8190
irb@lesley.edu

September 4, 2013

To: **Rita Jarvis**

From: Robyn Cruz and Terrence Keeney, Co-chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: Application for Expedition of Review: *Teacher Perceptions of the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

IRB Number: 13-015

This memo is written on behalf of the Lesley University IRB to inform you that your application for approval by the IRB through expedited review has been granted. Your project poses no more than minimal risk to participants.

If at any point you decide to amend your project, e.g., modification in design or in the selection of subjects, you will need to file an amendment with the IRB and suspend further data collection until approval is renewed.

If you experience any unexpected “adverse events” during your project you must inform the IRB as soon as possible, and suspend the project until the matter is resolved.

An expedited review procedure consists of a review of research involving human subjects by an IRB co-chairperson and by one or more experienced reviewers designated by the chairperson from among members of the IRB in accordance with the requirements set forth in 45 CFR 46.110.

Source: 63 FR 60364-60367, November 9, 1998.

Date of IRB Approval: August 26th, 2013

Appendix B

Principal E-mail

Dear [Principal Name],

I am writing to ask for your help regarding my research that is being sponsored by the Office of Language Acquisition and Title 1. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Studies program at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA, working on my dissertation, which centers on social justice education. I am looking for classroom teachers to interview regarding how their experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions of the need for culturally responsive teaching. Although I cannot pay teachers, I am offering participating teachers a \$50.00 gift card to Amazon to spend on materials.

Would you be willing to share the attached letter of invitation with teachers? I know that teachers are busy and must make decisions about what to participate in. I hope there might be some teachers who are interested in this as an opportunity to reflect on their practice.

I have attached two letters for your review. One is for you and specifically explains what I am working on, and the other is an invitation for teachers to participate. You may forward it directly to teachers.

Thank you for your consideration. I know you are busy too. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at rjarvis@lesley.edu or [REDACTED]. I hope to hear from you soon!

Warmly,
Rita MacDonald-Jarvis

Appendix C

Principal Letter

Dear [Principal Name],

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Studies program at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. I am currently living in [REDACTED] and working on my dissertation, which centers on social justice education. Part of my research involves interviewing elementary teachers regarding how their experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions of the need for this type of teaching.

I am writing to request your permission to recruit potential teacher participants for this study. I would be so appreciative to have approximately five minutes at the end of a faculty meeting to introduce this research to teachers and invite their participation. Alternatively, I could simply place letters of invitation in teachers' mailboxes.

I plan to conduct two interviews that should last approximately 60-90 minutes each. Additionally, I may ask teachers to share one or two artifacts from a professional development course that they have found most useful. Finally, I will ask teacher participants to respond to a short writing prompt (1-2 paragraphs) reflecting on their classroom teaching. Their total time commitment should be no more than three or four hours in total. To protect teachers' identities, all information will remain confidential and they will be assigned a pseudonym. Your school and location will not be identified by name. As a token of my appreciation, and to honor their time, I will provide participants with a \$50 gift card to Amazon, so they will have the opportunity to purchase classroom materials.

I hope you will be willing to allow me to recruit teachers to participate. I anticipate that the results of this study may provide insight for teacher education and professional development initiatives. I would be happy to discuss my research in more detail if that would be helpful.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at rjarvis@lesley.edu. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Rita MacDonald-Jarvis
Candidate for Ph.D., Educational Studies
Lesley University

Appendix D
Participant Recruitment Letter



Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Studies program at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. I am currently living in [REDACTED] and working on my dissertation, which centers on social justice education. Part of my research involves interviewing elementary teachers regarding how their experiences, education, and professional development influence their perceptions of the need for this type of teaching.

I am writing to invite your participation in this study. I plan to conduct two interviews that should last approximately 60-90 minutes each. Additionally, I may ask you to share one or two artifacts from a professional development course that you have found most useful. Finally, I will ask you to respond to a short writing prompt (1-2 paragraphs) reflecting on your classroom teaching. Your total time commitment should be no more than three or four hours in total. To protect your identity, all information will remain confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym. Your school and location will not be identified by name. As a token of my appreciation, and to honor your time, I will provide you with a \$50 gift card to Amazon, so you will have the opportunity to purchase classroom materials.

I hope you are interested in participating in my research. I anticipate that the results of this study may provide insight for teacher education and professional development initiatives. I would be happy to discuss my research in more detail if you are interested.

If you have any questions, or you are interested in participating, please contact me by [date] at rjarvis@lesley.edu. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Rita MacDonald-Jarvis
Candidate for Ph.D., Educational Studies
Lesley University

Appendix E

Informed Consent for Research Participants



[Date]

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a set of two interviews for a dissertation research project. This project is required in partial fulfillment of the degree of Ph.D. in Educational Studies through Lesley University. The interviews aim to document teacher perceptions regarding their experiences, education, and professional development.

Your participation will entail two interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. With your permission, the interviews will be tape-recorded. The tape-recording and interview transcript materials will be stored in the researcher's office on a password-protected computer. Your responses are strictly confidential and they will not be disclosed individually to anyone. Your name will not be connected to any of your answers. Participants will be identified by their positions and will be assigned pseudonyms. The schools described will also be assigned pseudonyms. Summaries of initial findings will be provided for your review in order to report accurate information.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. Additionally, if there is an interview question you would prefer not to answer, you have no obligation to do so. If you would like additional information, or if you have any questions about this study, you may e-mail me at rjarvis@lesley.edu or call me at [REDACTED]. If you would like to receive a summary of the final report, you may request it by providing your contact information below.

I appreciate your willingness to give your time to this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant or with any aspect of the project, you may report them to my doctoral committee chair, Dr. Linda Pursley, Director of Assessment and Institutional Research at Lesley University at lpursley@lesley.edu, or Dr. Terrence Keeney, Associate Professor and Co-Chair of the Lesley University Institutional Review Board at tkeeney@lesley.edu.

Sincerely,

Rita MacDonald-Jarvis
Candidate for Ph.D., Educational Studies
Lesley University



Consent to Participate

I understand the request for participation in this dissertation study, as outlined in the accompanying letter of invitation, and voluntarily consent to participate in this interview.

Participant Signature

Date

Please initial here if you agree to be tape-recorded during the interview: _____

If you would like a summary of the findings, please provide your mailing or e-mail address below:

Appendix F

Interview Protocol



Interview 1

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am a doctoral candidate at Lesley University conducting dissertation research towards earning a Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in Adult Learning. In my own teaching experience in two different districts and states, I have found more or less support for certain kinds of teaching approaches and content. I'm curious about how experiences, education, and professional development impact classroom teaching.

This first interview will take approximately an hour and will include questions regarding your personal experiences, education, and perceptions regarding your school and teaching practices. Please do not hesitate to stop me at any point in the interview if you need clarification or if any of the questions are confusing.

I will be tape-recording this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. However, if at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder and speak off the record, please feel free to let me know. The interview data will remain confidential and your name will not appear in my final report. Rather than describing you as "Teacher 1" etc. you will have a pseudonym.

- Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview 1

Background/Beliefs about Teaching

- 1. What led you to become a teacher?**
- 2. Can you recall a memorable school experience or a favorite teacher that had an impact on you? What was it about him/her, or you, that led to that impact?**
- 3. What do you see as the roles of a teacher?**
Probe if necessary:
 - What are two or three challenges facing teachers today?
 - What are the most important skills and knowledge necessary for strong teaching?
 - What personal factors have made a difference in your teaching (background, education, personal experiences, and a special skill)?
- 4. In an ideal world, what should be the purpose or goals of K-12 education?**
 - What shaped your understanding of this purpose?

School Context

1. How would you describe your school?

Probe *areas not described*:

- How would you describe the access to resources you have at the school?
- What is the school environment and community like?
- How are parents involved in the school?
- What kind of goals does the school promote? Is there a mission statement?
- Is there anything major that has happened at the school that you feel impacts the curriculum and/or educational practices? (AYP, new leadership, new curriculum, construction)
- If you have worked at other schools, can you describe any differences?
- What pressures do teachers face in the school? What pressures do students face? (test scores, safety)

2. Describe your students.

Probes:

- Grade level, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, Special Education, ESOL, ability range
- How do the needs of your diverse students (including ESOL, Special Education, etc.) shape your teaching practice/ philosophy?
- Do you see a difference in the school experiences of your diverse students and non-minority students?
 - *If they observe no difference*: Can you give me an example/incident why you say that?
- If you have taught bilingual students or ESOL students, what have you learned about teaching them?

3. What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your classroom so far this year?

Probe *if necessary*:

- Do you have challenges with classroom management?
- Do you have challenges with students not meeting academic standards, bullying?

4. What is the level of autonomy (*describe: voice in deciding what is taught*) you have in your classroom? Give an example.

Probes:

- Who or what influences your decisions about what to teach and how to teach it?
- How does standardized testing impact what you do?

5. Describe the relationships you have with other adults in your school?

Probes:

- Principal, fellow teachers
- How do you collaborate with other teachers in your school?

6. Do you and your principal have a similar view regarding teaching? Explain how you know.

Probes:

- If you have been observed and evaluated, what kind of feedback have you received?
- How have your evaluations helped you improve your teaching?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school leadership?

7. What professional development opportunities have you had in terms of what and how you teach? (Prior to the interview, participants will be asked to bring a list of professional development courses taken as well as an important artifact from a course. Discuss the list of courses provided by the participant.)

Probes:

- **Which course has been most beneficial or impactful to you personally or professionally?**
- **Describe the significant artifact you chose to share with me.**
- **Have you had any professional development courses that specifically addressed issues related to diversity or social justice (*define*)?**
- **Did your teacher education program address diversity or social justice?**
 - What topics were covered?
 - What big ideas did you take away from these courses or programs?
 - How has this type of learning impacted your classroom teaching?
 - *If they answer yes to either of these questions: **At our next interview could you please bring a few materials from those courses that you found most useful and share with me? If you still have the course name, syllabi, or a particular artifact, I would love to see that too.***
- How does your principal or school address issues of equity (*different than equality... discuss if necessary*) in student learning?

Concluding Question:

- **Is there anything that we haven't touched on that is especially important to include related to the context in which you are teaching?**

Wrap Up:

- During our next interview I want to move to address an approach to teaching in which I have a particular interest.
- Thank participant. Remind them they can e-mail with additional comments or return to a question at later times.
- **SET UP SECOND INTERVIEW DATE/TIME/LOCATION if necessary.**



Interview 2

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this second interview. It's nice to see you again.

This second interview will take about approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will include questions regarding social justice education. The first part of the interview involves a scenario I'd like you to read and respond to and then I will have general interview questions. Lastly, I will send you back to your classroom with a final question to think about for a few weeks and then reflect about in writing.

Please do not hesitate to stop me at any point in the interview if you need clarification or if any of the questions are confusing. Again, I will be tape-recording this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. However, if at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder and speak off the record, please feel free to let me know. The interview data will remain confidential and your name will not appear in my final report. Rather than describing you as "Teacher 1" etc. you will have a pseudonym and at the end of the interviews I will give you the opportunity to name yourself if you like.

- Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.
- **Is there anything you have been thinking about since our last interview that you would like to ask or share?**

Interview 2

PART I: SCENARIO

Please read the following scenario. The interview will begin with questions regarding your reaction to this case.

Case 5.4: Multicultural Day Parade

Case taken with permission from:

Gorski, P. C. & Pothini, S. G. (2014). Case studies on diversity and social justice education. New York, NY: Routledge. (pp. 52-53)

In an effort to recognize the growing racial and ethnic diversity at Eastern Elementary School, the school's Diversity Committee decided to sponsor Multicultural Day, a day dedicated to celebrating the many cultures represented within the student population. Numerous performers were hired for assemblies and classroom presentations. During the day's feature event, the "Cultural Parade," students were asked to showcase their "ethnic" clothing as they walked through the hallways. In order to prepare for the event, teachers were instructed by the committee to discuss clothing from countries outside the United States with their students and to invite students who had such clothing at home to bring it to school for the parade.

Ms. Morrison, a veteran teacher, was excited about Multicultural Day because she had many students who were immigrants or whose parents were immigrants in her fourth grade class. She imagined the day as a fantastic opportunity for those students to be the center of attention and for her other students to learn about their peers' cultures.

A week before the event, Ms. Morrison brought a kilt to class and explained its significance to her students. "This," she said, "represents my Scottish heritage and I am proud to show it to you today." She then asked whether students had special costumes at home that represented their cultures. Several students raised their hands, which prompted Ms. Morrison to discuss the events that were planned for Multicultural Day, including the parade.

Later, the day before the parade, during dismissal, Ms. Morrison announced to her students, “Don’t forget to bring your costumes to class tomorrow. We’re very excited about Multicultural Day!”

The next day, Ms. Morrison was pleased to see that several of her Hmong and Liberian students came with bags of clothing. Ms. Morrison also noticed that two of her students, Emily and Keisha, also brought clothing and so she walked over to them to inquire about what was in their bags. Emily, a white student, excitedly pulled out her soccer uniform, and Keisha, an African-American student, pulled jeans and her favorite sweatshirt out of her bag. Ms. Morrison told the two girls that she appreciated their enthusiasm for Multicultural Day but that they would not be able to walk in the parade and instead could view it with the rest of the class. She explained that what Keisha and Emily brought was everyday clothing rather than clothes that represented their ethnic heritages.

Both girls protested. “This outfit represents my culture,” Keisha argued.

Ms. Morrison shared with the girls that she felt terrible about the confusion, but could not allow them to participate. “Maybe next year they’ll expand the parade,” she said.

After the girls walked away, Ms. Morrison considered changing her mind. She worried, though, that other students or staff would be puzzled by their participation and that Keisha and Emily would be ridiculed for not following directions.

Questions about Scenario

1. What are your initial thoughts about this scenario?

Probe:

- Please explain what you perceive to be any problems in the scenario and why you think that they are problems.

2. Do you think Ms. Morrison handled the situation with Emily and Keisha appropriately? Why or why not?

Probe:

- If you were in the classroom scenario described above, what might you do differently?

3. What images come to mind when you hear the term “costume?” How might this word be interpreted by students? In what ways might it be considered demeaning? (Gorski & Pothini, 2014, p. 53)

4. What are the potential dangers of events like the Cultural Parade? How might they contribute to students’ and teachers’ existing stereotypes and biases? (Gorski & Pothini, 2014, p. 53)

5. Often people conflate “culture,” “ethnicity,” “heritage,” “race,” and “nationality” or use them interchangeably. How are these concepts different from each other? Is a “Multicultural Day” different than an “International Day?” (Gorski & Pothini, 2014, p. 53)

6. How might an activity like this alienate some students?

Probe:

- How might activities that require students to share part of their ethnic heritage alienate students who, like descendants of slaves or adopted children, might not know what their ethnic heritage is? (Gorski & Pothini, 2014, p. 53)

7. How might diversity be integrated in deeper or more thoughtful ways?

8. How could deeper issues of alienation and inequity have been addressed by the diversity committee?

Points of Consideration

Taken with permission from:

Gorski, P. C. & Pothini, S. G. (2014). Case studies on diversity and social justice education. New York, NY: Routledge. (pp. 17-138)

- Ms. Morrison used the words “ethnic” and “cultural” interchangeably when describing the type of clothing that would be showcased in the parade. Typically *ethnicity* is used to describe a person’s ancestral, geographical, background while *culture* is used to describe the norms of a group that could include people from various ethnicities. Additionally, *nationality* refers to the country of citizenship (which is not something that everybody has in an official sense) while *race* generally refers to groups of people identified by skin color and other attributes. It is important to note that each of these concepts is, to one extent or another, *socially constructed*. That is, they are classification systems designed by humans rather than scientifically-based. (This is why a Colombian citizen can be considered white in Colombia but Latino in the United States.)
- Many schools incorporate a Diversity or Multicultural Day into their school year instead of integrating diversity in deeper, more thoughtful ways or instead of addressing inequities that may exist. Sometimes, in these sorts of events, students who feel alienated because of the way they are treated based on their identities throughout the year are asked to showcase their differences from the cultural “norm,” which could further alienate them from their peers. It is important to consider how these deeper issues of alienation and inequity could be addressed by the Diversity Committee so that these celebratory events can be more authentic.
- Ms. Morrison described the special clothing as “costumes,” which is a word many people associate with Halloween or with make-believe play clothes. As a result, use of the word to describe clothing that youth associate with their cultural heritages could trivialize their cultures.
- Ms. Morrison had clear expectations of what she considered to be parade-worthy clothing. She assumed that students would be able to understand the notion of ethnic heritage and act accordingly. Once she realized otherwise, as with Keisha and Emily, she asserted her judgment and failed to see how their definition of “cultural clothing” was different from hers. Notice that Keisha was dismissed without consideration of the possibility that she, as an African American, might not have been able to trace her heritage to somewhere outside the United States or have access to clothing that she identifies as representing her ethnic background. Similarly, Emily may not know her ethnic background or have resources to acquire clothing for the event. Ms. Morrison failed to capture the opportunity to learn more about how her students’ self-identify.

Definition Card

Culturally responsive teaching:

Pedagogy that embraces the strengths of ethnically diverse students such as their cultural knowledge, frames of reference, language, performance style, social class, religious practice, and racial identity as well as prior experiences. A culturally responsive teacher might embrace constructivist approaches, learn about their students and their families and communities, as well as work as agents of change. They might also supplement/structure their curriculum with examples and readings that address issues of social justice and equity.

Interview 2

PART II: Questions

1. Have you heard the term “culturally responsive teaching” (CRT)? If so, what is your definition of this approach to teaching?

Here is a definition that I have found useful. (*Offer the definition card for participant to read. Give them a few minutes.*)

Pedagogy that embraces the strengths of ethnically diverse students such as their cultural knowledge, frames of reference, language, performance style, social class, religious practice, and racial identity as well as prior experiences. A culturally responsive teacher might embrace constructivist approaches, learn about their students and their families and communities, as well as work as agents of change. They might also supplement/structure their curriculum with examples and readings that address issues of social justice and equity.

Probe:

- How is CRT manifested in the classroom?
- 2. What shapes your understanding of CRT? (Personal experiences, professional development (PD), or teacher education?)**

Probes:

- Did your teacher education program emphasize social justice or culturally responsive teaching at all? How do you know?
- During our last interview we discussed teacher education courses or professional development courses have you taken that may have discussed topics related to this approach to teaching. **What materials did you bring to share with me? Why did you find them to be particularly useful? How have they impacted your teaching?**
- Did you have any models of teachers who taught in this way? What made them good models?
- Describe an incident or anecdote from your own experience as a teacher or learner that made you aware of the importance/impact of diversity in teaching and learning?
- To what extent are you currently able to use those practices?
 - Have you experienced any backlash or support for this kind of teaching?

3. Have you observed examples of this kind of teaching in your school?

Probes:

- **If yes**, describe what you observed?
 - **What do you see as the benefits of CRT for students?**
 - *Probe for other subjects: You mentioned a little bit about the music and the art teacher being examples of that kind of teaching. A lot of times, I think people look at including diversity or cultural teaching as through reading stories, the music,*

and the art. What about other subjects, like math or science? Can you see an example of culturally responsive teaching is used for that?

- **If no**, describe why this is not practiced in your school?
 - **What do you see as the potential benefits of CRT for students?**
(Let them talk about all students... see how they respond.)
- 4. **What are the challenges of culturally responsive teaching?**
Probe:
 - Personally? Professionally?
(Clarify if necessary, by describing the political nature of this approach)
- 5. **How does the diversity or lack of diversity among students impact teaching?**
- 6. **How does the diversity or lack of diversity among teachers impact teaching?**
- 7. **We teachers hear a lot about the gap in educational opportunities, or what some call the “achievement gap.” How do you see this in your own school, district, or classroom?**
Probe:
 - Can CRT help minimize the learning gap?
- 8. **How does your curriculum address issues of social justice (define)?**
Probe *if necessary*:
 - Integrated planning; heroes/holidays e.g.) MLK? Varied assessment? Cultures of students?
- 9. **Some supporters of this kind of teaching argue that schools are linked to broader society and are not politically neutral. What do you think about that?**
Probe *if necessary*:
 - *In other words, some suggest schools reproduce social structures within society, or reinforce structural oppression... They may have answered this in interview one about roles. If so: You commented earlier that... Can you elaborate more about...?*
- 10. **Do you specifically address concepts activism or inequity with your students? If so, how do you do this?**
- 11. **If you were going to give a professor or principal advice about implementing CRT what would you say?**
- 12. **Based on your responses to other questions, I think I probably know the answer to this, but I am curious as to how you would prioritize these influences in your understanding or perceptions of the need for culturally responsive teaching.**

_____ Personal Experiences

_____ Teacher Education

_____ Professional Development

- That is a forced choice, though. Do you think two or all three are of equal influence?
- Has one, e.g., PD, been more influential early in your career and another, e.g., experience, became more important later?

Concluding Questions:

- **Is there something I got you thinking about that you would like to share?**
- **Is there anything you wish I had asked that you'd like to add?**
- **Could you tell me why you volunteered to participate in this research project?**
- **Why do you think your principal agreed to let me recruit you? Or why do you think your principal asked you, out of all your colleagues, to consider this research opportunity?**

Wrap Up:

- Thank participant!
- Ask them to fill out demographic sheet (if not yet completed) and respond to prompt over the next two weeks.
- Remind them upon receipt of the reflection prompt you will send them a \$50 gift card to Amazon.
- Remind participant they can e-mail with additional comments or return to a question at later times.

Interview 2

PART III: REFLECTION PROMPT

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. Over the next two weeks when you are in school, please reflect on the following prompt and respond with at least 2 paragraphs to rjarvis@lesley.edu. As a small token of my gratitude, when I receive your electronic response I will provide you with a \$50 gift card to Amazon so you might purchase something for your classroom.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Approximate due date: _____

Prompt: *Describe an example of when you were able to teach or respond to a situation in a culturally responsive way over the last two weeks in your own classroom or school setting. Your examples may be broad, including anything from lesson planning to your interactions with students, parents, or colleagues. If you do not have an example, that's okay, but why do you think there were no examples during this period? What were the challenges you experienced?*

Appendix G
Demographic Survey



I will be utilizing this information in context to better understand your interview responses.

What is the highest level of education you have completed? _____

Undergraduate Major/Minor _____

Graduate Major/Minor _____

Where did you receive your pre-service teacher education?

Please fill in the bubble next to the grades have you taught (including student teaching). Indicate the number of years you taught at each level on the line provided.

- ☐ Pre-K _____
- ☐ K _____
- ☐ 1 _____
- ☐ 2 _____
- ☐ 3 _____
- ☐ 4 _____
- ☐ 5 _____
- ☐ 6 _____
- ☐ Middle school _____
- ☐ High school _____
- ☐ Higher Ed _____

In what settings have you taught? Please indicate the number of years taught in each environment.

- ☐ Urban _____
- ☐ Suburban _____
- ☐ Rural _____

In what sectors have you taught? Please indicate the number of years taught in each environment.

- ☐ Public _____
- ☐ Public (charter) _____
- ☐ Private (religious) _____
- ☐ Private (nonreligious) _____

What is the current grade you teach? _____

How many years have you been teaching? _____

What is your age range?

- ☐ Under 25
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60+

Describe your race and ethnicity.

Describe your political orientation/affiliation.

Appendix H

Document Summary Form

(Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp.54-55; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p.204)

Participant: _____ Document Name/Type: _____

Type of Document:

Book Handouts Flyers Staff notes Pictures PD curricula Lessons
Other: _____ Interview 1 2

Summary of Contents:

Significance of Document to Participant:

Codes:

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Key Words/Concepts:

Comments:

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Questions/Reflections:
